

## 1 Corinthians: A Picture of the Church – Love God by Loving Others – chapter 8

I love steak. There is nothing like medium rare steak smothered in mushrooms, a steak that is just warm enough to be cooked, but pink enough to keep its entire flavor. But there was a couple of times in recent years that I became afraid of eating steak. You might remember some of these. There was the mad-cow disease scare, and a few years ago, there was a series of stories of people dying in Oregon or Washington by eating steak. The ecoli virus had infected certain meat, and the news was filled with deaths, fear, and anguish from the victim's families. I just lost my appetite for steak, even though it came back nice and strong later on.

Today, we are going to continue in our sermon series and look at 1 Corinthians chapter 8, which talks about meat that was infected. It wasn't infected with a bacteria or virus, but it was spiritually infected. For some Christians in the city of Corinth, eating a steak was like purposefully putting ecoli in their stomachs. For others, they simply didn't see it as an issue.

The battle wasn't over bacterial infection, but over spiritual infection. You see – the Greeks sacrificed animals to their many gods, or idols. The meat was served at large cafeterias near the temple – and much of it made its way to the meat market. So when you went down to the grocery store to pick up a T-bone, chances are that meat had been offered to an idol.

There were two groups in the Corinthian church – one group claimed that their freedom in Christ allowed them to eat any meat, even meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. The other group was on the other side of the issue and was very concerned. They felt that eating meat given to an idol was taking part in idolatry. This issue was getting in the way of the two groups really loving each other.

The apostle Paul addresses both groups in 1 Corinthians chapter 8. He tells them to first and foremost:

### 1. Love God (Read vs. 1-3)

- a. Paul tells them to love God, even over what they know is Okay.
- b. You see, one of the groups claimed that they knew more about God. They knew about what is right and wrong for Christians. They felt that since they knew that idols were fake and didn't infect the meat, that they were more spiritual than the other group. They believed that since they knew that idols were fake, they could eat meat. What does it matter if meat was sacrificed to a fake idol or god? It did nothing to the meat.

- c. Paul responds by saying the more you know, the more you know how less you really know. If you are so spiritual, and if you know so much, then you know that you haven't even begun to tap into the mysteries of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father Himself. Paul calls them back to love God.
- d. Musicians know this to be true. It has been said that the more expert a musician is, the more humble they are. They are less confident the more they know their instrument, because they realize how amazing it is that they can do what they do – they see how profound music really is.
- e. Paul tells this group that knowledge puffs up – it makes you feel pretty special, makes you feel maybe better than somebody else.
- f. Albert Einstein – Any fool can know. The point is to understand.
- g. Proverbs 9:10 - *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*
- h. In other words, just because we know something, it doesn't make it okay to do it. We have to put loving God first. Paul said that knowledge puffs up, but love build up. Love is the whole point.
- i. Every Christian is called to speak the truth in love, even when it means to call someone out that they are making a non-issue an issue. But, to speak the truth about God, you must know God. And to know God you must love God. And to love God you must be in a relationship with God. Christians should have this relationship at the foundation of their lives. Faith in God is less, “do I believe this or that about God?” and more, “can I accept that God loves me and chooses me?” Everything else follows your love relationship with God.
- j. How do you know that you are a follower of Christ? The way you love other people.
- k. Paul calls us to love God more than worrying about what is right and what is wrong.
- l. Computer programs are amazing! You can get computer programs to write out what you say, to wake you up at a certain time, to remind you of appointments, to edit your grammar, to figure out your finances, to file your taxes, to do research for you, to edit your pictures, to make slide shows, to edit videos, to communicate across the world, etc. I am waiting, however, for a program that could predict sin. Sin Predictor 1.0 could be a high-powered tool to determine which people will be faithful and who won't. If you pour your

life into someone, become their friend, and remain devoted to them, there is no way of knowing if they will abandon you. Sin Predictor 1.0 could predict who would remain a devoted disciple of Jesus for the long term. It could predict who you should pour your life into. For example, we have started our after-school children's ministry. I could input data on each potential kid and have the computer program predict which kid will sin the least and will be the best to disciple. Why risk resources on troubled kids? We could input into this software every person's sin background – their parents, race, dating life, marriage, personality profile, education, employment history, even friends. Then after looking at all of this, it help you choose your relationships, family, and friendships more carefully. There could also be a central data base on-line that would give easy access to ministers. Let's face it, only ministers should be licensed to use this software. It would be quite volatile if the general population could find information like this on ministers. There is no way that people should do a profile on us!

- m. I hope by now you recognize that I am just playing around. A program like that would be horrible! It would produce more hatred, more racism, more class warfare, more people not loving each other, and less people knowing Jesus.
- n. One of the reasons that God doesn't allow us to know the future or predict sin is so that we will take risks on loving other people. We know that relationships can go south in a hurry. There are many things that can split friendships, and yet God calls us to take chances on other people.
- o. God even said that it was the second most important thing you can do, behind loving God Himself. The second most important thing you can do is to take a risk and love other people. Or as Jesus put it, "love your neighbor as yourself. This is the second greatest commandment."
- p. We are to love God and other people, because God promises then to truly know us. We should be less concerned with knowing about God and more concerned with God knowing us! This happens when we love God.
- q. Paul calls this group to love God, but then changes his focus to the next group. He says that you need to love God, but on the other side, you need to:

## **2. Know God (Read vs. 4-6)**

- a. It seems that Paul in verses 1-3 was siding with the group that said it was wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Paul, however, turns to this group and says there is nothing wrong with eating meat.

- b. He reminds them that idols are nothing! Absolutely nothing! This group was more concerned with being religiously right. Paul calls them back to know God. This means that people who think they are religious need to look at knowing God more than trying to be right.
- c. Brian McLaren once wrote, “Jesus was short on sermons, long on conversations; short on answers, long on questions; short on abstractions or propositions, long on stories and parables; short on telling you what to think, long on challenging you to think for yourself; short on condemning the irreligious, long on confronting the religious.”
- d. This group got hung up on idols. If they truly knew God, they would know that idols were nothing, and yet these people were concerned with being right.
- e. Habakkuk 2:18-19 - *Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’ Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.*
- f. Paul calls these people to know God:
  - i. He calls them to know the one Creator God the Father. Paul called another group of people in Athens to know God too.
    - 1. He said in Acts 17, let me tell you about your unknown God, and then goes on to say... *The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.*
    - 2. When you know God, you look to Him for breath.
  - ii. In the Corinthian letter, He also calls Christians to know Jesus. It was almost as if he was calling them back to John 1:1-4 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*
- g. So what does it mean to “know”? Well, think about it...
- h. First, Paul lets them know that it is important for Christians, whether strong or weak, to realize that eating meat – sacrificed or not – or doing things that are

similar to this - has no spiritual significance one way or another. If you know God is the only God, then it doesn't matter.

- i. When he called them to know God, I think he also had in mind 1 John 4:8.
- j. 1 John 4:8 - *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*
- k. By calling these people to know God, Paul was actually calling them to love other people. Well, how do you do that? Paul continues by answering this question in verses 7-9. READ

Paul calls both group to:

### 3. Put yourself in other's shoes (vs. 7-9)

- a. Eating meat is a spiritually neutral issue – therefore, what should come first is your love for other people. When we are faced with an issue like eating meat, we should first think, what would my Christian brother and sister think? Is it better for the Church if I do it or not do it? Will this cause division and become a stumbling block for others?
- b. Romans 14:17-19 - *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*
- c. In NFL football, it is a 15 yard penalty to trip someone. You can knock the other guy down, tackle him, smear his face in the ground, but you can not trip him. If you stick a leg out and trip someone your whole team suffers! They get sent back 15 yards! The same is true in the Church. I am not talking about actually tripping someone, I am talking about spiritually tripping someone: making someone stumble because they saw you do something questionable.
- d. Many people agree with the statement, "America needs to change." Our list of complaints grows like the deficit. Hollywood needs to change. Taxes need to change. The White House, the liberals, the conservatives, the lobbyists... we know what needs to change.
  - i. Max Lucado tells a story of a the man at a prayer session. During the time of prayer, he stood alone, looked up to heaven and prayed, "God, I thank You that America has people like me. The man on the corner needs welfare – I don't. The prostitute in Decatur has AIDS – I don't. The bum at the bar needs alcohol – I don't. Gay people need morality – I don't. I thank You that America has people like me.

- ii. In the same meeting, however, a man of humble heart, too contrite to even look to the skies, prayed, “God have mercy on me – a sinner. Like my brother on welfare – I’m dependent on your grace. Like my sister with AIDS – I’m infected with my mistakes. Like my friend who drinks – I need something to ease my pain. And like those You love who are gay – I need direction too. Have mercy on me, a sinner.”
  - iii. After telling a story like that, Jesus said, “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:14
- e. We need to be humble people, people who put ourselves in other people’s shoes and find true empathy as we follow Christ.
- f. Romans 14:19 - *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*
- g. Church can easily get caught up in rules, and lists, and commandments. The Church at large has handed us down through the years a huge list of dos and don’ts. They’ve given us a ton of things to live up to. Just look at your sermon outline. I have listed just a few things that each Christian through the years has been called to live up to. Basically, however, there are sixteen daily agenda items:
- God to glorify, Christ to imitate,
  - A soul to save, a body to mortify,
  - Sins to repent, virtues to acquire,
  - Hell to avoid, heaven to merit,
  - Eternity to prepare for, time to profit by,
  - Neighbors to edify, a world to despise,
  - Devils to combat, passions to subdue,
  - Deaths maybe to suffer, and judgments to undergo.
- h. That is a lot to live up to! What happens when we don’t? Putting ourselves in other people’s shoes means being patient in prayer, and not thinking that because you have these down, you are better than others.
- i. You see, you are free in our church:
- i. Free to attend as little and as much as you like
  - ii. Free to put little or nothing in the collection plate
  - iii. Free to become involved as little or as much in the life and work of the church
  - iv. Free to study or not study the Bible

- v. Free to pray or not pray
- j. You have freedom! In fact, no one should come in and take control of your life and make you do these things. That is what a cult does. A cult says you must hand over your schedule, your check book, and your heart to the leader or leaders of that cult. Christ, however, has set you free.
- k. Galatians 5:1 - *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*
- l. This freedom, however, means that you need to consider how your choices will impact others. If God has given you the freedom, he has given you the responsibility to handle it properly. If you choose to not come, people will be discouraged. If you choose to not give a tithe or offering, then the church will not be financially stable. If you choose to not get involved in the church, the people around you are impacted. If you choose to not pray, the church will not have power.
- m. We have to look at our choices and determine how they will impact other people. We have to put ourselves in other people's shoes.
- n. Paul continues to tell us how to really love others. Read vs. 10-13.

Paul also calls them to:

#### **4. Put others above your own freedom (10-13)**

- a. What could "eating meat" refer to today? Let's use alcohol as an example. There is nothing in the Bible that says that drinking is wrong, it only says that you can not get drunk. So let's say that I as a mature Christian feel no problem with having a drink now and then down at the bar. Now along comes a young brother who is from a family of alcoholics. I say to him that they should exercise their freedom in Christ – to have a drink with me. He might think that since I am a more mature believer (I mean, hey, I am a pastor) that I must be right. So he walks in and starts drinking. Eventually, this is repeated and he ends up becoming an alcoholic – a drunkard. I became a stumbling block to him. Paul warns against this!
- b. 1 Corinthians 6:12 - *"Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything.*
- c. So you see, it's not whether or not you are technically right – but its how what you do or don't do affects your brother who might not be as far along in his or her walk as you.

- d. What are some other examples of eating meat for us? Movies, Drinking, Christmas trees, Smoking, Easter eggs, TV, Dancing, Gambling, Dungeons & Dragons, Pokemon, Harry Potter, Video Games, Meditating.
- e. Our culture needs to see Christians really loving each other, putting others first. America has told us from the beginning to be individuals and self-supporting. Putting others first goes against the very grain of our society.
- f. Because of this, America is relationship-deficient. People in America today need people who practice godly relationships. Consider this:
  - i. Parents used to teach kids how to play Scrabble. Parents are more likely to teach kids how to play Solitaire on the computer!
  - ii. 35% of Americans today have experienced a romantic breakup in the past ten years!
  - iii. 12% of Americans spend Friday nights alone!
  - iv. One in four Americans live alone! For the first time in American history, more Americans live alone in a single-person household than there are families comprised of a husband/wife/child.
  - v. We have valued freedom so much, that we have separated from others.
- g. In some other cultures, putting others first is VERY important. In fact, other cultures think that we should put others above even owning our own homes. Sobonfu Somé grew up in Dano, a West African village where entire families share living space and multiple generations spend their lives together, When she told her family that she and her husband were living alone in a big house in the America, her family cried for her. In fact, Somé's mother shook her head and cried out in a where-did-we-go-wrong voice, "What are you doing this for?"
- h. Somé explained to her that everybody has his own place and there's no village to go to. Families split from one another when they became adults. She asked her mother if she would come to America and live with her. Her mother replied, "No, not under those conditions."
- i. I can't imagine not wanting to come to America, but some cultures look at people in places like Cerro Gordo and think that they are too individualistic.
- j. People around you need people who can really build relationships by putting others first, even above your own freedom. You have the freedom to do what you want. Christ has set you free. The real act of freedom, however, is putting others first.
- k. Superhuman feats aren't leaping tall buildings in a single bound or doing a triple flip on a wakeboard. Superhuman feats are astounding acts of

forgiveness, awakening acts of courage, bridging acts of betrayal, overcoming acts of fear, rejecting acts of rejecting, releasing acts of love, transcending theological disputes, loving people more than your own freedom. Superhuman feats involve “loving your neighbor as yourself.” Superhuman feats means putting others first.

Though the argument raged on about meat sacrificed to idols, Paul called the Church to Love God, to Know God, to Put yourself in other’s shoes, and to Put others first.

Paul was very clear as to why he wrote:

1 Timothy 1:5 (NLT) - *The purpose of my instruction is that all the Christians there would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and sincere faith.*

He called us to love from a pure heart, and a clear conscience! Do you know where you get this? From Jesus Christ.

Jesus had loving the Father down.

Jesus had knowing God down.

Jesus put Himself in other’s shoes! He cried, He wept, He longed for others. The very fact that He became a human meant that He had empathy for us!

Jesus put others first! He had the freedom to walk away from the cross, but knew that this would give us no hope!

A pure heart and a clear conscience come from Jesus. If you put a sincere faith in Jesus, your heart can be cleansed today, and your conscience can be cleared.

As we sing this next song, if you want to put your faith in Jesus, come forward.