

At the Heart of It

Week 8 in Our Weekly Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Orchard Park Wesleyan Church

Week of October 28, 2018

Day 1

Love Builds Up

“Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that “we all have knowledge” about this issue. But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church.”

1 Corinthians 8:1 NLT

Although we'll study it in greater depth in December, there is no way we could discuss 1 Corinthians 8 this week without talking about love. It is the most basic element of our faith—the one on which all other fundamentals stand—and it is the entire motivation behind the salvation of humanity. The Gospel of Christ is built upon the foundation of His love. But at the time Paul wrote this letter, love for each other and obedient love for God took a backseat to selfishness, pride, and love for knowledge.

Please read 1 Corinthians 8:1-4.

The opening phrase in chapter eight, “now regarding your question,” indicates that what follows is again Paul's response to a particular issue raised by the Corinthian church in their previous letter to him. By the tone of Paul's reply (and because we have previously seen such to be the case throughout this letter), we can gather that the Corinthian church may not just have been inquiring about Paul's opinion on the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols but rather taking a stand against him in disagreement. Paul's strong and sometimes sharp correction that starts in chapter eight and really doesn't conclude until chapter ten would be indicative of such a stance, and his defense of his own apostolic authority in chapter nine would suggest that this church may have outright questioned Paul's authority on the issue. (We saw that they did so on

other topics earlier in the letter, too.) So right away this week, we find ourselves in the middle of a familiar tension between Paul and the Corinthians.

Furthermore, in reading the opening verses of chapter eight, we're presented with a problem: Paul starts to address the question that the church asked but then seems to veer off in a different direction. Instead of giving a direct answer to "[their] question about food that has been offered to idols," he shifts to a conversation about love and knowledge. What do we do with this?

- What is the first word in verse four?

The "so" (NLT) or the "therefore" (ESV) that connects verse four to the preceding ones also connects it to the preceding topics of love and knowledge. Paul considered *part* of the issue about eating food previously sacrificed to idols to be directly connected to an imbalance in the church's values.

As we've seen throughout the letter, the Corinthian believers proudly pursued higher knowledge and regarded those who displayed it to be more valuable than those who did not. Paul understood that the Corinthians' question concerning food indicated more than confusion about a social issue; it indicated a heart issue. They valued knowledge more than they loved and valued each other, and so he tackled the root of the problem first in verses 1-3.

We'll talk more about the heart and what it means to God tomorrow, but for now, we're going to hone in on this very first profound statement that Paul makes about knowledge versus love. We don't usually think of knowledge and love being opposing forces—and really, they're not. True knowledge and wisdom come from God, and He even gives wisdom to us as a gift. Knowledge and wisdom are good! But, when the pursuit of knowledge as a commodity becomes our goal rather than pursuing the One who gives it in order to know *Him*, then knowledge becomes a tool of the enemy and seldom comes without its old friend, pride.

Please read Genesis 3:4-6.

- What reason did the serpent give Eve to explain why God forbade her and Adam to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

- List why Eve ultimately made the decision she did.

Pride and a lust for knowledge have been partners since the beginning of time, and I don't see them parting ways anytime soon. Please know that I am in no way disparaging intelligence, study, knowledge, wisdom—any of it. Like I mentioned above, those are good things! But when we prize them so much that we chase the gifts rather than the Giver, we move into dangerous territory. We think we know as well as—or

better than—God. This, as we saw in the earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians, was a major problem for the church in Corinth. And it is at the crux of their question concerning eating food that had been offered to idols. Many in this church thought that they had superior knowledge because they understood that idols were nothing. Such knowledge, they insisted, gave them

the right and the freedom to partake in meals held in pagan temples. Paul will strongly condemn such a practice for other reasons in chapter 10, but here, he corrects them on the grounds of the attitude of their hearts toward their brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words, Paul says that even if eating food offered to idols *wasn't* wrong on other grounds, they should still refrain because their attitude about having knowledge made them so proud and self-centered that they ignored the struggle with sin that their “right” forced on other brothers and sisters. Their “knowledge” made them arrogant, blind, and insensitive to the spiritual needs and struggles of other believers.

By contrast, how *should* the Corinthian church have handled this issue? They should have displayed love rather than flaunted knowledge. At the risk of infringing on what we'll study later in December, we have to glance at 1 Corinthians 13.

Please read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, and pay special attention to verses 4 and 5.

- What common thread do you see among Paul's description of what love is or is not?

In verses 1-3, Paul specifically mentions speech, knowledge, and understanding as qualities that are useless without love; and in verses 4-5, he targets proud, self-seeking behaviors as antitheses of love.

Now let's return to chapter 8. The Corinthian church had an overabundance of self-proclaimed knowledge, but it was useless—even destructive—because it was self-gratifying and therefore detached from love. Rather than using their knowledge and enlightenment to argue for what they thought was their right (partaking in temple meals offered to idols), this church should have clung to the wisdom and love of God that always selflessly gives itself for the benefit and building up of another.

Please read 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and 14.

- How can we practically demonstrate our love for each other by “building each other up?”

This is what we're all called to do (1 Thess. 5:11, 14). We are called to receive God's love and to imitate Him by pouring it out on each other. In John 13:35, Jesus says that this will be the distinguishing characteristic of His disciples. If we love each other—fellow believers—the world will know that we belong to

Him. In John 15:12, Christ commands His disciples to love each other as He loved them. How did He love them? He served them, attended to their physical and spiritual needs, gave up heavenly glory by becoming human, and ultimately sacrificed Himself so that they would be saved, have eternal life, be built up into His holy church, and pour His love out on the rest of the world. The One who possesses *all* knowledge could have blown His disciples' minds with all that He knew (knows) but instead chose to wash their feet, to build their faith, to encourage their growth, to teach through stories, and to meet them where *they* were in order to help them come up to what He had for them.

My friends, we're studying God's Word and learning so much. I don't want it any other way, and I imagine you feel the same. But let us never allow what we learn to tempt us to spiritual elitism or pride. Let us never allow knowledge to replace self-sacrificing, demonstrative love. This is the foundation of every piece of knowledge we could ever acquire about God. It is on this foundation that we build our faith; it is from this foundation of love that we seek to build others up.

Consider: When we're serious students of God, we can't help but want to learn all we can about Him. But an increase in knowledge can initiate a surge in pride. How can you guard yourself against this? How can you make sure that your heart is engaged in active, humble, demonstrative love for others as you grow in what you know about God? One of the most powerful defenses we have is prayer. We need to pray that God would keep us in His will, humbly loving each other with a heart like His.

Pray: Lord, give me Your love for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Your love is unending, not based on what we deserve but based on Your own goodness. Please increase Your Spirit within me, and help me to love others as You have loved me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 2

Knowing God

"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God."

1 John 4:7

Yesterday we talked about building others up in love rather than letting ourselves become inflated by knowledge. Over the next two days, we're going to talk about how love and knowledge relate to our knowing God and being known by Him.

Since we're studying this within the context of the Corinthian church's question in chapter 8, I think we should start with a question for ourselves:

- Have you ever brought what you thought was a small question, confusion, or other issue to God, only to have Him convict you or expose something deep within your heart? I certainly have. Describe it below.

The Corinthian believers who questioned Paul about eating food sacrificed to idols likely considered their question to be primarily a social one. But as we saw yesterday, Paul temporarily bypassed the social implications of the question and cut straight to the heart of the matter.

Doesn't God do the same with us? He starts with the hidden motivations of our heart and works outward to correct the actions that flow out from it. Our hearts are His priority. He searches and tests them, softens or hardens them, woos and cultivates them, and even takes up residence within them. He wants *all* of your heart and mine. Why? Because, as we will discover today and tomorrow, our hearts are the greatest indicators that we know God and that He knows us.

- Fill in the blanks below:

"Keep your _____ with all vigilance, for from it flow the _____ of _____."
(Proverbs 4:23 ESV)

"As a face is reflected in water, so the _____ reflects the _____ person."
(Proverbs 27:19 NLT)

In the Old Testament, the word most often used for "heart" is the Hebrew, *lebab*. It is intrinsically connected to the mind, the will, the "seat of the emotions and passions," the very "inner man." It is often used interchangeably for the soul.¹ God constantly searches and tends to our hearts because they are the wellspring from which everything else in us flows out. If He doesn't have our heart, He doesn't have us. With this as our starting point, let's draw two more conclusions about knowing God.

1. **In order to know God, we must experience Him.**

Please read Matthew 23:13-36.

- In your own words, write what 23:25-26 says.

If anyone could have boasted about knowledge of God, the Pharisees could have. As the theological authority of their day, the Pharisees knew God's Law inside and out, yet these were the ones on whom Jesus pronounced "seven woes" and who He repeatedly called "blind" and "hypocrites." These are the ones who knew every prophecy about the Messiah yet missed their visitation from Him. They had so much knowledge about God, but sadly, that knowledge became for them a replacement for actually knowing, loving, and worshiping Him. We, too, can have abundant knowledge about God and look outwardly like we know Him—but if this knowledge doesn't cut to our heart, it's all a waste. We can know *about* Him without actually *knowing* and experiencing Him.

This was part of the problem that Paul was correcting in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 8. The Corinthian Christians had knowledge about God, and in verses 4-6, Paul confirms that what they knew was correct: God is the only God; Jesus is the only Lord; and idols are nothing. However, many considered that knowledge to be the barometer and the end-goal of their relationship with God. If they knew the right things, they were in right status with God. If they knew more than other Christians, they thought they were superior and possibly even favored by God (8:8). How far this is from the truth!

Certainly no one would ever mistake me for an expert in the Greek language, but I have been fascinated for a long time by the Greek words used for knowledge and knowing in the New Testament. I did a little digging for our study today, and while much of this is still over my head, I found something that I think you'll enjoy with me. The root for most words used for "knowing," "being known," or "knowledge" in Greek is *gno-*. Its main derivative is the verb, *ginóskó*, which means "to come to know, recognize, perceive" or "properly, to know, especially through personal experience (first-hand acquaintance)". It is often used in reference to sexual intimacy.² From this verb is derived the noun, *gnósis*, which is a "functional ('working') knowledge gleaned from first-hand (personal) experience, connecting theory to application."³ We can probably say that *ginóskó* is the act of knowing through experiencing, and *gnósis* is the knowledge acquired from the experience.

Now here's the really interesting part: *gnósis* "is only as accurate as the relationship it derives from."³ In other words, acquired knowledge can never exceed the experience from which it was acquired.

So as it pertains to knowing God, our knowledge about Him can never replace a relationship with Him, and it is not indicative of our standing before Him. Unless we have an active relationship based on experiencing God, our knowledge of Him will always be lacking. We might say that we can collect knowledge in the mind, but unless we involve the whole

person—the heart—we can't really *know*.

2. In order to know God, we must love Him.

Please read 1 John 2:3-6.

I think I could read 1 John every day for the rest of my life and continue to be amazed by what I find there. The apostle John *knew* the love of God. He experienced it, lived it, understood it—and thankfully for us, he proclaimed it.

In 1 John 2:3, John gives us one sure way to know that we have come *to know* God: we keep His commands. Since we know that Christ fulfilled the Law and that we are no longer bound by it, what commands are we to keep that would indicate that we know God?

Read Matthew 22:34-40.

- What does Jesus say is the greatest commandment (Matt. 37)? The second greatest?

In His answer, Jesus referred back to Deuteronomy 6:4-6 where Moses instructed the Israelites in obedience to God. The greatest command that God ever gave was to love Him completely; the second greatest was to love each other. Every other requirement God has for His people comes from these two.

Loving God above all else indicates that we know Him because, when we know Him, we can't help but love Him! Secondly, though, it is the mark of the one who knows God because God Himself *is* love. We cannot know God and be devoid of love. Conversely, we cannot be full of genuine love without receiving it from Him who *is* love.

Consider: Take an honest inventory of the priorities of your heart today. Where is God? Do you love with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength? How can you incorporate more intentionality in your love for God? For others?

Pray: God, the desire of my heart is to love You with all of it. Let me *know* You for who You are, Lord, and love You more.

Day 3

Known by God

“But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.”

1 Corinthians 8:3

Yesterday we considered the importance of our hearts and how, in order to really know God, we cannot detach our knowledge about Him from our love for Him. Really knowing Him depends on having a loving relationship with Him. Today, we’re going to consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:3, above, about being known *by* God.

Paul says that when we love God, we are “known” (ESV) or “recognized” (NLT) by Him. But what does it really mean to be “known” by God? He is omniscient; He knows everything. So naturally, God would know all of His people, right? Yes, but being truly known by the God of the universe comes with a lot more than mere acquaintance.

Please read the following verses and write down anything you’d like that helps you understand what it means to be known by God. We’re going to draw some conclusions below.

Exodus 32:12

Psalm 139

Jeremiah 1:5

Luke 12:7

John 10:27

1 Corinthians 4:5

Ephesians 1:4-5

- **Being known by God is to be *completely* known.** By this point, we all understand that God craves intimacy with His people. That being said, I think it's important to note that the word used in 1 Corinthians 8:3 for "recognized" again is *ginóskó*, indicating that our love for God shows that we are known by Him in an active, relational, intimate way. God doesn't want us to simply know *about* Him; He wants us to know Him in real relationship. In the same way, He doesn't just know *about* us, either, but knows us intimately.

In the verses above, we see that God knows each of us by name; He discerns our thoughts and knows our every move; He has numbered the hairs on our heads and considers us valuable; and He knows even the secret purposes of our hearts. There is not one part

of us that remains a mystery to God. He is intimately aware of every physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational part of us. He even knows every part of our history and our ancestors' history that somehow affects our present. To understand that we are known by God is to understand that we are *fully* known by Him.

- **Being known by God is to be chosen by and belong to Him.** Our chosen status rests at the center of being known by God. Jeremiah 1:5 says that God knew Jeremiah before He made Jeremiah; God chose and appointed him even before birth. Ephesians 1:4 tells us that God chose us in love for adoption to Himself even before He laid the foundation of the world.
- **Being known by God is to be *treasured* by Him.** God refers to those whom He calls as His "treasured possession," so you'd better believe that when God recognizes you as His own, He doesn't just claim you. He treasures and adores you.
- **Being known by God means that we have heard Him and responded obediently to Him.** This is perhaps what lies at the crux of 1 Corinthians 8:3. In John 10:27, when Jesus said that His sheep "listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me," He was saying that when someone belongs to God (is known by Him), it is evidenced by the fact that he or she has responded in obedience by following Christ. Our love for God is not what *makes* God recognize or know us; rather, it is the evidence that He called us and we responded *yes!*
- **Being known by God is to be set apart *for* God.** We'll close with this final point today, and it will lead us into tomorrow's devotional. When we are known by God, having been adopted as His own son or daughter, we are endowed with enormous privilege. We receive eternal life, glory with Christ, and a heavenly inheritance. We are renewed daily and are being transformed to reflect the image of Christ. But with all of this privilege, we mustn't forget that in recognizing us as His own, God sees us as—and indeed calls us to be—separate from the rest of the world. We are to be holy as He is holy. We can't say that we belong to God, yet find our identity in the world. This is where we'll pick up tomorrow.

Consider: How well does your spouse or a parent or a best friend know you? Have you revealed everything to the other half of your most intimate relationship—or do you have a few hidden parts of yourself that you entrust to no one? God knows. He knows all of you; He loves you; and He considers you His treasure. The most wonderful part about being known by God is that we learn that we can trust Him with every part of ourselves. As we release more of ourselves to Him, we are free to receive more of His love. In turn, we learn to love Him more and others more, displaying that indeed, we know God, and He knows us.

Pray: Thank You, God, for choosing me. Thank You for knowing me, for loving me, and for growing

Your love in me. Please continue to pour Your love out on me so that all will know that I am Yours.

Day 4

Letting Go

Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.

2 Corinthians 6:17

Today's study is the one that God has been pressing most on my heart this week, but it's also the one that I've been most hesitant to approach. I'm praying that God will use my words the way He wants them used and accomplish His purpose for each one of us today—myself included.

Please read 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.

- What did these Christians “know?”
- What did they insist upon with this knowledge (v. 4)?

The Corinthian believers knew some important truths about their faith. From Paul's quotation of their previous letter, at least some of them recognized the absolute falsehood of paganism and embraced the Gospel as the only truth. As we've seen up to this point, though, that knowledge didn't lend itself to much in the way of relationship with God. The Corinthian church had much knowledge but little insight or understanding.

Instead of taking what they knew to heart and chasing after God in passionate pursuit—loving righteousness and hating wickedness—the Corinthians used and even twisted their knowledge (chapter 6) to argue for the right to remain attached to the world and actively indulge in sin. Sadly, many Christians in our culture today are not much different. But, instead of focusing on our deficits or failures, let's understand what God asks of us, why it's important, why it's hard, and how we can overcome it. If God uses any of this to convict you concerning your relationship to the unbelieving world, let Him, and run to Him. If He uses it to encourage you in how you're following Him, receive that!

First, we need to understand what the Corinthian church was advocating for in their previous letter to Paul. Ancient Corinthian society was full of paganism. Temple worship and sacrifices were part of the culture—and such practices were highly social events. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Gordon Fee asserts that “For the most part, the Gentiles who had become believers in Corinth had probably attended such [temple] meals all their lives; indeed such meals served as the basic ‘restaurants’ in antiquity, and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.”⁴ So, paganism had infiltrated just about the whole of society, and some of those who accepted the Gospel were now fighting against Paul’s assertion that they should no longer participate in such festivities.

Based on how intrinsic these temple ceremonies were in ancient Corinthian society, I think we can show a measure of compassion for the Corinthian believers who, to some degree, just wanted to participate in the normalcy of life as they used to know it. They likely had friends and family who regularly celebrated at temple feasts. To pull back from all of that would have been difficult at best!

However, it’s also important to note the seriousness of that for which the Corinthians were really fighting. Although some Corinthian believers “knew” that idols were nothing and claimed that that knowledge gave them the freedom to continue eating meat sacrificed to idols (likely at the temple feasts), they were putting themselves back in harm’s way, essentially advocating for the right to dabble in idolatry.

Please read 1 Corinthians 10:19-22.

You may have noticed—and been surprised—that in chapter eight, Paul doesn’t expressly forbid the Corinthian church from partaking in temple meals that have been sacrificed to idols except on the grounds that such participation could be a stumbling block for a weaker brother or sister. (We can understand chapter eight to essentially be Paul saying to the Corinthians, “Even if there was nothing else wrong with this situation, you still shouldn’t do it.”)

In chapter 10, though, Paul does forbid it, calling it what it was: participation with demons. That’s a serious claim and one that should take us all aback. What the Corinthians considered a right and argued was fairly innocuous because idols were “nothing,” Paul calls outright demonic. Why? Because we can bet that anything that sets itself up in opposition to God and tries to take His place of worship in our hearts is a calculated assault on our souls from the very enemy of our souls.

How, then, did God want the Corinthian believers to live in relationship to the unbelieving world around them?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

This is a difficult passage and one that has given me plenty of occasion to ask, *Really, Lord?* throughout my life. It was likely not something the Corinthians wanted to hear, either, but they certainly needed to hear it—and more than once. Their tendency was to stay as involved in the world as they could while still being saved—to have one hand freed from bondage and holding onto Christ but the rest of themselves immersed in the sinfulness around them.

Brothers and sisters, this is not where God calls us. He calls us to come out from sin and to be separate, consecrated to Him. He is a jealous God who righteously desires the whole heart of each of His people—not because He vainly wants our worship but because He knows Who He is! He is our Protector, Savior, Redeemer, and Freedom. When we worship Him as the Most High and come out from the darkness around us, we come into His glorious light, love, and protection. We are released from the bondage of sin and darkness, and our freedom speaks *volumes* to others enslaved by the enemy. Christ calls us to be salt and light because He *wants* us to be different from the mundane and the dark—not to blend in as best as we can—so that those ensnared and enslaved will see His freedom in us and reach for Him. We cannot ignore our call to be different! The souls of so many depend on it.

But now, let's be honest: being different often means feeling out-of-place and weird...and it's scary. How do we overcome our fear? We could do a whole study on how to live differently in this world, but to conclude today, let's just take a deep breath and remember that Christ is our reason for being different and our example of how to do it.

Luke 2:52 says that “Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.” Jesus, the Son of God, the most different of all the people who ever lived, was *likeable*. Crowds flocked to Him; children wanted to be near Him; His disciples left all that they knew to follow Him. Why? Because Christ was then as He is now: loving, joyful, peaceable, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and always self-controlled. Who doesn't want to be around such a person? Who isn't drawn to him or her? You and I have His same Spirit living within us; we have the same characteristics—the same fruit—of that Spirit. We just have to surrender to His authority to walk in His Spirit.

But Christ also never shrunk away from a situation that could convict. He upheld God's standards (see Luke 19), but He did so in love (see John 4). We won't get it right all the time, but I am increasingly convicted that we, as followers of Jesus, need to take our separate status very seriously. This world is a confusing place. Unless we take God's standards seriously and uphold them vigilantly, how will the lost ever find the Way, the Truth, and the Life?

Consider: God doesn't call us to be different from the rest of the world and to leave sinful practices behind because He wants to make our lives more challenging. He does so because He loves us and wants us to be all His—and He does so because He loves the lost whose lives we affect. Is there an area of your life that you need to obediently surrender to God's standard of holiness now? If so...

Pray: Ask God to help you release it to Him. Thank Him that He is always for you. Ask Him to help you overcome any anxiety about this decision and to give you His strength to surrender to Him.

Day 5

Surrendering Our Rights

But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble.”

1 Corinthians 8:9

We skipped over the end of chapter 8 yesterday in order to talk about the seriousness of idolatry and old, sinful practices that make us indistinguishable from the rest of the world. But today, we'll return to the first reason Paul gave that specifically addressed why the Corinthian believers should not partake in food that had been offered to idols. For a week of study that was not intended to be all about love, we are talking about it a lot! Today will be no different—and really, it's no surprise; like we mentioned earlier this week, love is the foundation and motivation for everything concerning the Gospel of Jesus.

Please read 1 Corinthians 8:7-13 and 9:11-23.

- What did Paul say the Corinthian believers could do by exercising their own freedom (8:9)?
- Why is this so serious (8:11-12)?
- Why didn't Paul want to claim any of his "rights" (9:12)?
- How did Paul choose to live instead (9:19)?

Well, Paul certainly wasn't ambiguous, was he? His fervor for bringing people to Christ at any cost is something I pray God grows in me—and in all of us.

The answer Paul gives to the Corinthian church in chapter 8 for why they ought not to participate in eating food that had been offered to idols is based solely on loving, caring for, and protecting the spiritual growth of other, weaker Christians. How like our God to make sure that those who need extra protection receive it!

For all intents and purposes, Paul says here that although the Corinthians *could* exercise their freedom to participate in the temple feasts (though he'll say they really *couldn't* in chapter 10, as we read yesterday), they *shouldn't* because by exercising that freedom, they could cause another believer whose conscience is bothered by the thought of sharing in such former offerings to stumble and sin. For our study today, we're just going to focus on a few important truths found in these passages.

Let's also add Romans 14:13-23.

- **Our freedom can be another's snare...and therefore ours, too.** Paul says in Romans 14:14 that he is sure that "no food, in and of itself, is unclean." However, another believer who may have just come to Christ from a lifetime under the Law could have trouble seeing all food as clean. In that case, that person could be influenced to eat what they think is sinful and unclean because they see Paul's sure knowledge that it's clean. They're not convinced, but they do it anyway.

We don't have so many issues with food today, but I'm sure we can each think of something that we would consider perfectly sinless because of our freedom in Christ—but that someone else might regard as sinful. In such a case, Paul says that we have to give it up because if we don't, our brother or sister in Christ might willingly choose to do it—against his or her conscience—and therefore end up in sin before God. The result? He or she suffers in sin—and so do we because we have caused them to fall. "There will always be temptations to sin, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting!" (Luke 17:1)

- **In any decision we make, love should be the driver.** Our own rights, freedoms, and preferences take a back seat. While we are not seeking to please human beings but God (Gal. 1:10), in order to walk in love toward others as Christ commanded us to do, we need to put their needs and spiritual edification above our own preferences and rights. In fact, as we studied earlier this week, such an attitude toward each other is evidence that we *belong* to Christ.
- **Giving up our rights and preferences for the sake of Christ is a blessing.** Paul was more than excited to give up his right to be compensated for preaching the gospel so that he could know for *certain* that he kept the path to salvation clear of every obstacle for anyone that would hear the Good News. He could have rightfully asked for compensation, but what if that stood in someone's way of inviting him to teach? He passionately surrendered that right so that he could proclaim Christ to those who would listen. So should our attitude of joyfully surrendering our rights to each other in love. When we do so in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, we encourage the Body of Christ, and we please God. (Romans 14:19).
- **We can sin by transgressing our own convictions.** God is very clear in His Word when He talks about what He considers to be sin. However, sometimes we become confused over an issue He doesn't specifically mention. I love that God leaves us room to make our own decisions, but we need to understand that our convictions actually matter to God. When we waver in our convictions and then fail to uphold them, He considers that sin. So if there is something that God does not specifically address as sin in His Word and we are unsure about it, we had best abstain from it altogether. However, if there is something that God does not call sin in His Word and we feel that it is right, we should feel no guilt in partaking of it. The sin

comes in doubting our own convictions and not upholding what we believe is right.

Consider: What freedoms do you have that might be a stumbling block to others? What might be a stumbling block for you—something you think might be sin but that others say is not?

Pray: Thank God that He always has our spiritual growth and protection in mind. Ask Him to help you be sensitive to weaker brothers and sisters, strong in following your convictions, and driven by a self-sacrificing love for His Body.

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