

## Love Before Liberty *1 Corinthians 8*

Good Morning.

*Have you ever witnessed a good thing used in bad way?*

Take perfume as an example; used in a good way, it can be pleasant and enjoyable.

But then you may run into someone who uses an obnoxious amount and as they walk into the room, it is almost unbearable.

Think about Christian liberties; we are told that Christ gives His followers freedom and we do not follow rules to earn His favor.

Paul said in, ***Galatians 5:1, Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. NKJV***

Christian liberty can be freedom from the penalty of sin, freedom from the Mosaic Law, freedom to do activities that are not specifically forbidden in scripture, or freedom in worship.

Almost every world religion tries to earn their “god’s” favor by focusing on "dos" and "don'ts, through self effort.

These rules may include things like; types of clothing, not wearing make-up, jewelry, having tattoos, smoking, drinking, gambling, dancing, or viewing certain movies.

But Faith in Christ grants us freedom, not a new set of rules.

However, our Christian liberty can become idolatry when we insist on exercising our liberties, even if they offend other believers.

Please open your Bibles to *1 Corinthians 8* as we continue

Last time Paul spoke about Christians' need to live as if the Lord's return is imminent. Because time is short, we don't plant deep roots here; rather we grow deep in Christ and serve Him.

For Christ followers, as we place the Lord in His rightful place within our lives; and He promises to take care of all of the provisions needed for tomorrow; so we can live for Him today.

Then Paul spoke to a father who was denying his daughter or son the right to marry, even if they did not have the gift of celibacy.

**Paul also said** a Christian widow has the right to remarry after the death of their spouse; however, they are only **permitted** to marry someone who is a believer in Jesus Christ.

Other than marriage and remarriage, the most important topic Paul addresses here for Christians to live like time is short.

*1 Corinthians 7:29 this I say, brethren, the time is short, NKJV*

Knowing time is short should cause us to lean into the Lord, more and more and cause us to share our faith with the unsaved.

There are things you can do on earth that will be impossible one minute after you die.

Bringing comfort to the discouraged, feeding the hungry, sharing the Gospel-these are all things that will be impossible to do in heaven but we can do right now.

This morning Paul is going to deal with the issue of not causing other Christians to stumble while exercising Christian liberties.

## **I. Love > Knowledge.**

Read *1 Corinthians 8:1-3*

Paul is answering another specific question from someone at Corinth, “*Can we eat meat sacrificed to idols, because idols mean nothing and we know the Lord?*”

So Paul is speaking about things offered to idols and we will get into that in the next point.

But notice Paul says *we know that we all have knowledge.*

Remember when we studied *1 Corinthians 1:4, I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,*

*1 Corinthians 1:5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, NKJV*

We were all created with specific gifts, purposes, talents and abilities from God that are to be used to edify the body of Christ.

Paul said these followers were *gifted and enriched through Christ, in all utterance and all knowledge.*

The word **knowledge** here means *a moral wisdom; a deeper understanding of the things of God.*

*"'Knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up." Knowledge alone leads to pride, to lack of consideration, to exploitation.*

Every believer in Christ is given some **knowledge**; but true Christianity is founded on **love**, revealed through **knowledge**.

David Guzik said, *"Both knowledge and love have an effect on our lives in that each of them make something grow.*

*"The difference between puffs up and edifies is striking; it is the difference between a bubble and a building. Some Christians grow, others just **swell!**" (Guzik)*

One sign of Christian maturity is the ability to speak the truth combined with love.

***Ephesians 4:15 speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ. NKJV***

It has been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is **hypocrisy**.

***Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. NKJV***

I don't have a problem speaking the truth to people, at all

...but it is a mark of maturity when we are able to share the truth with our fellow Christians, with love.

Some in Corinth had great **knowledge**, but instead of building up weaker saints, they were using this **knowledge** to puff themselves up.

When we studied *1 Peter* we learned that Gnosticism is heretical teaching of esoteric or **secret** knowledge that the world was created and is ruled by a lesser divinity.

Some Gnostics in Peter's day were devising clever interpretations of Old Testament prophecies trying to declare Jesus could not be the promised Messiah.

Peter informed his readers that no single person has individual private knowledge of God's Word.

When an **immature** believer has **knowledge** they will promote self while tearing others down; when a mature believer has spiritual **knowledge** they will use it properly to **love** others.

Some people want to have **knowledge** to love others, serve the Lord and be able to present the Gospel intelligently.

But some people want to have **knowledge** to show they are the smartest person in the room and to show others what they know.

Wiersbe said, "*When spiritual knowledge is used in love, the stronger Christian can take the hand of the weaker Christian and help him to stand and walk to enjoy his freedom in Christ.*

*"Knowledge must be mixed with love; otherwise, the saints will end up with "big heads" instead of enlarged hearts."* (Wiersbe)

*Knowledge* without *love* leads to intellectual pride; *knowledge with love* leads to humility and a sense of commitment.

*vs. 3, But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him...*

Later we will read in *1 Corinthians 13:1, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*

*1 Corinthians 13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

*1 Corinthians 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. NKJV*

## II. Sacrificed food.

Read *1 Corinthians 8:4-6*

The problem of food offered to idols is *not as relevant* to us today, as it was to them; however, there are many areas of our life where this principle may be applied.

Paul tells his readers that idols mean absolutely nothing

Adam Clarke said, *“There are many images that are supposed to be representations of divinities:*

*...but these divinities are nothing, the figments of mere fancy; and these images have no corresponding realities.”*

***Isaiah 44:14 He (the craftsman) cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.***

***Isaiah 44:15 Then it shall be for a man to burn, For he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it; he makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.***

***Isaiah 44:16 He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. he even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire."***

***Isaiah 44:17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" NKJV***

In the ancient cultures they had a “god” for everything; in *Acts 17*, Paul speaks about the altar they had to the unknown god.

Re-read ***1 Corinthians 8:6***

BUT The Greek word ***God*** in ***1 Corinthians 8:6*** is the word, “*theos*”, which is translated as the *Godhead or trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. (Strong’s G2316)

Leon Morris said about Jesus being *one Lord* in *1 Cor. 8:6*  
“The really significant background (of *Lord*), is its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to render the divine name, *Yahweh*... the term is equivalent to deity” (Morris)

**vs. 6,** *through whom are all things, and through whom we live*

Paul said in, *Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

*Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*

*Colossians 1:17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. NKJV*

Notice Paul says *in Christ we live*. Jesus is not only the creator and giver of life; without Him, there is no **real** life.

These Christians were thinking; if idols are really nothing; it must mean nothing to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

### **III. Different knowledge.**

Read *1 Corinthians 8:7-8*

In Corinth, there were 2 sources of meat; the regular market had meat, but the prices were higher than meat that could be bought at the local temples where the meat was from the sacrifices.



There were some who felt free to eat at the pagan temple as they realized these idols were nothing but powerless superstitions.

But some Christians who did not have this *knowledge* were bothered in their **consciences** about eating certain meats.

The puritan writer William Gurnall, “*Conscience may be defined as that divine influence at work in man to restrain him from sin.*

*God uses the conscience to give, some knowledge of His righteousness to all, so that no one can stand before Him on the Day of Judgment and plead ignorance.*

*When you become a Christian and consecrate yourself, conscience and all to Him, the Holy Spirit begins to perfect you in Christ. “*

There are Christians who do not realize that foods sacrificed to idols are no different than food which are not sacrificed; so we must be thoughtful towards them, while using our *knowledge*.

There are some freedoms mature Christians take for granted, which may be **shocking** to others who do not realize what scripture teaches on those subjects.

There could be some things which are not harmful that some Christians have not learned yet, but some mature believers have.

We must be careful that their experience with God is not shaken by our unwise statements about our freedoms!

We must always begin teaching things of the Lord, where the people are currently, with love, if we expect to help them.

Some people felt that eating food sacrificed to idols was a sin, so Paul is saying to respect the weaker brother or sister.

David Guzik asked, “*Why is their conscience considered weak?*”

*Not because their conscience doesn't work. Indeed, it does work – in fact, it overworks.*

*“Their conscience is considered weak because it is wrongly **informed**; their conscience is operating on the idea that there really is something to an idol.”* (Guzik)

Strong's Concordance says the *conscience is the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter.*

The *conscience* is not the law; but our *conscience* confirms God's moral Law within us.

Usually, our *conscience* depends on *knowledge*.

***vs.8, “But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.”***

This teaching was not only radical for converted Gentiles who thought food sacrificed to idols was evil; but it was also radical for converted Jews who knew the Mosaic dietary laws.

Before the Jerusalem council in *Acts 15*, most converted Jews believed the Mosaic Laws still applied to Christians.

But here Paul clearly teaches that someone is no less spiritual for abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols.

Arguments over certain Christian liberties, where one stance is argued to be evidence of greater or lesser **spirituality**, are the modern equivalent of abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols.

#### **IV.A stumbling block.**

Read *1 Corinthians 8:9-13*

This section starts out saying, “*Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.*”

This seems to indicate Christians who have learned more about the Grace of Christ, should not do things that could cause those with less knowledge of Grace to stumble.

On one hand, it would appear that the more educated person is the mature Christian, but if they are causing a weaker Christian to stumble with their liberty, *are they truly mature?*

When I was a younger Christian I was more judgmental about other people’s freedoms in Christ; **take drinking for example...**

***Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; NKJV***

More rigid Christians would say, any amount of consumption of alcohol is sin; while others may take this liberty too far; but this is **not** a full prohibition on consuming alcohol.

There is a two-fold admonition in *Ephesians 5:18*; don't be controlled by alcohol; instead, be **controlled** by the Holy Spirit.

Nowhere in scripture is there an outright prohibition on alcohol consumption but we are told not to be drunk or controlled by alcohol, rather we should be submitted to Jesus.

Paul said in, *Romans 14:21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. NKJV*

If your Christian **liberties** cause someone else to stumble, you are not seeking other people's well-being.

*How do we know when we are controlled by a substance? And **How impaired can I be without sinning?***

When a change in personality occurs, then someone is under the control of that substance.

The old person of the world is controlled by worldly things.

The new person in Christ is admonished to **be filled** (controlled by the Spirit); and in the original language this verse teaches us to be **continuously** filled with the Holy Spirit.

***Being filled with the Spirit*** happens at the moment of Salvation; but surrendering our wills to Him is a moment by moment choice for the Christ follower.

All that being said; we do not have to live our lives according to all that the weaker brother desires; but we should be careful how we use our liberties that they consider sinful.

This does not apply to anything the Bible specifically calls sin.

Christian liberties never give us the freedom to hate others, have something ahead of the Lord in our lives, to have unbiblical relationships, or other sinful activity.

When there is a grey area in the Bible about whether something is right or wrong and we have a clear conscience by the Spirit

...we can do those activities if we don't become a stumbling block to a fellow Christians.

We should be very careful not to cause another's relationship with Christ to suffer.

By refraining from certain activities and freedoms, it can prevent us from leading someone else into sin.

***Romans 14:22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.***

***Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin. NKJV***

All of this is done because of love; first love for the Lord and then love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

***1 Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.***

***1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." NKJV***

Jesus very clearly calls us to love others more than we love ourselves. He also told us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to die to our own preferences.

And so love for my brothers and sisters in Christ guides how I use my liberties in Christ.

If I have a certain freedom in Christ that stumbles another Christian; then I will cheerfully give up that right when I am with the weaker brother.

Love always triumphs over **liberty** and unity among Christians always triumphs over a Christian's personal rights.

If I insist on my personal rights, even if it causes you to sin, I'm causing you to stumble, and that is not the love of Christ.

We are free to enjoy whatever scripture does not forbid; however, our freedom must be weighed by care and love for other Christians.

If our freedom actually leads someone else to violate their conscience then we have become a stumbling block.

## **V. Practical Application.**

Almost every world religion tries to earn their “god’s” favor by focusing on "dos" and "don'ts, through self effort.

These rules may include things like; types of clothing, not wearing make-up, jewelry, having tattoos, smoking, drinking, gambling, dancing, or viewing certain movies.

But Faith in Christ grants us freedom, not a new set of rules.

However, our Christian liberty can become idolatry when we insist on exercising them, even if they offend other believers.

We all face decisions that bring immediate or long term consequences. Scripture is clear on some of our choices in life; but vague on other issues; like eating meat offered to idols.

For the Christ follower, we can have confidence that the Lord will grant us the wisdom needed along with the promise that He is with us every step of the way.

What is needed in the life of a Christian is **a)** prayer to seek God’s will, **b)** Bible study to hear God’s voice, and **c)** surrendering to our counselor and comforter, the Holy Spirit.

Some practical questions to ask about Christian liberties are:

- 1. Will our choice to engage in this activity cause my Christian brother or sister to stumble?*
- 2. Will our choice to engage in this activity strengthen and encourage my own life; or will it attack my conscience?*
- 3. Will our choice to engage in this activity ultimately glorify the Lord?*

If I have a freedom in Christ that stumbles another Christian; then I should **cheerfully** give up my freedom when I am with the weaker Christian.

If I insist on my personal rights, even if it causes you to sin, I'm causing you to stumble, and that is not the love of Christ.

Love always triumphs over **liberty**. Unity among Christians always triumphs over a Christian's personal rights. We should be concerned with Christian love before Christian LIBERTY