



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

DATE: SUNDAY, 13TH OF SEPTEMBER 2020

SPEAKER: CRAIG VERNALL

SERMON TITLE: RELIGION OR FAITH

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 8

The 8th chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a real game changer when we come to interpret faith in a real-world situation. How do we adjust to a changing world without compromising the essentials of our faith in Jesus?

Paul begins by separating out knowledge that puffs up over knowledge that builds. Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-3.

"Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. ³ But whoever loves God is known by God.

Then in verse 2 Paul is telling us that even those who think they know something still have a lot to learn. But it's better to be known by God than to have our own knowledge.

Q1. What characterizes someone who displays knowledge that "puffs up"?

Q2. What characterizes someone who displays knowledge that "builds up"?

Paul is about to engage in what has become a point of confusion and division within the church community. That being whether one should eat meat that's been sacrificed to a foreign god, or an idol within a pagan temple.

Most available meat had been through the temple worship system. It was then sold onto local butchers or cooked and then sold at the temple food courts. So, the question is whether or not a Christian should eat this food. Some were okay with this and some found the idea made them feel uncomfortable by the sense that they could become spiritually compromised or unclean.

Therefore, this is not a simple yes or no question. We need to remember that the Corinthian church is working out of a new paradigm and new way of doing life together. You'll recall this from 1 Corinthians 6:1-2.

"I have the right to do anything," you say- not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"- but I will not be mastered by anything.

It's from a position of freedom of choice that Paul is wanting to help the Corinthians make good decisions about whether to eat meat sacrificed in pagan temples. So, to do this, Paul firstly attempts to reduce the size of these pagan idols from within their imaginations. Which isn't easy to do because most of these people will have been worshipping at these temples for years prior to knowing Jesus as Lord. Read 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.

⁴ 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." ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ 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.

The Corinthians could have easily been intimidated by the grand architecture of the pagan temples. Or that friends and family still worshipped with sincerity at these temples. Of course, the Aphrodite temple in Corinth held the physical high ground in the city and was very wealthy.

Q3. Do you think that Paul's description in verses 4-6 serves to diminish the size of these "so called gods"? Does Paul help to put these pagan idols in proper perspective?

Now Paul addresses the cause of the division within the church community. It's a lack of clarity about the strength of these pagan gods.

⁷ 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. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

It's here that Paul introduces the concept of having a "weak conscience". This described people who are still struggling in their conscience with the idea that idols can affect the food we eat and therefore affect our spiritual wellbeing. This term of having a "weak conscience" may not be the most helpful for us. I'd suggest that we could also use the term "sensitive conscience".

But the term weak conscience takes our faith to a whole new depth. Now our freedom found in Christ should affect every part of our being. If our conscience is defiled by guilt then we're not truly free.

Q4. Are there things in your conscience that have transitioned from a position of weakness to strength?

Q5. Has this come from an increased confidence in Jesus or has your conscience become seared over time?

Having established that food does not bring us closer to God, Paul now focuses upon the relational problems that have occurred due to people having strong and weak consciences.

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

Within Christian community there are multitude of choices about how we can live our lives. This means that some of our choices may be questionable in other people's eyes.

Q6. Can you identify actions or attitudes that can cause division within today's church life?

Paul's strongest word is for those with a strong conscience. In that the strong must not live in such a way as to defile the conscience of the weak/sensitive. Paul sights those who are literally eating within the pagan temple restaurant as an example of this.

Q7. How do you feel about diminishing your own rights or freedoms for the sake of another person's conscience?

In his summary Paul makes it very clear that the way we treat or respect another's conscience is an action that we do for Christ.

¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ 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.

Q8. In what ways will Christian community be strengthened if we respect each other in this way?

If time allows end your group time with praying for one another. Have a blessed week!