

6/16/24

[Connection] Good morning Cornerstone! It is good to be with you this morning. Thank you for joining us. If this is your first time worshipping with us, I want to invite you to fill out our connection card. It just lets us get to know you a little more and be able to connect with you more. If Cornerstone is home for you, you can use our app to check in and let us know you are here. There you can also fill out a prayer request so we can be praying for you throughout the week.

[Title] While you're doing that we are going to be continuing our sermon series 'Church in Crisis' where we have been studying the book of 1 Corinthians. The Church had been doing a lot to compromise their integrity. Paul in this letter addresses all of those things with them, but the church also had a lot of questions too for Paul. Starting in chapter 7 Paul begins to address their questions from their previous letter to him. They had questions about marriage, singleness and in this chapter, Paul is addressing their questions about their participating in meals where the meat was sacrificed to idols.

Through Paul's instruction, even though we do not have the same temptation of eating meat sacrificed to idols, depending on how far down the rabbit trail of conspiracy theories you go, we do not face the same problem, as far as we know. Through this instruction Paul teaches the church a lot about their positions of influence in the church. He points out our ability to safe guard and protect other believers by setting the example for other believers to grow their faith.

Today our scripture is going to be found in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. If you have your bibles go ahead and turn there, if you would like to follow along with us. If you do not have a paper bible and would like one, we have some available for you in the back. You can also follow along with us today on the app with the scripture and our sermon notes available to you there.

But before we dive into the teaching today, lets read a part of our passage this morning together which comes from the book of 1 Corinthians 8:12-13. So let us stand as you are able, out of reverence for God's word as we proclaim the truth in God's word.

[1] SCRIPTURE 1 Corinthians 8:12-13

"Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

INTRO

[2] I want to remind us of the world that the church was living in at the time, and the certain aspects of the culture that contributed to this problem. The city of Corinth was a large city their entire economy functioned on import and export. They were a port city, so they were a large hub for that part of the world of goods. They would come through the city to be transported to other parts of the Roman empire. Because of the nature of their economy there was a huge religious undertone that was saturated with pagan idol worship. Different gods from around the world converge to one place. Idol worship was a huge part of the culture.

In these ceremonies of idol worship, meat would often be sacrificed to these 'gods'. The priests or worshippers burned the meat on the altar, and then they would eat some of it as a completion of the ritual. It would be eaten often be to unite themselves with this 'deity' that they were worshipping. After

the ritual, merchants would sell the burned meat in the market for the private use of the people in the city.

With it being a port city, Corinth lacked the adequate land and resources for raising large quantities of livestock. Meat for the people living in the city would have been scarce and expensive. It was not considered a normal part of the diet of common people especially among the poor, simply because they could not afford it.

Since Corinth was a focal point for pagan cult activity, and their rituals often required sacrifices of animals and meat, much of the meat that was available would have cycled through the pagan temples. As a result, it was extremely difficult for people to purchase meat that had not been previously sacrificed to idols.

What complicates matters is how this idol worship and scarcity of meat even effected the social and economic stance of the people. If someone offered the meat to idols, they would often take it home and host a dinner at their house. It was a way to strengthen social and business connections. The Host would see this meal like a networking event that was all for the honor of their god. If you were invited to such a meal, you were expected to go. To decline such an invitation or to refuse such an event, especially on a moral basis, was considered anti-social behavior and could result in commercial suicide.

All of these cultural aspects would have created tremendous pressure for the believers to participate in such events or diets simply because they seemed unavoidable. At first glance, for the believer to remain completely set apart from it would mean they would have to completely alter their lives, severing any and all business connections with anyone that worshiped these other gods and become vegetarians.

Thinking about our modern world, I have seen the videos about the meat industry being owned by some secret organization and it is all run under pagan precepts or whatever. I know most of it was theories developed by a paranoid doomsday prepper in a foil hat, but what if? Being completely transparent I am a meat and potatoes guy. If this was part of our culture, and I was called to minister here, I might think about being Jonah and fleeing somewhere else. If I couldn't have steak, I would rebuke who ever said that in the name of Jesus and sit down for a ribeye.

In preparing for this message, I knew what Paul's intentions were behind this letter. I am not going to lie, this was the chapter I was worried about preaching. I will preach about all the awkward subjects about sex, marriage, sexual immorality and conflict resolution all day, but if Paul is about to tell me that I can't eat meat and I have to go vegan, I didn't think I was ready to face that.

Paul throughout this whole letter has been focused on the church being set apart from the culture. This complete separation is hard especially when you are surrounded by a world that is against God. Can anyone relate? When we look at this world that the people lived in, we can almost hope that there is an understanding from Paul for their circumstances, because it almost seems unavoidable to be uncompromising in this area for the church. Let's dive in and see how Paul handles this circumstance with the church when it comes to this question about eating meat sacrificed to idols.

BODY

[3] 1 Corinthians 8:1

"Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up"

Paul is probably quoting another slogan that was in the church. This phrase that those in the church possess a common knowledge. This knowledge could refer to general knowledge of idol worship, like the practices, rituals and the cultural responses to these practices. Which makes sense because most of the people in the church, formally, were worshipers of idols. This would be information that was common to all of the believers. This could also be the knowledge that they have through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that is common to all believers.

Either way the church was using whatever knowledge they possess to justify eating the meat that was sacrificed to idols. They would say that the knowledge that they possessed, which Paul will elaborate on in a minute, theologically gave them the freedom to go to these temples and these dinner parties and eat the meat that was sacrificed. This knowledge gave the appearance that this act was almost inconsequential.

The church already struggled with being arrogant. They were prideful about their possession of the Holy Spirit, about their knowledge of the Holy Spirit and they were arrogant about their self-proclaimed spiritualness or spiritual maturity, which Paul has already dealt with in Chapters 1 through 3. This knowledge that they possessed has caused the church or at least certain individuals in the church to become arrogant about their decisions concerning this matter.

Because they have become 'puffed up', for Paul, it is evidence that they have knowledge but they are lacking in love for each other. This is why Paul points out the comparison. Knowledge puffs up, selfishly builds up the person in possession of the knowledge, but love builds up someone other than the one expressing it. Love then is for the benefit of others. Knowledge is the benefit of self.

[4] 1 Corinthians 8:2-3

"If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God"

The believers in Corinth assumed that knowledge was the sign of true spiritual maturity, but they did not understand the necessity of knowledge being in combination of love. Knowledge without love is evidence in a lack of knowledge. Knowledge puffs up and love builds up, so anyone that claims to have this knowledge, with the reputation of the believers that he heard about, they really do not have the knowledge that they think they have, because it is disconnected from love.

Love is the basis of knowledge, and it is also the basis of faith. Paul provides this test of faith concerning love, as a test for believers. Those that love God, live in relationship with Him. Someone that loves God is known by him. There is an intimate knowledge that is preceded by love. The same way that we are saved through our knowledge and faith in Christ, we have the ability to know Christ and have faith in him because it was first founded in an act of love that was the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our salvation.

Paul is pointing all of this out in the beginning because he is creating the platform or the basis for what he is about to say. **He is establishing the baseline for biblical conduct.** We know what is right and wrong based on our knowledge. We only have that knowledge and a drive to follow it as a moral obligation when we love God and are in relationship to him. Our faith and how we operate in it must be operated in knowledge and love. We cannot divorce the 2. When we attempt to, we will find people that are extremely loving and gracious but are egregiously heretical. Or on the other hand we have some

extremely intelligent people full of biblical knowledge, but loving people is a foreign concept and are often legalistic in their practice. I'll give you two examples.

June has been established in our culture as pride month. That is pride concerning homosexual orientation or pride for those who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. There has been a huge wave of clergy members of all denominations celebrating pride month. They claim that is motivated by love for people of all walks of life. They are doing great in the realm of love. People walk into their churches and feel loved and accepted but they also have no knowledge of what the scripture says and have no desire or obligation to align with the biblical truth of moral standards.

On the other hand, we have churches again of all denominations that are incredibly knowledgeable of the expectations of morality, but they hold it with condemnation. They are quick to condemn those that fall short of the standard. They will judge, convict and execute those that do not align with biblical guidelines, even those that are lost. They are quick to tell them that their sin is going to send them to Hell but fail to show them the love and redemption that is found in Jesus Christ that will bring them to repentance and forgiveness. These churches are like seminaries, you leave educated, but lack the practical ability to apply the knowledge in love to save those who are not redeemed in their salvation in Christ.

Paul is showing the church that both love and knowledge must go hand in hand. They will alter and shape how they will face and deal with any problem that they may come across. This is Paul equipping them with principles to address other circumstances in the future. It's like that saying 'give a man a fish you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime'. If Paul just told them what they needed to do and left it at that they would be able to handle that specific situation by doing what Paul said but the next circumstance they come across they will be forced to go back to Paul for the answer because they still do not know how to arrive at a conclusion themselves.

Paul is going to use this concept of knowledge and love to teach them how the truth applies to their lives. Paul equips them and addresses the knowledge that they possess, or at least should possess. Knowledge is addressed in 3 verses, 4-6, and Love will be addressed in 7 verses, 7-13. Just in the number of verses, Paul stacks the explanation in his teaching of love, because remember that is what the church was lacking in.

Starting off in the section on knowledge concerning food sacrificed to idols...

[5] 1 Corinthians 8:4

"Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one.'"

This is the knowledge that the church claimed to have that would make their participation inconsequential. They believed that these idols that the people are worshiping really do not exist. As in these idols are really not 'gods', in the sense that they are rivaled in reverence and power to Yahweh, the God of Israel. They believed that since they do not exist, it was not a sin for them to eat such a meal. They justify the acts by saying, 'idols are just an inanimate object with no real divine power, so there can be no consequence if they eat the meal and do not believe in the idol as an object of worship'. Which is true.

After all, these believers claim that there is only one God, and he is the only god that there is. Which is also true. This saying of ‘there is no God but one’ comes from something that the Jews called the Shema. The Shema is seen as the most fundamental expression of the Jewish faith. It comes from Deuteronomy 6:4. ‘Shema’ is the first expression in this passage and is from the Hebrew word that is translated to English as “hear”. This saying was a declaration of faith to be publicly professed.

[6] Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

This was Moses preaching to the nation of Israel the commands that they are to follow that were given to him by God for the fulfillment of the promises of God to the people. It was an affirmation of loyalty to Yahweh, and an opening call to attention. It was a statement that was a non-negotiable and a common belief of Israel. Paul is quoting this not only as a testament of the existence of God as the only deity worthy of worship, but also because it represents the greatest commandment of Judaism and Christianity. It represents God’s expectation that God’s people will remain wholly loyal to him.

This would have been convicting to the people that participated in these meals. And would have painted them, in a sense, as double minded. In one moment in the gathering of believers they are declaring the Shema, this loyalty to God, there is no other God but him. Then in the next moment they are participating in this meal in honor of idols. Even if they do not believe in the idols and they see it as not a sin, which Paul will explain that it isn’t, however their involvement creates an appearance of hypocrisy.

He explains...

[7] 1 Corinthians 8:5-6

“For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’, yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist”

Paul explains that there are divine beings that are being worshiped through these idols. These divine beings, although they are nothing in comparison to Yahweh, they are still being labeled as ‘gods’ and ‘lords’, in the form of these idols.

[8] Galatians 4:8

“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.”

Jews in the ancient Near East affirmed the existence of other gods¹, but they considered them inherently inferior to the God of Israel. The God who created everything and is greater than all false gods². What are these other ‘divine beings’ that are being labeled as ‘gods’ and ‘lords’? Later in the letter to Corinth in chapter 10 he says...

¹ Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalms 82:1

² Psalm 86:8, 95:3, 96:4, 135:5

[9] 1 Corinthians 10:20

"No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons."

[10] All divine beings that are establishing, perpetuating and recipients of idol worship are demonic.

Demons were all once the angels that were created by God to serve him. In Satan's revolt in heaven sometime around the fall of Adam and Eve. Satan, when he rebelled against God, he was joined by a group of other angels that participated in his rebellion. An account that is outlined in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28 and Revelation 12³. In this rebellion Satan and his followers were defeated and cast out of heaven. This is where we get the term of fallen angels. These demons then operate under the direction of Satan continuing their rebellion against God on the earth by deceiving human beings away from God.

Idol worship then is promoted by demons. They are the divine beings that are establishing, perpetuating and receiving the worship that is meant to be for God and God alone. Their goal is to take away worship from the one true God. So, in these rituals and meals that were happening in Corinth. When the people ate the meal to honor the idol, they believe that they were uniting themselves with their god and believed that their dinner guests were doing the same they were then uniting themselves with a demon. As believers in Christ, with these idols possessing no real power, they can eat and not engage in the significance, because it is seen as just a meal and not a form of worship. But there has to be an understanding that everyone else participating in the meal, are entering a partnership with demons through the meal that there are sharing with them.

This knowledge would create a new perspective for the believers that thought these meals were inconsequential. Now from this perspective they see that there is potentially a whole new can of worms that are being opened in this thing that seems like such a small matter. There partnering with a demon is a participation in the rebellion of the demonic which is in complete opposition to the believer's proclamation of Shema in loyalty to God.

Now before we go on some witch hunt and see everything that is in life as demonic which is not what Paul is insinuating. We saw this in the 50's right, Elvis Presley his different kind of music than were used to it must be demonic. Listening to records backwards revealed the demonic in the 70's. That is not what Paul is saying he is only talking about specifically about the worship being redirected away from God.

For these believers they have a conundrum they now see the greater implications of this action, but they have to find a way to balance that they do not believe in these idols, and they believe in God.

Believers exist to fulfill God's purposes in the world. It was through God that all things came about, and it is for those created thing, who belong to him, to do what their creator desires and what they were created to do, the will of God. Exactly like it claims in Deuteronomy. It is in this that Paul boldly includes Jesus in this Shema statement. He draws on this proclamation of Christ Jesus as Lord, to deny the legitimacy of the so called 'gods' of the pagan world but also that our knowledge of such things has come through Christ.

This is where Paul shows how knowledge and love come together to address their questions.

³ Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-18; Revelation 12:3-12

[11] 1 Corinthians 8:7-8

“However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.”

Paul is saying that not all of the believers possess this understanding that idols are inanimate objects. However, their knowledge should have the understanding that eating of the food sacrificed to idols, is not a neutral activity. Even though the idols possessed no real power, a believer then can participate and have no conviction of the matter because of the possession of this knowledge. Where their knowledge is disconnected from love is if there is a believer among them, that believes that these idols do possess power. When a weaker believer participate in this meal, understanding the significance and participates as though they are engaging in the meal with its significance, then they are destroyed as a result.

This is Paul pointing out the power of their leading by example. If someone that is a believer and has the conviction that these idols do possess power, sees another believer sharing in these types of meals. Even if the believer eating the meal knows that this meal bears no significance because of their belief in Christ. The believer witnessing does not possess this knowledge and will engage in the idol worship as they did before they came to Christ, because of the example that has been set by another.

Their witness of the activity, gives permission for them to engage in the activity even though they do not share the same conviction or knowledge of how to engage appropriately. This permission will destroy the believer that is without knowledge because they have engaged in this partnership with demonic activity in drawing worship away from God.

Paul is saying that by nature the food that is consumed does not draw a knowledgeable believer closer to God. In the same way that it is not a detriment to them if they do not eat it either. What a person eats has nothing to do with their spiritual relationship with God. Just like with Peters vision of all the unclean animals being brought before him on a sheet and Jesus commanded him to ‘go, kill and eat’, what God has made clean do not call common. Because the food itself possess no value to their spiritual relationship, they are free to eat of it, but Paul explains in this warning to balance their freedom and there influence through a warning.

[12] 1 Corinthians 8:9-11

“But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.”

They have the right to eat of the meat. But this right that they have should not become something that will ruin another believer that sees them exercising their right. They can do it, but they should do it with caution. They must consider the effect that their actions have on other believers. This is where their knowledge has to be in combination with love, because where knowledge alone puffs up, love build up others. The combination of knowledge and love is then to be Christ-like.

Some of these believers were not just eating in the homes of individuals but were going to the actual temple of the idols in order to eat of this meat. Paul is saying that it is better suited for them to exercise

this right in private so that is not on display to potentially be seen by those who are weaker in their convictions.

Notice that Paul is not stating that those who are weaker in their beliefs just need to be stronger as the solution to the problem. He almost approves of their weakness⁴. In this self-awareness of their weakness, they have a strong conviction and a deeper motivation to stay as far away from idol worship as they can.

If someone is prone to being burned they should not play with fire, even though others can. Those that can, should not demonstrate they can, because it runs the risk to potentially inspire others of this permissible nature. The example does not account for others being at greater risk for harm.

The knowledge then of the knowledgeable believer is the thing that will lead to the ruin of others, which is knowledge demonstrated in absence of love for another. This is like drinking a beer in front of an alcoholic. It is permissible for you. You can participate in it without falling into sin, but if a believer that is prone to alcoholism, sees you drinking, even in moderation, they can think it is okay for them to drink because you were. Their life will be led to ruin by your example of exercising your freedom.

Others witnessing this behavior are not encouraged. Paul even uses this term ironically, because some of the believers who participated in idol feast may have assumed they were helping the weak believers, but they were actually hurting their relationship with God.

This ruin that comes to the weaker believer, isn't just bad practice of the knowledgeable believer, but it is in fact a sin of the knowledgeable believer.

[13] 1 Corinthians 8:12-13

"Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

When the weaker brother is destroyed, Paul is implying that Christ counts what is done to his people as being done to him. We see this in a positive perspective in the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40, 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' The Corinthian believers must realize that their actions affect the entire community. This is what Paul has been saying over and over again.

This stumbling in the Greek gives the picture for stubbing your toe. Paul is calling these believers to not set the example of something that would cause another to stub their toe spiritually. Something that might be harmful to them and may hinder their growth in their relationship to God.

Remember Paul's desire and goal is to direct the believers away from idolatry, but they are shooting themselves in the foot and nullifying Paul's goal by setting a poor example for the weaker believers.

He establishes the extent of his love for the weaker brother, when he says how far he is willing to go in order to protect their relationship with God. He says that even though he knows that it is not a sin for him to eat of the meat, if it means that he can love his fellow believers, he would never eat meat again to preserve their salvation. Paul knows that it is theologically acceptable for them to eat the meat even if

⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:9-11

it is sacrificed to an idol. However, he does not act on such knowledge or appeal to his right to this freedom that he has, to make it permissible, because he knows how it affects others.

APPLICATION

[14] Being mature in our walk with Christ requires time and effort.

Knowledge and love must exist together. Demonstrating both in our lives is the sign of Christian maturity. It would be unloving to not share our knowledge of God his moral standard and our need for salvation through repentance. It is also completely unloving to speak from a place of judgement and condemn another because of sin without revealing the grace and mercy of God that they can possess because of Jesus' death on a cross through repentance and faith.

It is unloving to practice our theological freedoms if it mean that if someone were to replicate our example it would lead to them falling away. It is also foolish to love someone so deeply but never reveal the truth that there is freedom in Christ but we must follow the convictions of our heart because they are placed their by God, so long as they do not contradict his word.

I know what I said in the beginning about being Jonah if I wasn't allowed to eat a steak, obviously I was kidding. And I know I bring it up in a way that is humorous to make light of the matter, but we have to ask ourselves in our everyday lives what steps do we need to take where knowledge and love go hand in hand.

This is not a question of what we can give up for God. We already know the things that are of God and are not. Paul pointed many of those things out in chapter 6. Following God to a certain degree is heavily dependent on knowledge. Even the things that might be seen as permissible, we give them up because that is what God is calling us to do to embody righteousness. Conviction on the things that we are to give up for God are often clear and majority of the time are undeniable.

What Paul is talking about here is not what are you willing to give up in this life for God, the creator of all things and who is your Lord and Savior. Paul is asking, what are you willing to give up if it means that your fellow man, another believer in your community, grows closer to God. Even in something that is menial and insignificant as what you eat.

This question is something that we have to wrestle with, and it applies to so much more than just diet. Could you become a vegetarian if it means that someone else in your community does not have a hinderance to their relationship with God because of you? That certainly was something I had to wrestle with. There are parts of my way of life and hobbies that are centered on eating meat. This is just an example because I doubt the pork butt I bought at price cutters was sacrificed to an idol and I don't think a steak at a restaurant is going to cause someone to stumble in their faith, but what about the bigger picture?

Here's something that I know that I am guilty of doing and I have been convicted of, can having an alcoholic beverage out in public cause your brother to stumble, it is permissible, but can it be a stumbling block? If so, are you willing to give it up to demonstrate love for the body of Christ? Smoking weed might be permissible for you, but you, practicing your right, does that cause your brother to stumble in a way that hinders his relationship with God.

What about the clothes you wear, the music we listen to, the people we allow to speak in our lives, the things we put in our bodies like tattoos and piercings, or the movies we watch, video games we play? They may be permissible for you, but if your weaker brother or sister were to engage in them because of your example would it cause them to stumble? Are you willing to give that up?

When we set the example even if we do not possess the conviction, someone else might and if we cause them to stumble through our example we are harming the body of Christ. It is not just harm to our brother or sister, Paul says that Christ sees it as a sin against himself.

If we are unwilling to remove them for the sake of our love for another we have to ask why? Why is this thing so important to us that we will continue to engage even though it is potentially dangerous or harmful for someone else? Knowledge of permissibility has to exist in combination and reliance on love for another. We cannot say with full knowledge it is okay for us and not okay for others and do nothing to set the example for the weaker believer.



What this comes down to is about the conviction that we receive from God. This is not a hard and fast rule that if something has the potential to cause stumbling then we should remove it. If that were the case, we would never be allowed to have ice cream because we might have someone who is a diabetic witness us eating it. This is also not saying that anything that potentially might be seen as sinful should be kept hidden or only in moderation.

In Paul's letter to the Jews in Rome they wrestled with a similar issue about food, drink and celebration of certain days. Paul responded with this.

[15] Romans 14:12-13, 22-23

"So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother... It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. ²² The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

We have to give an account for the way that God calls us to act in the body of Christ. If you are convicted about something that may cause your brother to stumble, then don't do it. We will have to give an account for the personal convictions that are between us and God. For some that might mean abstaining from alcohol, for others it not watching their favorite show or movie, because it could be a stumbling block for our brother or sister in Christ. Whatever it is that God is calling you to abstain from, it is God calling us to demonstrate love to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Follow the conviction by not setting an example that would cause them harm.

[16] This concept that Paul is equipping the church with is the practical application of how they are to live in community combining both knowledge and love. By knowledge we are free to engage in the things that are not sin. In our knowledge in combination with love we know they are not sinful, yet we abstain, not because we no longer can but we choose not to so that we can love other believers well.

Knowledge is easy to obtain. A recent study says that 85% of American homes have a bible. 36% read it less than once a year⁵. We have the book. All the knowledge we would need on how to live a life according to the moral standing of God is right in here. Knowledge is easy but knowledge puffs up. Having knowledge and love only comes when we align ourselves with him and apply the knowledge to our lives. So we have to look critically at our lives, what kind of example am I setting for the weaker believers in my life. Am I exercising my freedom but causing them to stumble? Is it in my control to remove that from my life? How far am I willing to go, with all the knowledge I possess to love my brother and sister in Christ?

Out of Love for one another what are you willing to give up for the sake of another?

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Is there a conviction that you are feeling that might be causing someone in the body to stumble? What is it?

Is the idea of giving it up difficult? Why or why not? Bring it to God in prayer. He will show you both the knowledge and love of him and of the benefit to the church.

Do you or someone you know have stumbling blocks? Pray for freedom and spiritual growth to grow closer to Christ, not to be stronger but to find deeper motivation to avoid stumbling.

COMMUNION

⁵ <https://www.hollandsentinel.com/story/news/2012/04/19/religion-news-85-percent-u/47661548007/>