

Love to Care, Care to Love (1 Cor 8)

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[0 : 00] But I'm going to invite Erica to come and read this chapter, and then followed by that, Isaac, one of our brothers here, will open up this passage. I'll be reading 1 Corinthians chapter 8.

Now about food sacrificed to idols, we know that we all possess knowledge, but knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know, but whoever loves God is known by God.

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live.

And there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god.

And since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us nearer to God. We are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

[1 : 30] For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge.

When you sin against them in this way and ruin their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

That's the Lord's word. Thank you, Erica. Welcome, everyone.

My name is Isaac. I'm one of the leaders here. And yeah, I'm really excited to share with you guys the word today. So yeah, you can keep your Bibles open, and we will be turning to chapter 8 throughout the entire sermon.

I'm more nervous than I normally am. I don't know why. I preach this twice already for Saturday and for Sunday morning, but I don't know. Maybe because you guys understand a lot more English.

[2 : 44] So yeah, we'll sort of just go ahead and follow along. We've got a lot of different people here, so it's really cool to see.

So I know some of you quite well, and others probably not as well as I would like. But I know that we all have very different likes and dislikes. Some people like sports, and some people don't. Some people like movies. Some people don't. Some people like art or the outdoors. They love their pets. Others, not so much. We're all entitled to our opinion.

But church, if there's one thing I think most of us here can agree on is that pretty much everyone likes food. We plan celebrations around food, right?

We schedule dates around what we eat. We watch shows. We play games. We start businesses and Instagram pages about food as well.

[3 : 47] We let others know we'd love to grab a coffee sometimes, even if that sometimes never really comes around. Whether we have Asian or Maori, Indian, Kiwi backgrounds, food, kai, faan has deep significance to us.

Whatever our culture, food is used around the world to unite, to bring together, and to show love. However, in chapter 8, as Erica read, we see that food was doing the exact opposite.

It wasn't uniting. It was dividing. It was dividing. If we've been listening to the sermons for this past year, we know that division was a big problem in the church of Corinth.

And Paul continues to address division in this chapter, but expands on the idea of caring for the weaker brother or sister amongst us. So today, we'll be looking at a couple of reasons of division and ways to, I don't know why it's doing that, but ways to care for our brothers and sisters. And along the way, we learn why, because Christ died for us, we can show our love for others by giving up our rights. So, before we jump into it, why don't we pray?

[5 : 06] Father God, we thank you for your word. Lord, even after so much time has passed, your word is still alive, it's still teaching us, encouraging and giving hope to your church.

May your spirit be here tonight as you work in our hearts and reveal your word so that we may become a church more like your son, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray.

Amen. Amen. So firstly, we see Paul start us off in verse 1, now about food sacrificed to idols. It seems like Paul is answering a list of questions or maybe issues in the Corinthian church. Last week, he said now about marriage. This week, it's food sacrificed to idols. And a couple chapters later, we see Paul address spiritual gifts. But here he puts aside food for a second. And he builds a foundation for his arguments.

[6 : 02] We see here how Paul shows us division in the Corinthian church was caused firstly by what we know.

Verse 1 tells us that we know knowledge puffs up while love builds up. You see, the Corinthian church had themselves people, maybe very intelligent people like yourselves, very smart people. Very smart people who had built up knowledge about God, about the gospel, about Jesus Christ, about his church. They had gathered all this theological knowledge. They had gathered all this theological knowledge up here.

And it is exactly this knowledge that Paul criticizes. He calls them puffed up. This knowledge had caused members of the Corinthian church to think of themselves as bigger than they actually were, more important, more godly.

This kind of knowledge had caused certain members of that church to be prideful, that simply knowing about God had made them arrogant. And in verse 2, Paul takes that one step further.

[7 : 14] With all this knowledge that you have, not only are you puffed up, he says, you may actually not know God like you think you do. Verse 2 says, Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.

What I think Paul is saying is this. Those that know God, that truly know God, cannot help but arrive at the conclusion that amongst all his amazing characteristics, his holiness, his majesty, his power, God is love.

God is love. John tells us in 1 John that anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. You see, anyone that truly knows God knows love.

And if you truly know love, then you can't help but turn away from the pride, the arrogance, the knowledge that puffs up. The person that truly knows God knows that it is through humility that we can begin to even know him.

It is through our genuine acceptance of the fact that we only know God because he first reached down and made himself known to us.

[8 : 30] This is how they ought to know. To know that there was no way for us to reach up to God, to gather knowledge or to study hard in order to reach him. There was no way except for God making himself known through the person of Jesus Christ.

The word made flesh. John chapter 1 tells us in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. This is Jesus. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth. And that's the gospel, isn't it? That God in his infinite love and wisdom rescued us from death and sin through Jesus Christ.

He lived a blameless life as a man, taught with the wisdom of God, and ultimately died as a sacrifice for us on that cross. That's the gospel, isn't it?

Maybe you might be new here, or maybe this is the first time you've heard it. Maybe you've spent your whole life trying to be good, to gather wisdom or knowledge.

[9 : 43] The more I know, the better I can be, right? The more I know, the more I understand God, I could probably reach up to him, right? But this isn't the good news.

The good news is that this gospel that we believe in, it's a free gift. The gift of the Son, Jesus Christ, is the only way to know the Father, our God.

So when we confess our sins and proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only way, the truth, and the life, we will receive this gift. This gift of life, of salvation, and a reconciled relationship with our Father. That is the only way we could even begin to know God. So since, through Jesus Christ, we have the only way of knowing God, what is there to boast about?

What is there to be arrogant about? Should we let our knowledge, or lack of it, tear apart the Church of Christ and cause division? Paul is saying that this was a cause back in the Corinthian Church.

[10:49] But he moves on, secondly, and he shows us how division can actually be caused by where we're from. Having set this foundation of knowledge and love, Paul switches back to his original topic, about food sacrificed to idols.

It was obvious that this was a cause of division within the Church, with people taking different sides. It describes one group of people who knew that an idol is nothing at all in the world.

These people may have been raised, like Paul, as a member of the Pharisees. They may have been brought up in religious households, born to Jewish parents. Maybe even taught the law of Moses from young.

They possess the knowledge in verse 6 that says, There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and from whom we live. And there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

So one group of people had this knowledge. But this wasn't common knowledge. Because back in the day, the Church of Corinth, at the time, was surrounded by people from many different backgrounds.

[12:04] They believed in many different gods, many different religions. They worshipped in temples like this, worshipping Greek gods like Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite.

They sacrificed food in temples, like the ones we see up on the screen. They may have been recent converts to Christianity, new Christians, perhaps fascinated by this small but quickly growing movement of Christ.

These were the people who Paul describes in verse 7, but not everyone possesses this knowledge. So we had one group who had a firm understanding of these theological truths.

And we had the other group who were still young in the faith. We had one group that knew God could not be brought near, whether eating food or not eating food.

And then we had the other, who maybe for their entire lives had used food as a way to draw close to gods, asking for favours or for protection. We had one group who might have found it no problem at all eating the sacrificial food.

[13:15] And we had the other, who thinks this food is dirty and defiled. We see in verse 7, carry on, some people were so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food, they think of it as being sacrificed to a god.

And since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. In other words, some members of the congregation had long taken part in eating this idol-sacrificed food.

They may have been raised in idol-worshipping households. They might have gone to school in these temples, even worked there, serving these so-called gods.

Paul says these Christians are weak in conscience. Not in the sense of their conscience being guilty, having a guilty conscience, but in the sense that they may have been a bit more immature of the gospel and how it impacted their behaviour.

Because of this lifelong worship of idols some of these new believers had, these Corinthians, who may have been new Christians, had not yet believed in their hearts as well as their heads that an idol is nothing.

[14:27] Going back to the temple to eat this idol-sacrificed food would mean once again joining themselves together with an unholy God and be unclean in their understanding of themselves.

Their relationship with the Lord Jesus would be destroyed. Paul isn't criticising these new Christians here. He's criticising the older, maybe more mature Christians.

Because of their background, their upbringing, they thought they had the right to exercise these freedoms because they knew they weren't sinning against God.

Idols are nothing. This, maybe they knew. But they should also know that food is also nothing. Paul says that food doesn't bring us near to God.

We are no worse if we do eat, but we also no worse if we do not eat. But to the brother and sister who didn't grow up learning this fact, didn't know that Jesus had come to set them free from these old Jewish laws, it may have been something indeed.

[15:37] Something that would bring them down, tear them down, destroy them. And so this assumption of this shared knowledge, everyone knows about food, everyone knows about idols, had caused division within the Corinthian church.

had caused some Christians to stumble and even be destroyed. And finally, thirdly, Paul shows us that division can actually be caused by how we act.

In verse 9, it says, Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. Carries on in verse 10, For if someone with a weak conscience sees you with all your knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?

Paul is describing a situation where a knowledgeable believer is seen to be eating idol-sacrifice food. A person with a weak conscience, maybe a newer believer, sees them.

And that newer believer will be emboldened or encouraged to also go and eat this food sacrificed to idols. And in doing so, Paul says this younger Christian, this Christian with a weak conscience, will be destroyed.

[17:03] Destroyed is a pretty bold word. It means to cause to perish, or even to be lost from the kingdom of God. Paul here in verse 10 almost mocks them.

For if someone with a weak conscience sees you with all your knowledge, he's almost saying, so what if you had all this knowledge? So what if you knew you weren't technically sinning?

By you doing this, that person has been destroyed. And for what? Because you wanted a cheap meal? Because food sacrificed to idols is especially delicious?

Do you think it's worth it? No way. Simply put, because one Christian had cared more about exercising his rights, he had pushed his brother back into spiritual darkness.

Because another Christian had more knowledge and acted in the freedom she knew she had, a sister had strayed further from the Lord. Paul carries on and says that these members of the body are those for whom Christ died.

[18:15] And Paul equates this to Christ himself. Earlier in chapter 6, Paul taught that your members are bodies of Christ. And there are many members of Christ.

Stronger ones, weaker ones. These ones are ones that maybe need a bit more caring, a bit more protection. But they are also the ones that Jesus taught us to care for the most, the least, the lost, and the little ones.

And finally, how does Paul wrap up? Paul switches not just back to food, but actually to meat.

He makes this promise, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall. Meat was a luxury and reserved for special occasions back in the day.

But to Paul, he is saying, it doesn't matter. This is all worth giving up. Or to care for the weaker brother or sister. He will not taste meat, smell meat, eat any meat, so that he will not cause them to fall.

[19:26] To him, it was simply not worth it. So what about us, PCPC? We aren't the Corinthian church. We aren't eating at temples, I hope.

And I don't think we let meat divide us all that often either. But even so, we may be at times just as divided by what we know, our backgrounds and where we're from, our actions.

How can we cause others to stumble? How can we cause division in our church? And what do we do about it? I think I have three quick suggestions for us to start to maybe begin to care a little bit about our brothers and sisters and our church.

So firstly, to learn. Since Christ died for us, should we not begin to try and learn about each other? I mean, how many of us here at PCPC, like myself, grew up in a Christian home, singing songs like, Jesus loves me, this I know.

But on the other hand, how many of us grew up under red, shining lights at home, smelling incense in every room we go? How many of our parents might have taught us the Lord's Prayer, at the same time explaining the importance of our family meal, communion?

[20:58] But on the other hand, how many of us prayed to Earth Mother and gave thanks to Sky Father before we ate anything? You see, we all have different upbringings.

Even if we are one family in Christ, our earthly families have different beliefs, different ways of doing things, and we should never assume that just because maybe we look a bit similar, we all understand the ins and outs of Christian living.

Do we take the time to truly understand our brothers and sisters sitting around us here today, and not fall to our assumptions and stereotypes? Without firstly learning about each other, where we're from, what we're like, we may never know what things cause each other to stumble.

I encourage you, church, to not only fill our heads with knowledge that puffs up, as Paul describes. Now, it's very important to study the Word of God, that's not what I'm saying.

We're told to meditate and delight in it. It has power, it is living. It's part of our responsibility as Christians. But don't cling to that knowledge.

[22 : 13] Don't rely on that knowledge or take pride or to be arrogant in that knowledge. We need to learn to understand each other here in this place. Make every effort to listen, to really listen to each other.

Jesus meets us where we are, exactly as we are. And so since Christ died for us, can we do the same with other people? To lay down our assumptions, to meet them where they are and truly learn about each other?

Secondly, since Christ died for us, we should care by living life with one another. It would be a shame for me to say, don't worry, I will never ever cause another brother or sister to stumble.

They never see me eating or drinking. They never see me living my life. We have no chance to influence each other. It would be a shame indeed.

Proverbs 27, 17 tells us that iron sharpens iron. So one person sharpens another.

[23 : 25] But if one piece of iron is in a couch in Botany Downs and another piece of iron is laying in bed in Pakuranga, they'll never be able to sharpen each other. They'll just be separate, blank pieces of metal.

Isn't that what Jesus did? He ate with sinners. He talked to those ignored by society. He touched the unclean. But at the same time, he spent three long years every day with the disciples eating and drinking, laughing and crying.

And all the while, he was building them up in knowledge and in love. So what can we do? I encourage you, PCBC, to take part in many of the wonderful initiatives that we have here at church. We could join a fellowship group. We could volunteer to look after children. Maybe go to prayer meeting. Maybe all we need to do is stay longer than five minutes after service and connect with a brother or sister.

When we spend time together, we can start to look for ways to build each other up in love.

Remember, people often don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

[24 : 42] So take that first step. Strike up that conversation. Start that godly, life-giving relationship. Then you may actually be able to share that knowledge that you know and to build each other up in love.

Since Christ laid down his life for us and died, we too can lay down our comforts and try to do life together. And lastly, to love.

What greater love has this world ever seen than when the Son of God, all-powerful, all-knowing, sacrificed himself on the cross for us?

Love quite often is sacrifice. If anyone would come after me, Jesus said, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. So what does taking up the cross mean to you?

Is it, like Paul, a sacrifice of what you eat and drink? Do you have to be more careful about a glass of wine in front of a new believer? Or do you have to watch what meat you eat in front of an ex-Muslim or ex-Islam brother?

[25 : 55] Perhaps we need to be more careful of what we wear, how we speak, what we read, we watch, or we listen to. Now, growing up, I went to my fair share of parties.

I wasn't too crazy, but I would fit in with my friends. They drank, so I did too, and they would party, so I did too. And my go-to excuse was if Jesus turned water into wine, then I could turn this wine into a good time.

But it wasn't until I was reminded, I think one time actually by my mum, that although drinking is not prohibited, it's not a sin, I was doing nothing wrong technically, I was still a leader.

I was still an example. And that was what non-Christians, new Christians, young people saw. And if my drinking caused them to question Christianity, maybe even question Jesus himself, then I'm not

just having a good time.

I'm having a good time and destroying the body of Christ. Maybe I'm older now, I am. Maybe I'm wiser now, maybe not.

[27 : 15] But I am a lot more careful about what I do. Not because I know I'm forced to keep these rules, but because I need to love enough to not be a stumbling block.

We don't do some things because we care enough for others to lay down our rights in front of Christ. Christ. But maybe for some of us here, we don't really have that capacity to love. Maybe we really don't care. I mean, God, how can you ask me to sacrifice for someone? Give up meat? I mean, I'd rather eat a piece of steak than have a conversation with this person. But if pleasing God is what we want to do above all else, I think we can simply ask God for more love.

He is a God, he is a father who gives graciously. You can start small. Maybe we don't all jump to sacrificing what we eat or what we drink, but maybe you could sacrifice your time by praying for someone, by encouraging someone.

[28 : 29] You can sacrifice a little bit of your comfort by maybe being generous with your money, going out of your way to help other people. You'll find that the more you start to think of the needs of others, the more you'll be aware of a love that God gives you for them.

Our example, our great king and high priest Jesus Christ died for us, so we too can lay down our rights and love each other.

Paul finishes this chapter not by instructing the Corinthian church, you have to do this, you have to do this, you have to do this. What Paul says, I will give up meat, I will gladly give up meat.

He tells them what he would do if he were in that situation. So PCBC, let's take the same position as Paul. it starts from us.

Let's not point to the person sitting to the left or to the right of us, what they can give up, what she can sacrifice, but let's ask God how we ourselves can better build up our brothers and sisters in love and let's do it together.

[29 : 48] Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that you not only give us the chance to know you, you also give us the Holy Spirit to empower us to do these good works.

Teach us, Lord, to be a church that loves the weaker brother, that cares for the less mature sister. And through this, we may help lead more people to deeper godly relationship with you.

Thank you, Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen.