

Looking Out for Others (Proverbs 27:17 & 1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

26-Apr-20

G'Day church family

It would be good to have your **Bibles open to 1 Cor chapter 8**

Let me ask God to give us understanding of His Word; Let's pray...

Intro

Sometimes as a **minister** I might **get asked** things like:

Is it okay to put a **few dollars** in the **pokies** at the RSL?

Is it okay to **buy a raffle ticket**?

Is it okay to be involved in the **Melbourne Cup Sweep** at work?

Is it okay to have a few **beers** or a glass of **wine**?

Is it okay to go to the **Footy** on **Sunday**?

Is it okay to go **move house** on **Sunday**?

And so on...

How do we make a decision on these things?

(pause)

When I **first** became a **Christian**, I played **soccer** (football) on **Sunday Morning**
- and attended **church** on Sunday **afternoon**.

After a while, I started to **feel uncomfortable** about playing soccer on Sunday mornings - not because there was **anything wrong with playing soccer** on Sunday - but because **I was super competitive** - and I **felt my focus** on Sunday was **too much on the soccer game** - and not so much on **worshipping God**.

My **conscience** led me to think my **priorities** on the **Lord's Day** were **wrong** and **soccer** on Sunday was **becoming a stumbling block** for me

So, I gave up playing soccer on Sunday and joined a Christian comp - that played on Saturday's.

That was a personal choice

For other Christians - who might not be as super competitive as me - playing soccer on Sunday - would not mean as much to them - and their focus was still on the Lord

In 1 Cor 8 - the Apostle Paul gives us some really good advice when making ethical decisions?

Ethics are principles - that govern a person's behaviour or govern a person's decision to participate in an activity.

So - is it right for me to do this? Or is it wrong for me to do this?

Context

The **Context**, as we've said before, Corinth was a pagan, sexually immoral city. There were many temples in Corinth - where people worshipped false gods or idols.

Associated with these gods in these temples was food sacrifices.

People would come to worship the false god and offer food as a sacrifice to the god to gain favour - to gain fertility for people - and fertility for the land

So, food (like meat) was offered on altars at these temples and usually divided into 3 portions

- a. One portion was burnt on the altar in honour of the god
- b. One portion was given to the worshipper to take home and eat

- c. And a third portion was given to the **priest** making the **offering** on behalf of the **worshipper** - and if the **priest didn't want** to eat his portion - he **sold** it at the **temple restaurant** - or sold it to the **local meat market**

This raised a **few issues** for the Corinthian **Christians**. **Questions** like:

- Can we eat meat purchased at the temple meat market?
- What if we are served meat purchased at the temple meat market when we are guests in someone's home?
- Can they eat at the restaurant at the pagan temples?

These are tricky questions for the Corinthian Christians

But there was a **group** within the **Corinth Church** - who thought they had "**superior**" **knowledge** - you could say they were "**in the know**" - they were known as **Gnostics** (from the **Greek** word for **knowledge** "**gnosis**")

These are the **people** I mentioned in previous weeks who **saw** the **body** as **nothing** - and only the **soul** that **mattered**.

So, Paul **addresses** these **people** "**in the know**" in this chapter

And the **first principle** Paul gives is in **verses 1 to 6**

Knowledge alone must not determine your **ethical choices**

[PowerPoint 1]

Knowledge alone must not determine our ethical choices (vv1-6)

See v1

Paul brings up the **subject** of **eating food sacrificed to idols**

Now we might say - well we don't have **temples and idols and animal sacrifices today** - so **what's that got to do with us** here in Toukley today?
 Well - if you go to an **Indian or Chinese restaurant** - how do you know if they haven't **offered the food to Buddha**, or a **Hindu god** or even prepared the food **Halal style** and blessed the food, for **Allah**, according to Islamic Law?
 And should we care - if they have?
 That's **kinda** of what's **going on** here in Corinth...

Paul **sarcastically** says in v2

"We know "we all possess knowledge" - he's having a go at these guys "in the know"

And Paul's right we do all have knowledge

And **sometimes** we think we have **more knowledge** than we actually have
 As the saying goes **"a little knowledge is dangerous"**

And with the **advent** of **Google** and **Siri** - suddenly we can be **experts** in **everything?**

But Paul makes a **really important observation** at the end of v1

"Knowledge puffs up – while love builds up"

You see **knowledge alone** - can **give us a big head** - and cause us to be **arrogant** and **proud**

And **we stop listening** - because **we know it all** - and we're an **expert**

Paul shows us a **better way** - and it's **knowledge with love**

Here's a simple example - I could say to my granddaughter

"Oh, you don't know how to tie your shoelaces at your age - how dumb are you - everyone else in your class knows how to do that!"

Or I could say "*Sweetheart, let me teach you a really easy way to tie your shoelaces - so you don't get teased at school*"

Which is better for my granddaughter?

Knowledge "to tie your shoelaces" is one thing - showing love with my knowledge is better thing.

Paul's next point in v2 is:

Just because we know something - doesn't mean we know everything we ought to know.

And to paraphrase v3

We never really know enough until we show love - and recognize that it's God who actually knows it all.

Having made the point that knowledge needs to be accompanied by love

Paul then tackles the issue of eating food sacrificed to an idol in v4

And again, he quotes these guys "in the know"

Still in v4

We know "*an idol is nothing at all in the world*"

Paul's saying you're right in your knowledge - these idols - these false gods aren't real - and so they're meaningless and nothing.

For example, if meat is offered to the Greek god - Zeus - there's no real Zeus - so it's a waste of time and means nothing

These idols and gods are just lumps of wood or stone - nothing happens to the food when it's offered to these lumps of wood or stone

And Paul says you're right - still v4 - **there's only one true God** - these other **gods and idols are nothing**

Yet Paul says in v5

Even if there are **so-called gods** - that **people call "god" or "lord"** - which many countries in the world worship

Paul says you're right - to say they're nothing at all

Because **there's one only God, the Father** - who created everything

And **only One Lord, Jesus** - who **created everything** - and it's through Jesus we have life - because He died for our sins to be forgiven - and He rose - so we can have eternal life -

All that's true - Paul **says**

However, even though these **idols and false gods don't exist** - **Satan can use** them to **derail and trick people**

Paul's saying knowledge in itself is not enough - they need to consider the **effect** that these idols might have on **other people**

Just because these **people "in the know"** can **see** that these idols are **nothing** - doesn't mean **everyone has it together like them**

Other people might see food offered to idols as **totally wrong** and if they eat that **food** - it will make them **feel like** they've somehow **betrayed** the one true **God** - and they start to **feel uncomfortable** or **guilty**

The **people "in the know"** - can't just say to these others **"get a grip - what's wrong with you - you're being stupid"** - that's not loving

Which brings us to Paul's second principle in verses 7 to 13

Love must determine our ethical choices

[PowerPoint 2]

Love must determine our ethical choices (vv7-13)

Paul in v7 asks those "in the know" - who know there is nothing to an idol - to realize that not everyone knows this. And if someone believes there is something to an idol, and they eat meat that has been sacrificed to an idol and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

Why is their conscience considered weak? Not because their conscience doesn't work. In fact, it overworks! Their conscience is weak because it's wrongly informed and operating on the false idea that there really is something to an idol.

You can just imagine those "in the know" in Corinth - with their superior knowledge saying "but we're right!"

Being right is important, but it's not more important than showing love to the family of God

Paul makes the point in v8

We're not more spiritual if we know idols are nothing and eat meat sacrificed to these idols - and we're not less spiritual if we abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Food doesn't bring us nearer to God - as Paul says.

Application - this is the very point where a lot of people stumble in issues related to Christian freedom. Things like - what movies they watch; what music they listen to; what TV shows they watch; what they do on the

Sabbath/Sunday; what they eat (vegan), what they drink, what they spend their money on - and so on. They assume that their stance on these things is evidence of them being spiritually superior than someone else.

In our church family - we've come from **different cultural backgrounds and traditions** - we have **Scottish Presbyterian heritage** - and we also have people from other denominations - **Anglican, Baptists** etc. and from **other cultures**. We shouldn't see our traditions and heritages as **spiritually superior** - nor should we see other's traditions and heritages as **spiritually inferior**. However, we should **respect each other's traditions** and particularly be **respectful** to our **Scottish Presbyterian heritage** - as that's the **denomination we belong to**.

What Paul goes on to show is what really matters is love towards those in God's family (vv9-13)

Paul's point is - it's **all very well** for those "in the know" to **claim their rights** as having **superior knowledge** - that idols are nothing

But what about the rights of your weaker Christian brother or sister?

Those weaker brothers and sisters - need to be considered - and listened to - and loved

When Paul talks about **weak here** - he doesn't mean - weaker in self-control - or that they are weaker in faith - but weaker in their knowledge.

Paul's point is the ones "in the know" need to **consider** that their eating of **meat sacrificed to idols might cause their brother and sister in Christ, to also eat meat sacrificed to idols and then **destroy their conscience**.**

And that's not very loving at all.

In fact, Paul, v12, says - it's not only sinning against their brother and sister in Christ, it's also sinning against Christ.

Here's an example.

Let's say we have our **annual church lunch at Canton Beach Club** - and I know that there is a **member** of our **church family** attending who has in the past had **great trouble with alcohol**, and has managed, with God's help to **beat it**. But I know, it's something they **still struggle with**. Then, **during lunch, I have a beer** or a glass of **wine** - and I **say** to that **person** (with the alcohol problem) - "**come on - a beer won't hurt you**"

That may cause this person, to say, well - 'Paul as the **minister**, is having a beer - **I can have a beer.**'

Unfortunately, them having a **beer**, leads to them **drinking the next day and the next day**. And before they know it, they are hooked on alcohol again, then they are **ashamed**, they **stop coming to church**, they **give up on their walk with the Lord**. I have been a stumbling block to them.

My knowledge of the **Bible** tells me **drinking alcohol is okay**. Jesus attended a **wedding** where **wine** was served {in fact he **changed water into really good wine**}; And Jesus **drank wine with His disciples**. The Bible says **drinking is not a problem** - but drunkenness is. I know that.

But my **knowledge is not enough** - I need to look out for my church family. It's **no problem for me** to not have a **drink at that lunch** - and so then the **person** (who has the problem with alcohol) is not influenced by my **behaviour** and **they don't stumble**.

Let's be clear though - if a teetotaler gets offended by me having a drink - I'm not being a stumbling block to them. I have freedom to drink - they have freedom not to drink.

I'm only a stumbling block if my behaviour influences their behaviour.

I've also seen the reverse problem where a 'mature' Christian has been so forceful in their opinion that '*nobody should drink alcohol*' that they have offended a new Christian who is okay with having a drink. The 'mature' Christian was so forceful in their opinion, it caused the new Christian to doubt their knowledge of the Bible and to be less inclined to attend events at church when that forceful Christian was present. That's not right. That forceful Christian was sinning against the new Christian and sinning against our Lord Jesus?

One great piece of advice that was given to me, when I became a minister was "*In whatever you do in ministry - minimize the damage to you and Heather - and minimize the damage to the congregation*"

I've since modified this to be a positive statement "*In whatever I do in ministry - maximize the good to you and Heather and maximize the good to the congregation*"

This is the same principles that the Apostle Paul is laying down in this chapter:

1. Knowledge alone must not determine our ethical choices
2. Love must determine our ethical choices

As, Paul concludes in v13

If eating meat causes his brother or sister in Christ to stumble, then Paul won't eat meat every again - because his love for his fellow brother or sister in Christ is more important than his knowledge about meat sacrificed to idols being nothing.

We can apply Paul's 2 principles in all our ethical choices

For every ethical choice we make:

We ask ourselves - what knowledge do I have about this? What does the Bible teach on this? Is this an issue of salvation? Or is this an issue of my Christian freedom? If it's an issue of salvation - then it's not open to debate. If it's an issue of Christian freedom, then we ask ourselves - is the decision I make loving towards God's family - is it loving towards my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ - will it cause one of them to stumble? If it will - then I shouldn't do it?

Conclusion

To finish up then - back in v2

Paul says *knowledge puffs up but love builds up*

That is - the knowledge we have can make us proud and arrogant - and have us not listening and not being pastorally sensitive - BUT - if we apply love with our knowledge - love builds others up - love is caring and pastorally sensitive - and encourages others.

You see knowledge is about us - love is about others!

As a church family - we need to be all about lovingly building each other up.

One way we can do that is by applying our OT reading from Proverbs 27:17 ¹²

[PowerPoint 3]

As iron sharpens iron,
so one person sharpens another.

Let's **use our knowledge** accompanied **with love** to **sharpen one another...**

Let's pray...