



A Study of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

Lesson 13: How About a Nice Piece of Hare Krishna Coconut Candy...

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 8:1**...Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. ⁴ Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." ⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"-- ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. ⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

I had spent the whole morning sitting on the floor in a Hare Krishna temple listening to a Hare Krishna philosopher go on and on about the wonders of

Krishna and the Bhagvad Gita. Now, before you get worried, I have to tell you I wasn't there by choice but rather because my foreign mission's professor at Dallas Seminary, a wonderful man named Ron Blue, had decided our class needed to go out on a field trip to reacquaint ourselves with the lost.

He was right about that by the way.

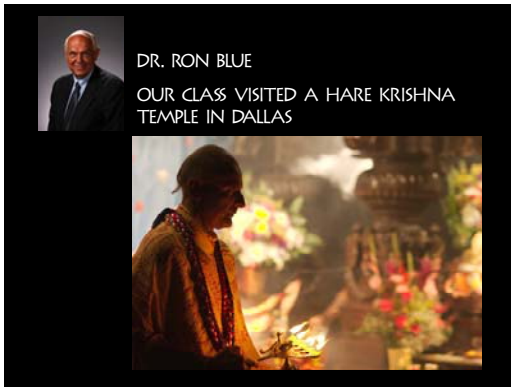


Anyway, Professor Blue met our class out on the parking lot at DTS one morning and we drove in formation over to a Hare Krishna temple just east of downtown Dallas to try to renew our sense of purpose in calling the lost to repentance.



Now I am guessing that Prof. Blue intended to accomplish that by just having us sit there and listen to a Krishna philosopher teach his people. I am not really sure if

Prof. Blue knew exactly what would happen but I have to tell you after an hour or so I was beginning to lose confidence and I was beginning to get pretty irritated and not just at the guy up front with the microphone. I was thinking something like this, **“You know I am paying three hundred dollars a semester hour to sit here cross-legged on the hardwood floor of a Krishna temple to listen to a pagan that I wouldn’t otherwise give the time of day.”**



But I stayed and listened to this Krishna philosopher drone on and on. I sat and I listened and I sat and I listened and I sat and I listened. And after awhile, and I know this never ever happens to any of you, I began to drift off and when I did I noticed that one of Professor Blue’s socks had a hole in it and his toe stuck through. I thought that wonderful...but I digress. Eventually I turned my attention to the little Krishna kids laying there around me on the hardwood floor, coloring in what I soon realized were Hare Krishna coloring books. Up until that time I had no idea there was any such thing.

They were lying around me there on the hardwood floor, ignoring their teacher, ignoring me and the other seminarians, all dressed up in their Krishna clothes, with their Krishna haircuts, coloring pictures of Krishna and some of the celebrities off the Krishna faith and it absolutely broke my heart. I began to think to myself,

“You know these kids ought not be coloring pictures of Krishna and stuff like that...they ought to be coloring pictures of Paul and the apostles or of Moses and the 10 plagues or of David and Goliath. They ought to be in a class somewhere learning their catechism questions and answers or saying memory verses or learning the books of the Bible or learning to sing songs like *Jesus Loves Me*.”

And you know it struck me as so sad that I began to cry...quietly at first and then out loud. After a while, some of the other guys began to cry out loud too. So we sat there a bunch of seminarian eggheads, crying out loud in a Hare Krishna Temple for these poor, precious lost souls...watching their mothers and fathers do everything in their power to bring them up in the doctrine of demons when all of a sudden this Krishna philosopher up at the front of the auditorium and his fellow worshippers decided it was time to unveil their Krishna deities.



Well I have to tell you, being an East Texas sort of guy, I was not quite sure what to expect. I wasn't quite sure what it meant to unveil a deity, so I wasn't quite sure whether it was something I wanted to watch or not and then they pulled back a velvet curtain there on a stage behind their teacher to show us a couple manikins with blue skin dressed in wildly exotic Indian and eastern attire. Now I have to tell you, I quit crying almost immediately and sat there cross-legged with an

enormously stupid expression on my face, you know like when a calf runs across a new gate, not knowing whether to laugh out loud or to start swinging when our Krishna hosts began to dance and spin and beat their tambourines and ring their chimes in order to work themselves up to state of ecstatic frenzy.

While they were doing that, I kept thinking of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and just Elijah must have felt.

Anyway, after a few minutes they closed the curtain and stowed away their deities and began to calm down and we realized they were wrapping things up and we began to stand up and put on our shoes and exit the temple. At the door, there was a young Krishna man who thanked each of us for coming, blessed each of us and handed us a little paper cup (kind of like you sometimes find on cupcakes) with a piece of candy in it, a piece of handmade, homemade Krishna coconut candy...as sort of a token of their affection or good will.

I took my little paper cup and walked out the door. Now, I had been pretty much at the end of the line so most of the other guys had gone out before me. As I stepped out the door and down the step I noticed there on the ground, not five or six feet out the door, an enormous pile of paper cups and in each paper cup was an untouched, handmade, homemade piece of Krishna coconut candy.

I knew, of course, immediately what had happened. Almost to a man, my seminary brothers had determined they were not going to eat any of the candy made by these pagan idolaters. They were not going to take a chance on being contaminated by Krishna candy. They were not about to let one of those blue skinned manikins get any sort of foothold and seep down into their soul.

And I have to tell you, I was, I was torn about what to do with my own little paper cup, with my own little piece of handmade, homemade Krishna candy. I was not quite as set in my ways then as I am now even though I have always had an abiding affection for homemade, handmade coconut candy.

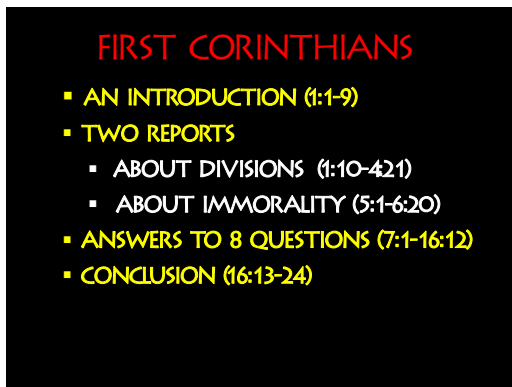
The men were looking back to see what the guys coming out were going to do, so I just stopped and stepped aside and turned and looked back too when Prof. Blue came out with a giant glob of Krishna candy in his mouth. He looked sort of like a hamster with a cheek bulging with candy. He even walked over to where the guys had thrown down there candy, I had a feeling he had done this before, and sort of looked through what they had thrown down to see if anything was salvageable. I think he actually bent down and picked up a piece or two and then on his way back to the car asked first one guy and then the next, **“Hey, are gonna eat that...and if you are not...how about...uh...handing it over?”**

I stood there for a moment and finally made my own personal decision about what to do with my piece of candy and...and...and I wanted to tell you that story because it is a great illustration of the conflict Paul was facing with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter eight and because it will help me to further illustrate an important point because unless I miss my guess the only thing you are wondering right now is whether or not I ate that piece of handmade, homemade, Krishna Coconut candy.

Am I right? I thought so... inquiring minds usually want to know.

I promise before we leave this morning I will answer that question.

But for now, I want to remind you of where we are in Paul's First letter to the Corinthians and how chapter eight fits into the overall structure of the book. You will remember that First Corinthians is made of four sections... a brief introduction...a brief conclusion and two larger sections in the middle.



The first of those two larger sections is found in chapters one through six and concerns a number of reports Paul had received from some of the members of the church at Corinth. Those reports related information to Paul about the various divisions or factions at Corinth. They also related the facts about a notorious case of immorality in the church there and the facts about a number of lawsuits that had been filed by some of the church members against their brothers.

After addressing the various reports he had received, Paul began to answer a letter he had received from the church at Corinth...a letter which was probably a response from the Corinthians regarding a letter he had written them earlier. I think it's the consensus of almost all commentators that their letter to Paul was not a very friendly letter. In fact, most commentators think that the letter was fairly confrontational on the part of the Corinthians. That is, most commentators think that the Corinthians disagreed with Paul's instruction and wound up in their letter denigrating both his advice and his authority to give them advice. After all, they

were a gifted people with both advanced knowledge and advanced wisdom and spirituality.

In other words most commentators think the Corinthians were saying something like this in their Letter to Paul, **“Look here Paul we are grateful to you. God used you to get us into the kingdom...but you have to admit you only focused on the basic stuff. Since you have been gone, we have had some really gifted teachers in our midst and we have grown enormously in our spirituality and knowledge. In fact, we have grown so much that the rudimentary stuff you taught us just doesn’t cut it anymore. Instead, we have moved on to other things... deeper things. For example, you wrote to us to abstain from sexual impurity but honestly since our bodies don’t matter., isn’t it true that we can do whatever we want...”**

You can see how such a letter might have provoked Paul to a little righteous indignation. You can see, as well, why Paul was apt to repeat some of their own words back to them in a bit of a sarcastic rebuke.

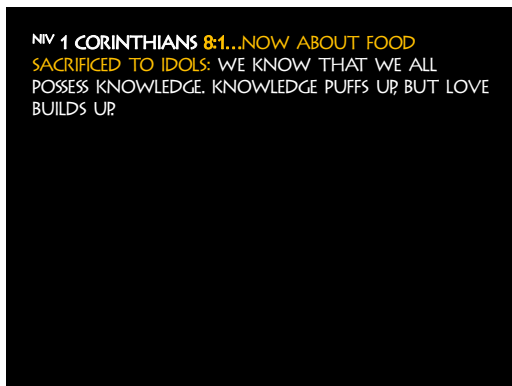
The way Paul does that is to answer the questions posed by the Corinthians one at a time...though not necessarily in the order they were asked them and you can tell when he turns to a new question because he tends to use the same phrase over and over again, the phrase **“Περὶ δὲ”**...“now concerning”.

Now some of Paul’s answers to the Corinthians are gentle...and some of his answers are not. Some of his answers are a slap upside of the collective heads of the Corinthians...like a slap with a cold washrag. Some of his answers are phrased

in such a way that Paul seems to be giving the Corinthians as best he could, a good **“spiritual shaking.”**

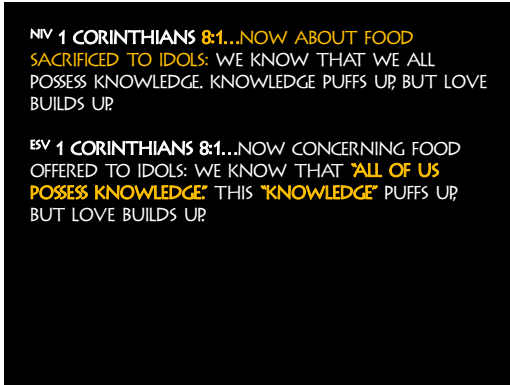
Now one of the ways Paul does that, and this is something a good commentary will point out is that he occasionally quotes the Corinthians letter back to them...I mentioned the fact back at the beginning of chapter 7...because it is clear there that what he is quoting them because after makes the statement **“it is good not to touch a woman”** he then proceeds to argue for just the opposite of what the phrase says...which is something he would have never done if the thought had been his own. Anyway, it seems pretty obvious that he is quoting the Corinthians by picking up their own catchy little phrases and then turning them on their heads...by arguing exactly the opposite point.

Most scholars think that is what is happening here at the beginning of chapter and you can just that point in the NIV translation where the words are set off by a colon.



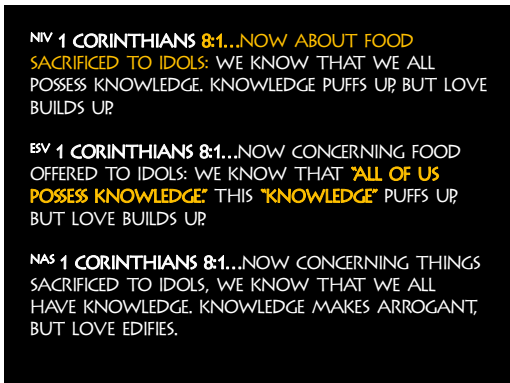
NIV 1 Corinthians 8:1...Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

The ESV goes a step farther by putting the phrase in quotation marks.



ESV **1 Corinthians 8:1**...Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "**all of us possess knowledge.**" This "**knowledge**" puffs up, but love builds up.

The NAS, however, does not set off the words with a quote or with a colon thus making the words the words of Paul himself...which is something with which I entirely disagree.



NAS **1 Corinthians 8:1**...Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

Now the thing to keep in mind is that Paul is turning from the issue of sex to the issue of meat and food and not just any meat or food but specifically meat or food sacrificed to idols. But not only is he turning to a new issue or question broached by the Corinthians but he is doing so by quoting their words back to them. What that would mean is that Paul's opening words would mean something like, "**Now**

about food sacrificed to idols...yes I am very aware that you think you have a lot of knowledge, knowledge that allows you to do whatever you want...but there is something I think you should know...knowledge will make you swell up like a big toad...whereas love actually builds up”.

Now that observation is not new with me, in fact, listen to Gordon Fee’s wonderful observation about the first verse of chapter 8.

THE MOST STRIKING THING ABOUT THIS OPENING PARAGRAPH IS HOW **NON SEQUITUR** IT SEEMS TO BE. PAUL BEGINS WITH THE REGULAR RUBRIC **“NOW ABOUT”** (CF 7:1), HAVING AS ITS PRESENT CONTENT “FOOD SACRIFICED IN IDOLS.” BUT WHAT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWS SAYS NOTHING ABOUT EATING OR FOOD OR IDOLS; RATHER, HE SETS FORTH KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE IN BOLD RELIEF—WORDS THAT DO NOT IMMEDIATELY COME TO MIND AS NATURAL OPPOSITES. **ONLY AFTER COMPLETING THIS OPENING SALVO DOES HE RESUME WHAT HE BEGAN IN VERSE 1.** SINCE **HE CONCLUDES THE CHAPTER WITH A CONSIDERABLE ASSAULT ON THEIR ACTING ON THE BASIS OF KNOWLEDGE ALONE, ONE CAN BE SURE THAT THIS FORMS THE BASIS OF THE CORINTHIAN RESPONSE TO PAUL, AND THAT HE CONSIDERS IT TO LIE AT THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM.**

The most striking thing about this opening paragraph is how non sequitur it seems to be, Paul begins with the regular rubric **“now about”** (cf. 7:1), having as its present content “food sacrificed in idols.” But what immediately follows says nothing about eating or food or idols; rather, he sets forth knowledge and love in bold relief—words that do not immediately come to mind as natural opposites. Only after *completing* this opening salvo does he resume what he began in verse 1. Since *he concludes the chapter* with a considerable assault on their acting on the basis of knowledge alone, one can be sure that this forms the basis of the Corinthian response to Paul, and that he considers it to lie at the root of the problem.¹

Now I think that is a wonderful point on the part of Gordon Fee and it is point I want you to get. Most of the time, sin is not an issue of knowledge. Most of the time when someone comes to a state of repentance, it is not because they have gained any new facts. Rather, people change because of what they love...or they refuse to change because of what they love. You see the basis for ethics...the basis

for how we live and what we do and how we treat each other...is not knowledge but love and not just love for each other but rather love for Christ. If I love you for your sake, I will only love you until you hurt me bad enough to snuff out the love I have for you...but if I come to rightly understand what Christ has done for me...in redeeming me from my sin and in gifting me with the Holy Spirit...I will continue to love you even though you hurt me because the basis for my love is not your behavior but the matchless, perfect behavior of Christ. That is... I will continue to love you because I know that Christ loved you enough to die for you. That is why the gospel is the most important thing in the world...that is why we constantly seek to hold up Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf...in order that you may come to love Him as you ought...in order that you may come to love others as you ought.

Listen to how Calvin puts it:

KNOWLEDGE PUFFETH UP HE SHOWS, FROM THE EFFECTS, HOW FRIVOLOUS A THING IT IS TO BOAST OF KNOWLEDGE, WHEN LOVE IS WANTING. **"OF WHAT AVAIL IS KNOWLEDGE THAT IS OF SUCH A KIND AS PUFFS US UP AND ELATES US, WHILE IT IS THE PART OF LOVE TO EDIFY?"** THIS PASSAGE, WHICH OTHERWISE IS SOMEWHAT OBSCURE, IN CONSEQUENCE OF ITS BREVITY, MAY EASILY BE UNDERSTOOD IN THIS WAY "WHATEVER IS DEVOID OF LOVE IS OF NO ACCOUNT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD; NAY MORE, IT IS DISPLEASING TO HIM AND MUCH MORE SO WHAT IS OPENLY AT VARIANCE WITH LOVE.

Knowledge puffeth up. He shows, from the effects, how frivolous a thing it is to boast of knowledge, when love is wanting. **"Of what avail is knowledge that is of such a kind as puffs us up and elates us, while it is the part of love to edify?"** This passage, which otherwise is somewhat obscure, in consequence of its brevity, may easily be understood in this way "Whatever is devoid of love is of no account in the sight of God; nay more, it is displeasing to him and much more so what is openly at variance with love.

NOW THAT, KNOWLEDGE OF WHICH YOU BOAST O YE CORINTHIANS, IS ALTOGETHER OPPOSED TO LOVE, FOR IT PUFFS UP MEN WITH PRIDE, AND LEADS TO CONTEMPT OF THE BRETHREN WHILE LOVE IS CONCERNED FOR THE WELFARE OF BRETHREN, AND EXHORTS US TO EDIFY THEM. ACCURSED, THEN, BE THAT KNOWLEDGE WHICH MAKES MEN PROUD, AND IS NOT REGULATED BY A DESIRE OF EDIFYING.”²

Now that, knowledge of which you boast O ye Corinthians, is altogether opposed to love, for it puffs up men with pride, and leads to contempt of the brethren while love is concerned for the welfare of brethren, and exhorts us to edify them. Accursed, then, be that knowledge which makes men proud, and is not regulated by a desire of edifying.”²

And isn't that true?

Now we are part of a tradition here as Presbyterians that has always rejoiced in learning...but that is not to say that we rejoice in learning for the sake of learning. We do not...although we are sometimes accused of that. Usually, when someone accuses us of being uncaring they call us something like the “frozen chosen” and the idea behind that is that people think we are smug and self-satisfied knowing that we are converted and on our way to heaven and that because of that we do not care about the world or the unconverted.

Now brothers and sisters that sort of faith has nothing to do with the historic Reformed faith I know nor is it the Reformed faith I want to know. Rather, I want to belong... I do belong to a Reformed faith that is experimental...that is, experiential...it is a Reformed heritage that rejoices in learning because that learning percolates down to our hearts and causes us to be dumbstruck by the awesome wonder of our God's kindness to us...and the result is that we worship

Him and love Him and seek to please Him by serving Him as we love others.

Now I have said this before but I want to say it again...the great missionary movements of the past were almost all Calvinistic...and when I say that I am not just talking about William Carey, James Chalmers, Adoniram Judson, John Eliot and John G. Paton. I am even talking about John Knox and John Calvin. I think it is always a surprise to people when they find out that Calvin sent hundreds of missionaries out from Geneva, Listen to this:

GENEVA BECAME A SAFE HAVEN FOR PROTESTANT REFUGEES, NOT ONLY FROM FRANCE BUT ALL OVER EUROPE. CALVIN FOUNDED A SCHOOL TO INSTRUCT MEN IN REFORMED THEOLOGY AND THEN TRAIN THEM TO RETURN HOME, PREACH THE GOSPEL, AND PLANT CHURCHES. THE CITY THEREFORE BECAME THE NUCLEUS OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITY FOR EXAMPLE, IN 1561, 140 MISSIONARIES ARE RECORDED AS HAVING LEFT GENEVA.

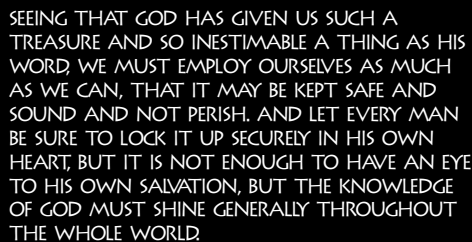
Geneva became a safe haven for Protestant refugees, not only from France but all over Europe. Calvin founded a school to instruct men in Reformed theology and then train them to return home, preach the Gospel, and plant churches. The city therefore became the nucleus of missionary activity for example, in 1561, 140 missionaries are recorded as having left Geneva.

CALVIN DIDN'T JUST PLANT SMALL FLEDGLING CHURCHES; HE PLANTED MEGA-CHURCHES THAT IN TURN PLANTED MORE CHURCHES. IT IS DIFFICULT TO FATHOM THE EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS OF THESE GENEVAN SPONSORED MISSIONARIES. EVEN IN OUR MODERN ERA, SUCH STATISTICS ARE UNHEARD OF.

THE MISSIONARY INFLUENCE OF CALVIN EXTENDED NOT ONLY TO HIS NATIVE FRANCE, BUT ALSO TO SCOTLAND, HOME OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ENGLAND, NORTHERN ITALY, THE NETHERLANDS, AND EVEN POLAND. CALVIN ALSO SENT OUT THE FIRST TWO OVERSEAS MISSIONARIES IN THE HISTORY OF PROTESTANTISM; AN EXPEDITION TO BRAZIL IN 1556.

Calvin didn't just plant small fledgling churches; he planted mega-churches that in turn planted more churches. It is difficult to fathom the extraordinary success of these Genevan sponsored missionaries. Even in our modern era, such statistics are unheard of. The missionary influence of Calvin extended not only to his native France, but also to Scotland, home of the Presbyterian Church, England, northern Italy, the Netherlands, and even Poland. Calvin also sent out the first two overseas missionaries³ in the history of Protestantism; an expedition to Brazil in 1556.⁴

I think you can get a sense of how Calvin felt by reading his prayers. Calvin always ended his sermons with a prayer. Listen to one of his prayers after preaching a sermon on 1 Timothy 2:3.



SEEING THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US SUCH A
TREASURE AND SO INESTIMABLE A THING AS HIS
WORD, WE MUST EMPLOY OURSELVES AS MUCH
AS WE CAN, THAT IT MAY BE KEPT SAFE AND
SOUND AND NOT PERISH. AND LET EVERY MAN
BE SURE TO LOCK IT UP SECURELY IN HIS OWN
HEART, BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO HAVE AN EYE
TO HIS OWN SALVATION, BUT THE KNOWLEDGE
OF GOD MUST SHINE GENERALLY THROUGHOUT
THE WHOLE WORLD.

Seeing that God has given us such a treasure and so inestimable a thing as His Word, we must employ ourselves as much as we can, that it may be kept safe and sound and not perish. And let every man be sure to lock it up securely in his own heart, but it is not enough to have an eye to his own salvation, but the knowledge of God must shine generally throughout the whole world.⁵

That is why we support and want to support some of the various mission ministries we know about. That is why our elders felt compelled to go to the Philippines and gain an understanding of what was needed and what was faced.

Now as one of your pastors, I cannot emphasize to you enough how important I think these kinds of things are and how blessed you will be by joining such

opportunities in the future and by expressing your love and affection for folks that are involved in such things.

Now having said that let's look again at 1 Corinthians 8...picking up with verse 2.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 8:2**...If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

Now Paul picks up again on the theme of knowledge and his point is that 'just thinking that you know something doesn't mean that a person really possesses genuine knowledge at all. Now the word Paul uses here is the word "**gnosis**." It is the term from which we get the English word "**gnostic**" and even "**agnostic**"...which means "**not to know**." It is generally used to apply to those that possessed secret knowledge...who were the "**elite**" as far as what they knew. That is, it refers to term refers to those who either are or think they are the super-enlightened which is almost certainly what the Corinthians were claiming to be.

Paul then turns to consider whether they are really as "**knowledgeable**" as they think they are...much as he had done in chapter 3, when he turned to talk about "**true wisdom**" and how the people of this world think they have but do not. Anyway, what he says here is that man doesn't really have "**true knowledge**" unless that "**knowledge**" demonstrates itself in love to God. The oldest manuscript of verse 3 doesn't have the little phrase "**by God**" at the end and that would make the thought to be "**the man who loves God...really is in the know**."⁶

Listen to what Gordon Fee writes...this is so good.

THE TYRANNY OF **"KNOWLEDGE"** AS THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS HAS A LONG AND UNFORTUNATE HISTORY IN THE CHURCH. ONCE ONE'S THEOLOGY IS PROPERLY IN HAND, IT IS ESPECIALLY TEMPTING TO USE IT AS A CLUB ON OTHERS. AND IN THIS CASE, IT HAPPENS FROM THE THEOLOGICAL RIGHT AS WELL AS FROM THE LEFT. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT KNOWLEDGE IS EITHER IRRELEVANT OR UNIMPORTANT, BUT IT DOES MEAN THAT IT CANNOT SERVE AS THE PRIMARY BASIS OF CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR. IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS **"KNOWLEDGE"** MUST ALWAYS LEAD TO LOVE.

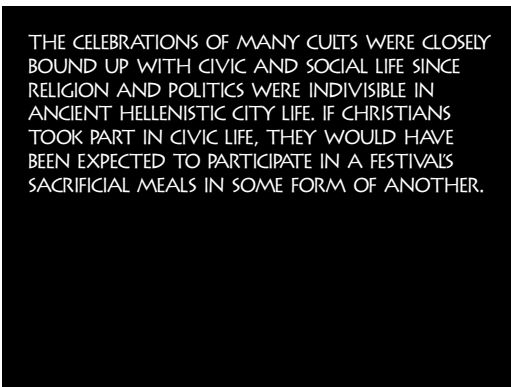
The tyranny of **"knowledge"** as the basis of Christian ethics has a long and unfortunate history in the church. Once one's theology is properly in hand, it is especially tempting to use it as a club on others. And in this case, it happens from the theological right as well as from the left. This does not mean that knowledge is either irrelevant or unimportant, but it does mean that it cannot serve as the primary basis of Christian behavior. In Christian ethics **"knowledge"** must always lead to love.

ONE SHOULD ALWAYS BEWARE OF THOSE TEACHERS OR SYSTEMS THAT ENTICE ONE BY SPECIAL **"REVELATION"** OR **"DEEPER INSIGHTS"**. SUCH APPEALS ARE INVARIABLY TO ONE'S PRIDE, NOT TO ONE'S BECOMING A MORE TRULY LOVING CHRISTIAN. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT **"INSIGHT"** OFTEN LEADS TO **"FREEDOM"**, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT IT OFTEN RESULTS FINALLY IN THE DEMAND FOR **"FREEDOM"** IN THE FORM OF **"RIGHTS"**. THIS IS WHAT HAD HAPPENED AT CORINTH, IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH **"KNOWLEDGE"** OR **"INSIGHT"** IS NEVER AN END IN ITSELF; IT IS ONLY A MEANS TO A GREATER END, THE BUILDING UP OF OTHERS.

One should always beware of those teachers or systems that entice one by special **"revelation"** or **"deeper insights."** Such appeals are invariably to one's pride, not to one's becoming a more truly loving Christian. While it is true that **"insight"** often leads to **"freedom,"** it is also true that it often results finally in the demand for **"freedom"** in the form of **"rights."** This is what had happened at Corinth. In the Christian faith **"knowledge"** or **"insight"** is never an end in itself; it is only a means to a greater end, the building up of others.⁷

Now here is what most scholars think was happening. They think that some of the Corinthians were still going up to the pagan temples to participate in eating at the

pagan feasts that occurred there, Now the reason they did that is because those people in Corinth that still worshipped pagan gods...made sacrifices to them in their various temples and when they did part of that meat what set aside by that particular cult's priests and used to host large feasts. Apparently, some of the Corinthians thought that such meals...provided them an opportunity to eat a pretty good meal for free. David Garland describes the situation this way;



THE CELEBRATIONS OF MANY CULTS WERE CLOSELY BOUND UP WITH CIVIC AND SOCIAL LIFE SINCE RELIGION AND POLITICS WERE INDIVISIBLE IN ANCIENT HELLENISTIC CITY LIFE. IF CHRISTIANS TOOK PART IN CIVIC LIFE, THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN A FESTIVAL'S SACRIFICIAL MEALS IN SOME FORM OR ANOTHER.

The celebrations of many cults were closely bound up with civic and social life since religion and politics were indivisible in ancient Hellenistic city life. If Christians took part in civic life, they would have been expected to participate in a festival's sacrificial meals in some form or another.⁸

Do you see what I mean? In Corinth there were at least 26 major temples⁹...perhaps more...dedicated to various gods and they were constantly sacrificing to the various gods...which meant if one planned properly they could be constantly visiting the various temples to take in a **“free meal”** or a **“shared meal”** with their old friends...a meal by ancient standards that would have been rather **“high quality.”**

Now I know all of that probably sounds very strange...but here's what the commentators think some of the Corinthians were saying, **“Look here Paul, we**

know that there are not really any other gods. besides the one, true God... so why should we be bothered by eating in a pagan temple...mean after all we 'know' the truth about such things...all we are doing is acting on what we know."

Now in the extended argument that starts in chapter eight and which goes all the way to chapter 10, Paul is going to say, **"You know you are right...there are no other gods...still your knowledge is not really all that great...because the knowledge that you are displaying is actually destroying the faith of some your brothers and sisters that are bothered by the thought of going back into the temples they used to go to worship these false gods."**

In fact, when we get down to chapter 10, we will see that Paul is actually going to forbid them from eating such meals in pagan temples. As a matter of fact, why don't you turn there for just a second...chapter 10, verse 19?

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 10:19**...What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord

Do you see what I mean? Paul doesn't think that a Christian ought to participate in such things...even though the gods there are not real...and the reason that Paul thinks that they ought not to do so is because the gods they are not gods at all...but are rather...demons...

But that is not the only reason Paul doesn't think they ought to eat such pagan meals. His main reason is that such meals are destructive to the faith of their weaker brothers. Look how Paul puts it starting in chapter 8, verse 4.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 8:4**... Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one."

Obviously the end of verse 4 there is a reference to Deuteronomy 6...the *Shema* where it reads...

^{NIV} **Deuteronomy 6:4**...Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

But let's go on...

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 8:5**...For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"-- ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. ⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

Now I want to stop there for just a moment because verse 8, reads exactly the opposite of how we usually understand it. Usually, we understand it to say something like. **"Food doesn't matter...so eat what you like...because we are no worse if we do eat and no better if we don't"** which implies that we ought to simply go ahead and eat all we want of whatever we want.

But what the text actually says is the exact opposite of that, What it says is, **"We are no worse if we don't eat and no better if we do"** which implies that it won't hurt us to abstain from eating and that it won't make us any better is we do eat.

You see, what was happening is that some of the **"enlightened, super-spiritual"**

Corinthians were going up to pagan temples to eat and they were encouraging those of weaker conscience to go with them., perhaps, even telling them that they could never be enlightened as long as they held to their simplistic ideas about pagan gods. I think perhaps they were saying something like this, **“Hey Fortunatus, I am going up to the temple of Aphrodite tonight for the big feast they’re going to have...why don’t you come with me. What’s that you don’t like to go up to her temple...because you were a regular worshipper there before you came to Christ...O, man, somebody needs to enlighten you. Aphrodite is not a real god...you know. She’s nothing...there is no God but God...so going up there to her temple is nothing...in fact, until you get to where you understand that you are always going to be something of a novice in the faith. I really think you should come...because you just need to past all this hesitancy...you just need to get over it.”**

Do you see how that would make the argument different? You see it seems most likely that the super spiritual at Corinth were not just arguing that they were free to eat meat sacrificed to idols but rather that the weaker brothers were obligated to do the same and if you understand that the rest of the chapter makes a lot more sense, Look at verse 9.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 8:9...**⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Do you see Paul's point? Whether you eat or don't eat is not an issue of knowledge alone...it is actually more of an issue of love than of knowledge. What Paul is saying is that your freedom does not extend to destroying the faith of others...act not out of a libertine sense of freedom and rights but out of humble sense of love for those for whom Christ died.

Now let me give you two examples to balance against each other,

My wife is a tea-totaler. I am not.

I don't drink much...maybe a beer or two a year...maybe a glass of wine now and then. I have no qualms about doing so even though I was raised in a fundamentalist church...but I am more of a Scottish Presbyterian...I don't like to spend the money.

Anyway it would be wrong of me to say to my bride, **"Now honey, you know you really ought to snap out of it. You are free to drink...or not drink but you are taking all of this way too seriously and it is impeding your Christian growth. You would be better off if you were to take a drink now and then."**

You see that would be wrong but it would be wrong because to her, drinking is a problem. She has had members of her family that really struggled with alcohol and she doesn't ever want to be like that...so somewhere along the way, she made a vow to God...that that is something she is not ever going to do. So I leave her alone. She will be no worse if she doesn't drink and she'll be no better if she does.

On the other hand...we ought not to think that not drinking needs to be added to

the gospel...that would be legalism...even works righteousness.

Once when I worked for Joshua's Bookstores we had a breakfast with one of the major publishing houses and one of the men started talking about some brother at one of our competitors who could not possibly be a Christian because he drank a beer now and then, I asked him if not drinking was one of the requirements of faith and he said, **"Yes, he thought it was"** So my boss looked at me and I looked at him, he was a Lutheran, and we both ordered Mimosas...I think that is what they were called...it was champagne and orange juice...not my idea of a typical breakfast drink,, and we drank them down right there in front of him. In fact, I think we had two. Now I had never had one before and hope to never have to drink one again...it was pretty nasty...but what the man was saying was an infringement on the gospel...on the content of the gospel...that simply could not go unanswered.

Still, that was an unusual situation...and we would do well to remember that the thing that ought to guide us when the gospel is not at stake is love., love for each other based upon our common love for Christ and His common love for us.

Let's pray...oh before we do...yes, I ate the candy...but I was a follower...if I had it to do over...I don't know whether I would have or not...probably not. Now if it were chocolate...it really would have been a much easier decision.

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians NICNT*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1987), 364.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8:1.

³ We actually know the names of the two missionaries that Geneva sent to Brazil: Pierre Richier and Wiltiem Chartier.

⁴ <http://www.theopedia.com/Calvin> See also the lengthy article on the mission's movemet at Geneva at <http://www.rts.edu/quarterly/fall01/james.html>.

The Genevan archives hold hundreds of letters containing Calvin's pastoral and practical advice on establishing underground churches. He did not just send missionaries; he invested himself in long-term relationships with them.

Concrete information exists from the year 1555 onwards. The data indicate that by 1555, there were five underground Protestant churches in France. By 1559, the number of these Protestant churches jumped to more than one hundred. And scholars estimate that by 1562 there were more than 2,150 churches established in France with approximately three-million Protestant souls in attendance.

This can only be described as an explosion of missionary activity; detonated in large part by the Genevan Consistory and other Swiss Protestant cities. Far from being disinterested in missions, history shows that Calvin was enraptured by it.

To be a missionary in France was so dangerous that the Genevan Consistory decided not to keep any record of such missionary activity in order to protect their lives. And so the Genevan Consistory deliberately obscured the names and the numbers of missionaries sent out from Geneva.

Scholar peter Wilcox has combed the Genevan archives and dusted off some of Calvin's five hundred-year old correspondence. Much to his surprise, Wilcox discovered a treasure trove of material indicating that the last ten years of Calvin's life in Geneva (1555-1564) were preoccupied with missions' Among the dusty tomes were letters written by the Genevan missionaries themselves revealing just how successful they had been. One French church in Bergerac boasted to Calvin:

"There is, by the grace of God, such a movement in our district, that the devil is already for the most part driven out, so that we are able to provide ministers for ourselves. From day to day, we are growing, and God has caused His Word to bear such fruit that at sermons on Sundays, there are about four- to five-thousand people."

Another letter from Montpellier rejoiced, "Our church, thanks to the Lord, has so grown and so continues to grow every day that we are obliged to preach three sermons on Sundays to a total of five- to six-thousand people."

And it gets better. A pastor in Toulouse wrote to the Genevan Consistory: "Our church has grown to the astonishing number of about eight- to nine-thousand souls."

Calvin didn't just plant small fledgling churches; he planted mega-churches that in turn planted more churches. It is difficult to fathom the extraordinary success of these Genevan sponsored missionaries. Even in our modern era, such statistics are unheard of.

⁵ John Calvin, *Sermons on 1 Timothy*, 1 Timothy 2:3.

⁶ Fee, 368.

⁷ Fee, 369.

⁸ David B. Garland, "The Dispute over Food Sacrificed to Idols"(1 Corinthians 8:1-11:11) in Perspectives in Religious Studies 30.02., 173-197.

⁹ Fee, 2.