

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

¹Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ²Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴ Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶yet 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.

⁷ It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸“Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling-block to the weak. ¹⁰For if others see you,

who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹²But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

There are three main things I want to highlight from this text, knowledge, sacrifice, and food. Now I promised myself I would never give a “Princeton Three-Point Sermon” after hearing them from my pastor growing up. Not that three-point sermons are such a bad thing. I just didn’t want to have anything to do with Princeton. I am sure that Princeton Theological Seminary is wonderful, but not the place for me. Part of this aversion to Princeton is because of the ongoing rivalry between Princeton and Columbia.

In the case of this scripture there is so much Paul is trying to write to the Corinthians that I felt it necessary to focus on three points or I might be up here rambling all afternoon. And I know we all don't want that.

Knowledge puffs up but love builds up. With knowledge we run the risk of becoming overconfident and conceited. We think we have it all figured out. We have the knowledge of academics, of Jesus, of God. We know stuff! We run into danger, though, when we think we fully understand something or have the complete knowledge. It is when we think we have the knowledge that we are far from true understanding, because we have stopped seeking. If we approach God with love and humility, we are capable of knowing more. When we don't think we know everything, we will be blessed with more love, more knowledge, and more understanding of God.

The second point I want to draw on from Paul's letter is that of sacrificing. He refers to offering to idols, something that we as Christians are very unfamiliar with. Giving offerings to God of animals and plants is something we reading about in the Hebrew Scriptures but not something that we are accustomed to. In contexts other than our own, however, ritual sacrifice is not such a foreign concept. While I was in Mexico we visited

two sites of Mayan ruins. These included temples, houses, and sacrificial sites. Being able to see the stones and platforms that sacrifices were performed on gave me a new understanding of what sacrifice is about. The Mayans participated in human sacrifice.

The Mayans would play a ball game. You've probably seen pictures of the ball court before; it's a long court with stone sides, and in the middle of the walls on each side is a stone hoop. There are two teams of seven players. The game is played using the hips, knees, elbows, and shoulders, never the hands or feet, but some variations have bats or paddles. The object of the game is to score only one point. This is more than a game though, it is type of worship. It is an honor to participate. The result of winning the game is that the team captain will be sacrificed. While my first reaction would be to intentionally lose the game to prevent being sacrificed this may display my lack of understanding of the purpose of sacrifice. For the Mayan people it would be an honor and the greatest display of gratitude and worship to be sacrificed to the gods.

Part of the reason we are unfamiliar with sacrifice is because of Jesus; ultimate sacrifice on the cross was such that we no longer need to present sacrifices to God. Jesus died for our sins, so that we don't have to

practice the ritual of sacrifice as a form of repentance. Even though sacrifice is uncommon for us as a practice we can recognize how others use sacrifice and look at our lives as a living sacrifice to God. We don't have to offer up plants, animals or even humans to God, but the way we chose to live can be a sacrifice to God.

The third point I want to focus on is the aspect of food. Paul devotes the majority of this passage to talking about food. He refers to people that think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol — people that previously ate food that was offered to idols — so if they are still in the presence of this they may fall into their former practice of idol worship and not their new practice of worshipping God, through their belief in Christ. If they eat in the temple of an idol, might they not be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? This ritual would not bring them any closer to God. Paul states that, “We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.” Other than the ways in which people eat, Paul may be referring to what people eat according to the Levitical law; eating unleavened bread, not eating pork, not eating certain foods together. Much as with sacrifices, we no longer have to follow the food laws. It's not *what* we eat, but *how* we eat. Paul isn't condemning certain foods, he's simply

raising awareness of how different eating practices may raise spiritual obstacles for some of our brothers and sisters.

Paul's writing to the Corinthians urges them to look past what they are eating and focus on the purpose. Paul states that "Food will not bring us close to God." I would have to challenge him in this statement because I feel that food can bring you closer to God. While I understand that Paul does not want for people to get caught up in the ritual of eating idol food, and therefore advises against placing importance in the food, there have been times when I have tasted some of the most wonderful food. Certain experiences I have had related to food and eating have definitely brought me closer to God. While I was in Mexico I had some of the most fantastic food. It was so great I could only thank God for it. It was as if thanking those that made it or grew it was not enough. The experience of eating became a spiritual practice for me. I have a picture from one Sunday evening on the square. The street was lined with vendors selling food. There were people everywhere gathering around the variety of food. It was like a glimpse of heaven for me. Churros, marquesitas, elotes, pico, sorbet, brick oven pizza, Memes, fried plantains, panuchos. (Food Descriptions)

One meal in particular can bring us closer to God, the Lord's Supper. Through communing with each other at the Lord's Table we can experience God. The experience of meeting Jesus at the table just as his disciples did can bring us closer to God than any other.

This letter from Paul is complex and hard to understand. Hopefully by narrowing the focus the message was easier to understand. *Love* is what brings us knowledge of God. Like knowledge of the love that Christ showed to us through his sacrifice on the cross. Or knowledge of the love that Christ embodies in this communion that we are about to take. Through this meal, may we experience the love and knowledge that brings us closer to God.

To the Glory of God. Amen.