

1 Corinthians 8-9

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 8?

You've likely heard of the TV channel called The Food network. It's incredibly popular, in fact it's distributed to nearly 100 million U.S. households. And their website draws over 46 million unique web users monthly. Isn't that amazing! It just proves what an impact food has on our daily lives.

And the same was true 2,000 years ago in the city of Corinth. In fact, issues involving food had crept into the Corinthians' worship. A schism over food had developed in the church. There was a big beef over some beef!

The topic of food is how chapter 8 starts, but you'll notice a theme as we study both chapters 8 and 9 tonight, and that theme is all about others.

Remember self-centeredness, and pride split heaven.

The title of tonight's message is LOVING OTHERS

Let's pray

In chapters 8–10, Paul uses a question the Corinthians had asked about meat dedicated to idols to address the larger issue of Christian liberty.

We talked about this in Romans 14. But again, there's a bigger picture here that we cannot miss, the picture of love.

1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. Some wondered how a Christian in Corinth could eat meat that they knew was sacrificed to an idol? If it was in the devil's freezer,

could they really put it on the grill for God? And this wasn't just an ancient issue from 2,000 years ago.

SHOW PIC 10 years ago there was a headline that made it's way around Christian circles that asked "Has Your Thanksgiving Turkey Been Sacrificed to Idols?" The author reported America's most popular turkey brand, Butterball, was now processing turkeys according to "halal" or Islamic standards. Eat a butterball and it may've been blessed in the name of "Allah." **CLOSE PIC**

So what if your were shopping for a Thanksgiving turkey and the choice you made was a Butterball? Was eating this bird running afowl to God?

This very issue had divided the church in Corinth. Some said "yes," others said "no," but everyone was adamant they were right.

But there was an even more concerning issue that was acting as an undertow over this debate. There was a haughtiness and arrogance that infiltrated their hearts. That Bible makes it clear that knowledge puffs ourselves up, but love builds others up.

2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. The most dangerous person in the church is the guy who knows just enough to think he knows it all, all the while trying to wear a mask of fake humility! That type of attitude isn't just harmful, it's also sinful and destructive to a church body.

It's interesting though, there was knowledge on both sides of this issue. Folks on the "don't eat it side" understood the dangers of idolatry. Demonic forces were behind the worship of false gods...

But the Christians who had no issue with the food knew that it was just a piece of meat.

Both sides had valid points! The problem was that both groups failed to recognize the legitimacy of each other's concerns. They thought, "I'm right and you're wrong."

See their knowledge of the issue had gone to their heads, not to their hearts.

Isn't this exactly what we saw with Covid? Dividing lines and walls were built up over differing opinions on facemasks, social distancing, and vaccines, especially amongst Christians.

In the last 2 ½ years lots of Christians got big-heads and became self proclaimed experts, (btw quoting people they never met) yet as their knowledge grew, their hearts and love for others diminished!

It's been said, "Love without truth is hypocrisy, but truth without love is brutality."

3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. 4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. There's only one God. Idols are all powerless-they're just chunks of wood or stone.

5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. Paul explains that idols are nothing when put in the perspective of who God is.

7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Some of the Corinthians, because of their previous belief in idols, had

needless false guilt about eating meat that someone had previously dedicated to an idol.

They thought that they were doing something wrong, even though they weren't.

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. We're right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, not the food we eat! A right relationship with God is achieved through the work of Jesus on the cross, not our own efforts. **Ephesians 2:8 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

Eat or don't eat... our diet makes no difference in our standing before God.

But now Paul is about to set up some guardrails, for this freedom is to be expressed through love.

9-11

9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? Remember verse 1, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies..." Logically, you might know that meat is just meat. But a younger Christian, with weaker faith - sees meat as a moral issue. For them to eat it is to compromise. So, logic allows us to eat, but love requires restraint!

If we insist on our liberty knowing it'll lead a brother astray - what was right for us, has become a sin to them, and us!

12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Notice, the extent to which love takes Paul. He's willing to forgo meet the rest of his life!

SHOW PIC

Imagine, juicy steak, spiced sausage, barbecue beef brisket, a delicious rack of ribs... Paul is prepared to give it all up for the faith of another believer. CLOSE PIC

Do we have this level of love for other Christians?

And this is what was so heartbreaking about Covid. How many Christians elevated their own rights above loving others?

It was heartbreaking watching Christians put love on the back burner so they could exercise their own liberties

Chapter 9 continues this discussion about Christian liberty, but on another topic. Paul points to how he curtailed his freedom as an apostle - gave up some of his perks and privileges - to keep the Corinthians from stumbling.

Chapter 9

1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? Here, and in Acts 1:21, we learn that one of the requirements for being an apostle was to be an eye-witness of the risen Christ. Paul had met Jesus on the Road to Damascus

2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. Clearly God sent Paul to the Corinthians to bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and to disciple them. A thriving church had been born in an evil city.

3 My defense to those who examine me is this: Paul will now assert his rights as an apostle, as if he were a lawyer arguing a case.

4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? One apostolic perk was food and lodging from the host church. And an apostle could also travel with his wife. This was how “Cephas” or Peter rolled.

And here in verse 3 is a huge problem for Roman Catholics, who believe Peter was the first pope. If he was; then you’ve got a married pope. This is further scriptural confirmation that Peter had a wife.

Paul's point is that as an apostle he had certain rights he willingly forfeited-it was a pattern of self-denial. Other apostles were married and traveled with their wife. Paul stayed single

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Here’s another right Paul forfeited due to his love for the Corinthians. From the earliest days, the Church supported its leaders financially, so they could devote themselves to ministry.

Of course Paul was entitled to this financial support, but in Corinth he waived the privilege. Acts 18 tells us while there, he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, and helped make ends meet by working with them in their tent-making business.

7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Paul mentions 3 different vocations as examples of properly receiving support. A soldier, a vinedresser, and a farmer.

Soldiers should be supported by the people they help to defend. If a soldier in battle is worried about his family back home - whether they're starving, or getting evicted - how can the soldier ever be focused on fighting the battle? A distracted soldier is an easily defeated soldier. A soldier is more effective on the battlefield, if he's not worried about the home front.

Verse 7 also describes the fact you won't find a thirsty vinedresser, or a dairy farmer with brittle bones. The vinedresser is drinking from his vineyard, and the farmer is drinking milk from his own cows.

Likewise, a pastor should be supported from the finances through their ministry.

To be clear, no pastor should draw an exorbitant salary.

But neither should a faithful pastor make the very bare minimum. Many churches pray, "Lord, you keep him humble, and we'll keep him poor." A church with that attitude may just get what they pay for!

So let's talk for a moment about me, and my comp.

First I hope you know I didn't enter the ministry for the money. On the contrary, when I left my high paying corporate job, and became the pastor, I took about an 85% pay cut.

Money has never been a focus of mine in the ministry. In fact when it was time to become the pastor Kim and I looked at our budget and said ok, what are the things we need to cut or reduce. But the Lord has been faithful!

Also its important to know that my compensation is set by our board, and I'm excluded from those votes.

8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall

not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.”[fn] Is it oxen God is concerned about? Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.

A good farmer allows his ox to munch on the grain as it threshes it. Think about how cruel it would be to muzzle an ox and prevent him from eating the very food he’s working to thresh. And not only that, practically speaking, a weak ox is worthless!

Paul says just as feeding the ox is an expense of the harvest, supporting the pastor is an expense of the spiritual harvest.

10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? Here’s the instruction the scripture gives to the body of Christ. If a pastor helps you grow in your faith; then the church should support him financially.

12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Paul had founded the church at Corinth and was entitled to compensation. But he had laid aside his rights, lest someone accuse him of selfish motives.

Paul was not above accepting a church's financial help. On other occasions he gladly received financial support, just not in Corinth.

Perhaps, the Corinthians were suspicious of crooked clergy. Maybe they’d been burned in the past. Paul wanted to emphasize to them that he cared about their soul, not their money.

And I hope you know this is how CCC has patterned our approach to money. Sure, we have many financial needs. Duke

energy doesn't give us our electric as a donation! In fact so far this year we've paid duke energy over \$15,000!

I think we would be well within our God-ordained right to be bolder in our comments about giving, but for the years I've been the pastor, we've waived those rights. I realize how often churches abuse appeals for money. Folks have been manipulated.

So, for the sake of the Gospel, we're a church that limits our fund-raising. CC exists to meet your needs, not the other way around. We've always believed God will take care of His church if we're faithful to the ministry He's given us.

13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? When an OT worshipper brought his animal to the altar, the priest who administered the sacrifice got a choice cut of meat. The OT priest was supported by the worshippers.

14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. 15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. Paul would rather have died than be portrayed as a money hungry teacher.

This is why I don't talk about money unless it comes up in the scriptures. I'm very conscientious of how people have been fleeced by churches.

16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" I've heard it said, and now I also tell others, that if you can be anything else other than a pastor, do something else.

Being a pastor isn't a career move, it's an inescapable calling from God that consumes the man's heart.

I get asked from time to time if I ever miss the business world, and the honest answer is no-I've never once looked back.

"Pastor" is the most demanding, taxing, challenging, intense job I know. But I wouldn't trade being one for any other post in the world.

And that's what Paul is saying here. Being a pastor was laid on Paul, and woe unto him if he didn't preach the Gospel.

I'm sure Paul would've been successful at whatever he did – but he'd never be satisfied.

17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. If he preached the gospel willingly he would receive a reward from the Lord. If he preached unwillingly, he wouldn't receive a reward, because he would only be doing his duty as a steward

18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ^[fn] without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. Paul's reward for preaching the gospel willingly was the privilege of preaching it without charge to his hearers.

We may not ever be faced with the same decision Paul faced – to accept or deny financial support for the good of the gospel. But we each have a critical question to answer: what rights are we willing to sacrifice for the cause of Jesus?

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; Paul was a free man, not the slave of any other human being. Nevertheless, as the Lord's servant, he had made himself subject to every other human being

so that he might win more people to Christ. And why did Paul do such a thing? Because serving people rather than commanding them is the way to win them.

Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

So how was Paul so effective in his ministry efforts? Verses 20-23 shows how Paul did this

20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law,^[fn] that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God,^[fn] but under law toward Christ^[fn]), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as^[fn] weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.” Paul was faithful and flexible. If his audience were Jews he would observe Jewish customs. He ate kosher food, and kept the Sabbath. He realized it wasn’t the time or place to flaunt his freedom. Paul was never focused on winning an argument and losing a soul.

But when Paul spoke to Gentiles he downplayed his Jewishness, and indulged his freedoms. Paul knew if he could fit in, he would be better positioned to speak up.

Obviously, we're not talking about compromising moral, or ethical, or spiritual, or biblical values. Paul was pointing out that he adapted to the culture at hand.

Paul identified with the people he wanted to reach. He understood their culture, and found common ground to build a bridge.

Yet few Christians today think and behave like Paul. Our polarized world conditions us to look for the differences between us, rather than the similarities. We look at race, or political beliefs, or church affiliation, or covid stances. We run down the checklist to see what makes us different.

But in reality our similarities are probably more numerous - we both have a car, a mortgage, kids, a job, bills to pay, many many similarities.

Paul focused on the similarities to build a rapport, then built a bridge to share the Gospel.

Evangelism expert, Donald McGraven, once said, "The world has more winnable people than ever before... but it's possible to come out of a ripe field empty-handed." That's happening today.

The world is hungry for the Gospel, but the Church doesn't get close enough to folks to present it in a compelling way.

When Hudson Taylor landed on mainland China he struggled in his efforts to spread the Gospel. One day the Lord told him to give up his Western clothes and customs, and dress like the Chinese - even cut his hair. This offended his fellow western missionaries, but it built a bridge to the local Chinese that yielded a great spiritual harvest...

Hudson Taylor didn't go to China to reach missionaries, he went to reach Chinese!

The founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, once said, "I would stand on my head, and play a tambourine with my feet if I thought it would help me win one lost soul to Jesus."

And these scriptures were the foundation of my decisions and actions during Covid. Because again notice the theme. It's about

laying down one's rights, for the benefit of others, for the glory of Christ.

Of course I didn't like wearing a mask, and I doubt it did a ton of good. But if that mask allowed me the opportunity to share Jesus with others, how could I ever refuse to wear one because of my own personal freedoms being violated?

Jesus left the halls of heaven, gave up everything He had to save me. How can I call myself a follower of Christ if I'm not willing to do the same?

These verses ask a difficult question-which is more important. Self-rights, or loving others for Jesus?

Chapter 9 ends with a trip to the stadium. Corinth was the site of the Isthmian Games, similar to the Olympics in Athens. The Greek peninsula was a hotbed for athletics. And in verse 24 Paul compares the Christian life to an athletic contest

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. We should run our race in such a way that we will receive a reward from the Judge. In the Christian race we don't compete with one another for the prize. We compete with ourselves.

See the emphasis is on self-discipline, not competition. In a foot race only one person is the winner, but in the Christian race all who keep the rules and run hard will receive a reward

25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. When an athlete is training for an event, there are foods he won't eat, and activities in which he won't participate. A training regiment requires strict discipline. The Greek athlete exerted all this effort for a flimsy wreath.

But as Christians, we're going to receive eternal rewards. How much more determined should we be to be disciplined in our walk with Christ! To receive the prize of our Lord's "Well done" we need to give all our effort.

26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. Paul didn't throw wild punches, but sought to make every punch count.

27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. The phrase translated "discipline my body," literally reads, "I blacken my eye." Paul uses severe measures in his training. He pushes his body. He does whatever it takes to make his body do what it naturally doesn't want to do.

Jesus transforms our heart, but it's our job to train our bodies. And if we don't properly train our bodies, we can become disqualified.

The swimmer has to stay in his lane. The boxer can't throw a low blow. The runner can't leave before the gun sounds. To win you have to play by the rules. And likewise, to be useful in the Kingdom we've got to serve God, His way.

God doesn't reward short-cuts, or man made success plans separate from His Spirit and will. All our performance-enhancing schemes, and tactics, and gimmicks won't take the place of faithful obedience.

When we do God's work, God's way we'll not only never regret it - we'll receive an imperishable, eternal crown