

A Love That Limits Your Freedom?

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[0 : 00] I read this morning from 1 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 to 13. I'll just give you a second to look that up. It's on page 1149 in the Church Bible.

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 in all 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 come. And for whom we live. And there is but one Lord. Jesus Christ.

[1 : 14] 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 near 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. 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 wound their weak conscience. You sin against Christ.

[2 : 12] 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. Amen. Good morning St Silas.

If we have not met. My name is Martin. I am the lead pastor here. Thanks a lot David. For reading that so well for us. And it would be a help to me. If you could keep your Bibles open. At 1 Corinthians chapter 8. It's page 1149.

Of the church Bibles. In front of you. If that would help. And you can find an outline. Inside the notice sheet. If you find that helpful. As we look at this portion of scripture together. So let's ask for God's help.

As we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father. As we come to scripture. We thank you for this wonderful opportunity.

To hear your voice. In the scriptures. We ask that by your spirit. You would give us ears to hear your word. Heads that can grow in your truth.

[3 : 18] And hearts that respond in love. For we ask in Jesus name. Amen. Well Joanne will be known to many of you from our staff team.

She's from Hong Kong. And she sent me a photograph this week. It's of a film production company. Have we got it up? There we are. This is of a film production company in Hong Kong.

This is the cast. And the production company. About to start making a film. And as has become their custom now. They have a ceremony. It involves prayers.

By the cast. And crew. To an undefined God. And they come together around a roasted suckling pig. And incense is offered. A red cover is then placed over the camera.

And there are prayers for the tech equipment. That that will all go smoothly in the filming. It's a pagan ritual. So what does an actor do. Who becomes a Christian.

[4 : 15] Well you can see a Christian actress. In that picture. Just to the right. Of where the incense is being held up. And she's there. But she's not.

She's not taking part. She's actually praying. To the God of the Bible. As a way of marking that she's present with the team. But not taking part in the pagan ritual. And just on the next slide. Just go again Chris. You can see them gathered around later. So joining in with what she can. But not joining in. In the offering of incense. You can see some oranges and candles there.

So it looks a bit like a Christingle. But it's not a Christingle. It's a pagan festival. What does the Christian do in that situation? Alright. But then suppose.

That that Christian actress. Is at the house of one of the other actors. A few days later. And dinner is served. And on the menu. It's roast pork. And she realizes.

[5 : 10] This is probably leftovers. From the sacrifice. That we had the other day. Am I offending God. To eat this now. In a different place. It sounds quite removed.

From life in secular Glasgow today. But there are certainly areas. Of our lives. Where we might start to ask. Similar kinds of questions. Decisions where the Bible.

Bible doesn't seem to give a clear. Specific command. To do or not to do something. And we're left to ask. From what we know. And from our conscience.

How do we live to please God. In this situation. I met up this week. With a guy Andy. On Monday morning. And he was talking about. How he became a Christian.

And he said. Until he became a Christian. In his twenties. He lived for Saturday night. Ordinary Glasgow bloke. Saturday night was what he lived for. Would never miss it.

[6 : 05] Out with his friends. Off to nightclubs. In the city centre. Then he became a Christian. And for him. That way of life. Was so closely associated. With everything he used to live for.

Before he knew God. Hedonism. Drunkenness. Sexual promiscuity. Getting into fights. He completely drew a line. Over that way of life. He won't go back.

To those bars. Those nightclubs. That kind of night out. So picture Andy. Getting stuck into church. Getting to know people. And one day. On a Friday. He gets a phone call.

From his friend. Mark. From church. And Mark says. A few of us are going out. Tomorrow night. For some food. And then we're going to a nightclub. Do you want to come? And Andy says.

Ah. No. I don't. I'm not sure. I used to be really into all that stuff. But I've kind of drawn a line. Over that. Under that lifestyle now. But Mark says. Oh no. No. It's not.

[7 : 01] We don't carry on. Like your. Old mates would have done. No. It's not like that. It's just good clean fun. Just. Just come and join in. So what should Andy do?

And what should Mark do? His friend. His friend. Well Paul is going to address these kinds of issues. In chapters 8 to 10 of this letter we're looking at. That he wrote to this church he planted in Corinth.

And the presenting issue for them. Was when food that they came to eat. Had been sacrificed previously. To idols in the temples. The city of Corinth was awash with these temples.

To pagan gods. Gods like Jupiter. And Hermes. And Venus. And Cupid. And Zeus. And religion was at the heart of public life.

So if you went to a birthday celebration. Chances are it would have been in the courts of a pagan temple. If you went to a gathering of trades people. For the business you worked in.

[8 : 00] It would have started with a pagan ritual. Prayers to one of the pagan gods. And when you went to the market to buy food. Almost certainly the meat that you bought.

Would have formerly been sacrificed in a pagan temple. The meat then used in a pagan meal ritual. But then the leftovers sold on in the marketplace.

Where it would be bought for people. By people for their homes. So how do you feel. If you've joined the church in Corinth. And there's a bring and share lunch on the Sunday.

And your friend Sarah turns up with burgers. And you know she got them from the butchers. That gets their meat from the temple. Paul's addressing that.

And our first point is. It's not what you know. It's who you know. From verses 1 to 3. So Paul says that knowledge taken the wrong way. Is dangerous. Have a look with me at verse 1.

[8 : 58] Halfway through. He says we all possess knowledge. Quoting them and what they thought. But knowledge puffs up.

While love builds up. Knowledge puffs up while love builds up. I don't know if you've seen the film Despicable Me. Animated film.

Super villain. Has his life changed by three little girls. It starts with some Americans on holiday in Egypt. And they go to see the Great Pyramid.

And a boy goes flying through the air. Long story. About to land on the Great Pyramid. And then he bounces off. And they realize that the Great Pyramid has been stolen.

And replaced with a giant inflatable replica. Which then deflates. Because it's been punctured. The Apostle Paul is saying that we can be like that pyramid.

[9 : 55] In the Christian life. We might look great. We might be respected. Because of what we know. But on the inside. There's nothing solid.

We're puffed up. Rather than built up. And we get puffed up. When we have knowledge. In the Christian life. But it makes us proud. Verse 2. Those who think they know something.

Do not yet know as they ought to know. In other words. When we do grow in knowledge. In the Christian life. It should humble us. As we grow in our sense of the holiness of God.

And of our need for his grace. We should be transformed by that. In humility. But sometimes we can learn more. And we grow in confidence.

Spiritual pride. Puffed up. And Paul points out. It's not through knowledge. That you are drawn into relationship with God. So have a look at verse 3.

[10 : 59] But whoever loves God. Is known by God. So which do we value more? Is it knowledge of God? Or love of God? Paul says.

What brings you into relationship with God? Is love. He has lovingly taken the initiative. But he comes to know us relationally. When we respond to that love.

Demonstrated at the cross. In Jesus rescue mission. Dying for us. When we respond in love. We are known by God. Known relationally by him. And you could know lots about God.

But it would mean nothing really. It would be of no value to you. If you are not known by him.

Because of your love for him. So love is more important than knowledge.

And it's good to reflect on that. On how we might become puffed up. Instead of built up. By knowledge. Knowledge of truth about God. Is key to how we grow.

[11 : 57] The Bible calls us to be. As a church. To be a spirit dependent. Jesus centered. Bible teaching church. That's clear.

We saw that in the summer. We looked at a book in the Bible. Second Timothy. Where it's very clear. The way to be a healthy church. A growing church. Is through faithful Bible teaching. That teaches us.

So that we grow in our knowledge. But wouldn't it be awful. If we grew in that culture as a church. A church where we are keen to speak God's word. Prayerfully to one another.

So that we're all well taught. But the result was. That we became puffed up. Instead of built up. A church where we think something of ourselves. Because of head knowledge.

About God. One symptom of that would be. If when we hear someone teaching the Bible. We enjoy being able to criticize. What we've heard.

[12 : 54] So if you visit another church. Say you're away from Glasgow. And you go to a different church. And you hear the preacher. Preach a sermon. And they love Jesus. And their hearts are in the right place.

But they just. They just don't handle the Bible well. They. They don't bring out what's there. In the Bible passage. They just speak about something else. That isn't really what the Bible passage is about.

Well. How do we respond? The danger is. That we feel good about ourselves. Because we spotted what was wrong. With the sermon. And that's what we leave talking about.

That's what we leave preoccupied with. And we miss that the general point. That the preacher was making. Was. A healthy good one. They loved Jesus.

And they wanted people to love Jesus. Or what about when we sing. Do we go away preoccupied. With what was wrong with the song. What was wrong with the line in the song.

[13 : 53] Do we say to others. I can't believe we sang that song again. It's just spiritual candy floss. There's nothing in it. There's not enough meat in the song. It was just vapor.

While. While. Maybe other people. Were singing that same song. With love for God. In their hearts. Knowledge puffs up.

But whoever loves God. Is known by God. So that's our first point. It's not. What you know. It's who you know. But then Paul balances it. There's this great balance. In the chapter.

He shows us that knowledge. Really matters. So our second point. It's not about what you eat. It's about the Lord you live for. Let's pick things up again. In verse four. 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.

[14 : 51] Now just pause there. Paul has a lot more to say. Later in the section. That we'll get to. About. The power of idols. So here he says. An idol is nothing. It's nothing at all. In chapter 11.

He says. An idol. Has a demon behind it. It's demonic. In other words. We can end up. Spiritually enslaved. Ourselves. To a false God. There are evil spirits.

At work. In false religion. But here. Fundamentally. An idol is nothing. A false God. The issue here. Is not about. Whether you join in.

With a different religion. It's about eating meat. In a different place. That might previously. Have been sacrificed. To a pagan God. And is it defiled? Well Paul says.

No. Because. Well his reason's a punchy one. Isn't it? The reason it's not defiled is. There is only one real God. So of course.

[15 : 47] We'll hear other people. Talk about. Other gods. And lords. In verse 5. He says that. But look at verse 6. 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 God who is there. The only God.

Is an eternal father. With an eternal son. The gods of every other religion. Are not really there. And we have different gods.

Around us. That people worship today. Because they've endured the test of time. More than the God Jupiter. Or the God Hermes. From that time. But the same principle.

Holds true. Now if you buy meat locally here. There's a reasonable chance. That it would be halal meat. We've got Muslim friends.

[16 : 43] And we were arranging to go out with them. To Nando's. And we were limited in the Nando's. We could go to. Because some of them are halal. And some of them are not. For meat to be halal.

The person who slaughters the animal. Has to be a Muslim. And he has to say a prayer. A prayer called the Tasmiya. A prayer to the God of Islam. Does that mean that when you eat the meat. It's wrong for you. As a Christian to eat it. Well I think Paul says no. It's not wrong. Here in chapter 8. Why not? Well. Well. The prayer when the meat was slaughtered.

Doesn't affect the meat. Because Allah. The God of Islam. Is not real. He's not really there. So you can give thanks to the living God.

For the food that's served to you. And receive it as a gift from God. So let's notice Paul's approach there. In this chapter so far. He wants the Corinthians to know.

[17 : 44] That love is more important than truth. Verses 1 to 3. But he does want them to grow. In their knowledge. Verses 4 to 8. Because it's the knowledge of the truth. That brings them freedom.

And he wants them to take hold of their freedom. In Christ. Whenever we have questions like this. Our own conscience is how we work out what's right and wrong. We tend to go by our conscience. If we feel that it would be wrong. Then we don't do it. If we feel it would be right. Then we do. But as you grow in knowledge of God's will. Through the scriptures. Your conscience gets shaped by that. And sometimes things that you used to think were fine. You then realize you shouldn't really be doing. And other times there are things that you avoided. And then your knowledge of God's word grows.

And you think. Yeah. I think I'm free to do that in Christ. So Paul here in this chapter. He's opening the dialogue in the church. And we need to do that on these kinds of questions.

[18 : 46] With fellow Christians. So that we're not held to ransom. By the kind of the traditionalist views. Of one minority group in the church. You know. If there's a group that have a particularly.

Conservative view on an issue. That's not necessarily framed by scripture. But by what's been handed down to them. How do we ensure that we're not just held.

Continually to ransom. By that view. Well. We need to talk to one another. With Bibles open. And understand. What our freedom in Christ is. I think of a friend.

Steve. Who became a Christian. In kind of middle age life. But he grew up in a Christian home. Going to a Bible based church. And when I asked him. Why he'd.

Been driven away effectively. He decided it wasn't for him. He said. Well what we heard. In the sermons. Was grace. But what I experienced. Growing up in that church.

[19 : 46] Was. Legalism. And he remembers being shouted at. By his parents. If his trousers weren't pressed right. On a Sunday morning for church. Because you had to be wearing your best. And these traditions. Had come to. Kind of define for people. Their experience. Of. Who Jesus is. Well we can only avoid legalism. By looking to grow.

In the truth. Of the scriptures. And talking to one another. About issues we're facing. So that we get better. At thinking. What does it look like. To live to please God. God. In this scenario.

And it can be great. To do that. With Christians. From other cultures. It's a great blessing. For us in our church. That there are Christians. From different cultures. And they notice. Our blind spots. And we can help them. Notice theirs. Is it okay. To have a Christmas tree. In church. That's a conversation. I've had in the last couple of weeks. With. Christians in our church.

[20 : 44] From a non-western culture. Is it okay. To drink alcohol. As a Christian. Can you play sport. On a Sunday. Should you wear your Sunday best.

For church. Well in questions like that. Knowledge matters. As we look to live. To please God. So we've heard. It's not what you know. It's who you know. And that comes through love.

It's not what you eat. It's who you live for. Our knowledge matters. So how do we use. Our freedom. In Christ. That's our third point. It's not about your freedom.

It's about saving others. So Paul has demonstrated. That they are free to eat. This meat. That's been sacrificed to idols. But then there's a twist. If you have a look at verse 7. He says.

But not everyone. Possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed. To idols. That when they eat. Sacrificial food.

[21 : 40] They think of it. As having been sacrificed. To a God. And since their conscience. Is weak. It is defiled. Now he clarifies.

That they are wrong. To think that. Verse 8. But food does not bring us near to God. We're no worse. If we do not eat. And no better if we do. But then. He says.

If they are. If they might be discouraged. Or led astray. Because they see you eating. What they think. They shouldn't eat. Look at verse 9. Be careful however.

That the exercise of your rights. Does not become a stumbling block. To the weak. So when Paul talks about. A weak conscience here.

He's talking about. What we might describe. As an overly tender. Conscience. And Paul says. That our conscience. Is really important to God. You know.

[22 : 35] If you're in a situation. Where. You are free to do something. It's a matter that's indifferent to God. Whether or not you do it. But you would feel it was wrong. Then for you.

What does that say. About what you think of God. You can see that. In a relationship. Can't you. Just imagine for a moment. I'm married to Kathy. Just imagine.

That I'm invited out. On a Saturday. With. By a couple of friends. To go fishing. For the day. And it's a day out. And it gets to the evening. And we're on the way home. And we get back.

To Glasgow. And one of the guys says. Do you want to go for a curry. To round off the evening. And I think. I didn't. Clear that. With Kathy.

She'll be expecting me back home. But if I phone her. And say. We're back. Can I go for a curry. She'll probably say no. So. I won't phone.

[23 : 30] I'll just go. This is not true. This is an example. Right. I don't like fishing. Okay. It's not true. But imagine that scenario. So I'm thinking. Kathy will say no.

So I won't. Because she won't want me to. So I won't ring. I'll just go for a curry. And I'll just get back later. And imagine I do that. And I creep into the house. On the Saturday night. And Kathy says. How was your day? And I say. Yeah. It was good. Sorry. I'm back late. The guys wanted to go for a curry. And she says. Yeah. I assumed that you would go out for dinner.

No problem. So my behavior has not offended my wife. But the thing is. If I thought. That what I was doing. Would make her unhappy.

And I did it anyway. What does that say. About my attitude. Towards my wife. Well God. The living God. Sees our hearts.

[24 : 25] He sees what's going on. When we make decisions. With our conscience. And if we're resolved. In our conscience. That he doesn't want us. To do something. And we do it anyway.

Then that is sin. For us. Have a look with me. At 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. So this weak.

Brother or sister. For whom Christ died. Is destroyed. By your knowledge. And that makes it. Sin for you. As well. Because of their conscience.

Look at verse 12. When you sin against them. In this way. And wound their weak conscience. You sin. Against Christ. It's extraordinary language. Isn't it? That you could be free.

[25 : 23] To do something. But because. Another Christian. Has a weak conscience. About it. And they ask you about it. Are you sure that's okay? You might then be sinning.

If you carry on. Because of the effect. It would have. On them. If your exercise. Of genuine freedom. In Christ. Would lead them. To disobey God.

In their heart. As they join in. Because what they interpret it as. Is it's okay. Not to please God. In this area. Then their salvation. Would be. In jeopardy.

In other words. It's love. That seeks the salvation. Of my Christian brothers and sisters. That would limit my freedom. The same love. That moves someone.

To move. To Tajikistan. Or Vietnam. To be a missionary. And tell people about Jesus. They're free not to go. But they go out of love. For those people.

[26 : 20] That same love. Might move you and me. In Glasgow. To limit our freedom. Because it would help. Another Christian. Spiritually. It would help save them.

And how far does that principle go? Well how about. A full-blooded. First century meat eater. Being willing to say. For the rest of my life. I will be vegetarian.

If that's what it needed. To stop a Christian. From stumbling. If you have a look at verse 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. So here's the big idea. Of the chapter. The truth. Brings freedom.

But love. Limits freedom. God calls us. To lay down our rights. To serve others. To save. So that they can be saved.

[27 : 17] It's so different to the world. Isn't it? The world says. Fight for your rights. Especially in our times. That rights are all about you. Other people. And other kind of structures.

In our society. Have taken those rights from you. You need to fight for them. Because you're entitled to them. Don't let anyone take them away. But when we come to God.

He gives us far more. Than we could ever be entitled to. Peace with him. Thanks to the Lord Jesus. Friendship. Reconciliation.

Adoption into his family. Living hope. Of eternal joy. Because on the day we meet him. We will stand righteous. Rather than condemned. We were never entitled. To these things.

But then he says. Love my people. So that you would lay down your rights. If it would help them to be saved. The truth brings freedom.

[28 : 12] But love compels us. To lay down our freedom. So what might that look like? Well we're talking about. Areas of life. Where we're confident.

There's no specific command in the Bible. Disputable matters. Where some Christians think. We're free. But others. Carefully weighing up the scriptures.

Don't think we're free. And the difficulty of giving examples of that. Is that none of us. Ever thinks we're weak. Do you see what I mean? If you think something's wrong.

To do as a Christian. You don't think it's because your conscience is weak. You just think it's wrong. And so. I've got some examples here. And it's worth saying isn't it as well. As we've seen this chapter.

For as long as you think it's wrong. Even if it is an indifferent thing. If for you it feels wrong. Then it is wrong. Because of what that would say about what you think of God.

[29 : 10] But it's right for us to think. Are there any times in my life. Where I am confident. That I'm free in Christ. On this issue. I know I'm free. But I need to lay down that freedom.

Because a fellow brother or sister in Christ. Would be led astray. If I lived out the freedom I have. So I've got some examples here.

Of live issues. Where we might need to explore these questions. We might need to think. Am I really free? And even if we think. Yeah I am free. Do I need to limit that freedom.

For others. And these are issues. I have quite clear ideas about. And some of you will as well. So you'll find as I say them. You might be thinking. But hang on. Hang on. But.

Because some of them. I'm quite clear we are free. And others. I'm quite clear we're not free. But they're issues that face Christians today. What if we were going to buy a new car.

[30 : 07] And a Christian. We were talking to someone else about it. Another Christian. And they were discouraged to hear. About the type of car we were going to buy. Because they felt like it was an unnecessary luxury.

In our lives. Would you be willing to buy a more modest car. Because of their conscience. And how they would feel. About how you're spending your money. What about gambling?

What about buying a lottery ticket? What about buying a lottery ticket with a promise. You'd give 90% of it to the church. If you won. What about smoking?

What about Halloween? Different people in our church. Have different approaches to Halloween. Are those of us who think it's wrong. To celebrate Halloween. Write about that. Or are others in our church.

Who think we're free. Write about that. And if you're free on it. In what situations. Might you think. I think voluntarily. I need to limit my freedom.

[31 : 10] For the sake of others. What about going to the same sex wedding. Of a friend. Or a family member. Are you free to do that? What about playing a Dungeons and Dragons role playing game.

Where the characters you play. Worship false gods. What about watching House of the Dragon. Or Game of Thrones. Or another 18 rated movie.

Or a 15 rated TV series. On some of these. Some of us will think we're free. Others will think we're not. But on any of these issues.

What this chapter of the Bible does for us. Is it puts three pegs in the ground. One is. Love. Love is more important than what you know.

It's through love that we're known by God. And he calls us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Second peg in the ground. Knowledge. That as we grow together in our knowledge of God's word.

[32 : 10] We're going to get better at knowing. If we're really free. And that's a good thing. That we would grow in our grasp of our freedoms in Christ. So that where we should feel constrained by God's will.

We would respond. And where we feel free. In Christ. We would be able to live out that freedom. And the third peg in the ground.

Is conscience. The conscience of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Not just our conscience. That Paul would say. He'd be willing never to eat meat again. Rather than discourage a brother or sister. So there should be issues in our lives. Where we think. I think I'm free on that. And we'd be right. But our love for other people. Compels us to limit that freedom.

Because of their conscience. Now why would we do that? Well Paul is going to say more next week. And in the coming weeks. About his examples. Of how he lives.

[33 : 09] Limiting his freedom. And he says why he does it. At the beginning of chapter 11. He says follow my example. As I follow the example of Christ.

Where he wants us to look. Is at Jesus. The entitled one. The one who had rights beyond comprehension. The stars and the galaxies were made for him. And everything will be handed to him.

And he will hand it back to the father one day. And humanity that he had made. Had refused in our hearts. To give him what he is entitled to.

The honor that is his due. And he chose that rather than enforce those rights. In judging us. He would lay down those rights. And come into our world to suffer and die.

Because he was seeking our good. That we would be saved. And now as God saves us. Through that work at the cross. The wisdom and power of the cross.

[34 : 08] He calls us. Not to get so puffed up with our knowledge. But rather to be built up in love. So that we can lay down our rights.

To see people saved. As Jesus did for us. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Gracious God and loving heavenly father.

We are sorry for when we have used our knowledge. That you've graciously given us. To become puffed up. To think something of ourselves.

By your spirit we pray that you would grow us in love. We thank you that your spirit has poured your love into our hearts. That we know you love us. Would you be at work by your spirit.

That we would grow in our love for you. Our deep appreciation of what it means to be known by you. We pray that our love will grow in knowledge.

[35 : 17] That it will be a knowing love. So that we know what it means to live to please you today. And would you give us wisdom and love. To know when to limit our freedom in Christ.

For the sake of brothers and sisters around us. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.