

2012_01_29 (Epiphany 4) Sermon Script I Ascension Batavia
SDG

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Corinthians 8:1–13 (NKJV)

1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. 4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. 7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

KNOWLEDGE PUFFS ↑, LOVE BUILDS ↑

In Jesus name, who has enriched us in every way by His love, in all speech and knowledge, dear fellow redeemed,

Have you ever seen a puffer fish? The puffer fish when it is approached by potential predators it will inflate with water to several times its normal size, extending its spiky exterior making it virtually inedible.

In what ways do we “inflate” when it comes to our “know it all” approach to others? Did you know puffer fish do not travel in schools, but are usually pictured alone? They spend their time avoiding and pushing away rather than building a community. We ask the Spirit to bless our study as we consider how KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP, but LOVE BUILDS UP.

1. A “my knowledge” approach is me focused

Firstly a “my knowledge” approach is me focused. This is when we become focused on what I know vs. what you know rather than on what God knows.

(v.1) Knowledge puffs up, but love “builds up.” “Edify” means to “build up.” And that is what our relationship with each other is all about – building up. We all have knowledge of some sort. Yet, how and when shall we apply that knowledge? A focus on our my knowledge of Scripture, or of anything – economics, politics, engineering, etc. – these will all lead to a “ME FOCUS.” The Corinthians faced this with regard to the eating of

food. Paul spends nearly two chapters of this epistle devoted to this topic. Is it lawful for a follower of Christ to eat food that had previously been sacrificed to an idol?

Let me fill you in on some background details to this diverse city of Corinth . . . As an introductory commentary puts it: “A variety of shops line the walls of the marketplace ... Along with people bartering in Greek, Latin, and other tongues, hogs grunt, sheep and goats bleat, chickens cluck, doves coo, and cattle low. ... The smell of blood and cooked meat hangs in the air, wafting from the market area and from the dining halls in the nearby temples. Worshipers gather in the temple to make sacrifices, and businessmen recline at tables to discuss the latest issues, while ... gods stand by in mute approval.” (TLSB 1944).

These animal sacrifices of which Paul speaks played an integral role in the whole city's economy and social life. When an animal was sacrificed to a false god, the parts were divided up. Some of the best parts were offered in worship, some went home with the worshippers, some went to the priests, some was sold in the temple, and some went to the market. In fact, the temple dining room itself was more of a restaurant / market than anything else. Business transactions, social gatherings, weddings and so on would often take place right within the temple complex.

You can imagine this influence pressed its influence upon the congregation – especially when you think of how many of these Christians had, not too long ago, been in those temples, calling upon and sacrificing to those gods. And then you throw the Jewish Christians into the mix who were still adjusting to the end of the ceremonies in their own common practices. All these factors had led to what Paul calls in chapter 1 “divisions,” where the church was divided into different sects; where some boasted this “knowledge” that was superior, while others were followers of who they believed were the wisest. The congregation was being infiltrated with a “my knowledge” approach, rather than a “my brother” approach.

(v.4) Paul agrees with this knowledge. The argument would have gone something like this: “since these idols do not really exist, and since there is only one true God, then the sacrifices are nothing and we are free to eat whatever meat we like, we are free to walk into the temple, purchase what we like, and sit down to eat.” In fact it seems they were also encouraging others to do the same, even when not everyone fully understood this teaching. **(v.7)**

You see, there were some, who “until now” had been coming to the temple in order to worship these gods. They had been considering this meat from the temple holy, something devoted to an actual god that really did exist. These were not able to disassociate the worship of the false god from their eating of the sacrifice – whether the meat was sold in the temple, in the market, or offered to you within someone's home – some Christians could not eat of it without thinking of the false god it was offered to. One translation refers to this as “who through former associations with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol.”

Paul agree with those who have this knowledge that indeed an idol is nothing and as he says in chapter 10 – **1 Corinthians 10:25–26 (NKJV) – 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake; 26 for “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness.”**

A Christian, as long as he was not participating in the pagan rituals themselves, was free to eat whatever was sold in the meat market, at a wedding feast or in the house of an unbeliever. And yet a “my knowledge” approach led these to insist that everyone follow their example. This “me focus” did not see how this was leading their brethren into spiritual traps. They weren’t seeing that this knowledge if not applied correctly was more destructive than constructive.

(v.8) Any knowledge that you might gain in things pertaining to our Christian living, should be used for building up, not puffing up. For instance, if someone should come a Roman Catholic background and has been taught it is a sin to eat meat on Fridays, does it make you better if you know God’s word doesn’t really teach that. You are no better if you eat, you are no better if you do not.

(v.9). To be “puffed up” would be to insist that since you have the right knowledge in such things, everyone must act accordingly. To be puffed up would be to invite your weak brother to dinner on Friday and serve him a big juicy steak.

(v.10,11) Did you know that the poison of a puffer fish is more toxic to human beings than cyanide? It is this puffed up, “my knowledge” approach which strikes a brother with poisonous venom, leading him to sin against his own conscience.

We can see this in any number of scenarios. I had a close friend while I was in college who was not a Christian. I remember discussing gambling with him. Before I was going to school to be a pastor we would \$5 poker games about once a week. It seemed harmless. Pretty soon I realized I did not want to lose even that \$5 and became resentful when I lost. I realized that I was sinning against my conscience which told me I should not be participating. I tried to explain this to my buddy. I told him how even if my conscience was at ease with losing the \$5, there is a good likelihood that someone else might not be. He just didn’t understand. He said basically, “if they want to risk their own money, that is there choice. You can’t help it if they get upset if they lose. It is only \$5.” His approach was “me focused.” Even if it did not bother him to lose \$5, he couldn’t see how his pushing me to gamble was asking me to sin against my own conscience.

2. A “my brother” approach is love focused

A “my brother” approach is love focused. Paul, in Galatians, states it this way, **Galatians 6:2 (NKJV) – 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**

The law of Christ is the law of love. Knowledge puffs up, love builds up. When we get to chapter 10 in two weeks we will read, **1 Corinthians 10:23 (NKJV) – 23 All things**

are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify (“build up”).

Intellectually, anyone can have knowledge, but love is a gift of the Spirit; love is what we need to apply knowledge, to understand how our actions will affect those around us. Think of Jesus. **Ephesians 5:2 (NKJV) — 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**

Jesus is the visible showing of a truly “my brother” approach. Christ gave himself for us. Even though He had every “right” – I mean He had the “right” in a way we never have had – to say, “no” to this innocent death to which He subjected Himself. We, of course, deserve eternal death. He on the other had was God. He never sinned. He had ever right in the garden of Gethsemane as He said, **Matthew 26:53 (NKJV) — 53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?**

Knowledge says: “It is my right that matters.” Love says: “It is my brother that matters.” Chapter 13 explains this difference between knowledge and love. **1 Corinthians 13:1–2, 8 (NKJV) — 1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ... 8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.**

Luther himself standing before the Roman Council, when asked to recant his writings, declared that it is neither right nor good to go against his conscience. Paul in v.13 refers to this in the original as “skandalizo” – a word that describes a trap set to catch an animal, a spiritual death trap.

Think of how your fellow brother or sister could be led to destruction. Whether it be someone who thinks it is wrong to eat meat on Fridays, someone who thinks TV is sinful, or someone who thinks it is sinful to go to a bar for a drink – think of your brother for whom Christ died. What if, having been encouraged by you, the weak brother is unable to draw a distinction between eating meat sacrificed to idols and participating in the ceremonies themselves. What if he or she is unable to draw a distinction between liberty in watching TV and liberty in sexual immorality.

Impressions matter. Confessions matter. Let us sound a clear trumpet. God has joined us together to build up, not to drag each other here or there. If Christ was willing to give up all His rights, all the riches of heaven to save your soul, surely we can give up even the smallest of things if we know it will help our brother (**v.13**).

Unlike the puffer fish, lets be more like the surgeonfish. The surgeonfish is a shoaling type of fish. Similar to schooling fish, shoaling fish stay together in a social group. Unlike "schooling fish," however, they do not all move in the same direction all the time. Yet their independent patterns are all coordinated and dependent on one another to survive. Though it seems we do not always travel the same direction, let us not puff up to push away, rather let us stay together in order to build up eachother up with ongoing study and growth in God's Word. KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP, LOVE BUILDS UP. Amen.