LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 13

The Superiority of love

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 19, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hi, everybody, and thank you for welcoming me back into your home so that we can study God's Word together. We're in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, so I'd like you to turn there in your Bible with me, please, and we're going to get into this chapter. What we're going to do, because it's really kind of a single theme, and that is the main reason we're taking the whole chapter, we're going to read through the entire chapter. It is 13 verses, so it's not terribly long, and then we're going to open our time in prayer, and then we'll hopefully get a chance to unpack some of these verses. So let's go ahead and read through the chapter, and let's see what the Lord has for us today.

Now concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. 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.

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 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. 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. Food will not commend us to God.

We're no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? And so, by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Let's pray. Father, as we get into these words this morning, and this is an important chapter, I pray that you

would help us to lay hold of the meaning for us today. And I ask, Lord God, that you would cause our hearts to be receptive, to hear your voice, and to be responsive to all that you desire to communicate to us through this chapter. We pray this in the authority that is ours, through Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Amen. All right. Now, you might read this chapter and you might kind of come away thinking, I don't really know if this is applicable, because here they are talking about food sacrificed to idols, you know, meat that had been dedicated to a pagan idol. And we don't do that today.

You know, I mean, I've been to the grocery store lately, and when I look in the meat section, I've never once seen a tag on a pound of ground beef saying that it had been dedicated to a pagan idol. It simply wasn't a problem. But you know, the believers in Corinth, this was a regular part of their existence and reality. And so this was something they were dealing with. And they obviously wrote to the apostle Paul for insight about it.

And yet, interestingly enough, even though we don't deal with meat sacrificed to idols, the theme behind the theme of this chapter is my rights. My rights as a Christian, my rights as a citizen, my rights, the rights that I have to live and do what I want and do what I see as right, you know. And this is something, for those of you who are watching this and live in the United States of America, we are big on our rights, are we not? And rightly so. I mean, good grief, you know, as part of our original founding documents, we have what we call the Bill of Rights.

And it's a very important thing for us here in America. And I know in other countries, too, that we have certain rights that we don't want to set aside. And we shouldn't have to set them aside. But this chapter is all about setting aside my rights. And this is not the only chapter that Paul's going to use to speak of rights.

In fact, we're going to deal with it in the next chapter as well in our next study. The apostle Paul will continue on. And the whole issue here is not just laying down my rights for the sake of laying down my rights. It's all about laying down our rights to keep our brother and sister in Christ from stumbling. Because you see, there are times when the exercise of our freedom can be a stumbling block to people who don't have the same freedoms that you have.

All right, we'll talk more about this. But there are two specific verses in this chapter that I think are the key verses of the entire chapter. And I want to point them out to you here, because I think these are very, very important. And the first is in verse 9. Paul writes, But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

And then the last key verse of the chapter, I think, is the very last verse that we read. Verse 13. Therefore, and this is Paul's conclusion, If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Those are two verses worth underlining, because they are really the crux of the chapter. All right, what's going on here?

In that day and age, pagan temples were all over, and in Corinth there were many. And there were regular sacrifices that were made to these pagan deities. But of course, not all of the meat that was sacrificed to those pagan gods was eaten by the worshipers and so forth. And so some of it would get carted off to the marketplace and sold. And they would put a tag literally on that meat saying, this is meat sacrificed to an idol.

And the reason they did that is because nobody wants to sacrifice an animal to their god that isn't excellent. And so when people saw that tag, this is meat sacrificed to an idol, that would be something today similar to grade A beef, you know, or something like that. It communicated to the people who were purchasing meat that this is the best. Again, nobody's going to offer a diseased animal or a lame animal to their god. They don't want to anger their god.

Even in the Old Testament, God, the Lord God creator of the universe said, don't sacrifice to me animals that, you know, are sick and diseased and that sort of thing. So this was a very common sort of a thing. So if you really want to buy the best meat, you're going to look for that tag, sacrifice to an idol. Problem is, some of these people who were now Christians had come out of paganism and they had a very strong belief that what you ate and put into your body could somehow defile you. In other words, if this meat was sacrificed to a demonic, or I should just first of all say a pagan idol, which we know basically there were demons behind that.

But these people coming from their own pagan background, they believed that to ingest such meat was to ingest part of that pagan god. They literally believed that when they ate that meat, they would be kind of like turning their back on the Lord God who saved them. And they're now playing games again with pagan gods. Well, Paul writes in this chapter and he begins by saying, and look with me here, he says, you know, concerning this issue of food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge, but this knowledge, he says, puffs up. All right, here's the deal.

The knowledge that pagan gods are really no gods at all is a good thing. thing to have. That's good knowledge to have. Unfortunately, that same knowledge can cause us to become conceited or vain and kind of to be pridefully puffed up about what we know, but over here this guy obviously doesn't know, and so he's telling them here, knowledge is, he's not saying knowledge is a bad thing, knowledge is a good

thing, but you got to be careful because knowledge can cause us also to become prideful, but he goes on to say here, but love builds up, and here's the point that he's saying. It's great that you have knowledge, but do you also have love?

You have knowledge, and your knowledge tells you that that hunk of meat is not going to make any difference whether you eat it or don't eat it, or whether it was sacrificed to an idol or not sacrificed to an idol. You know that. That's knowledge you have, but do you have love for your brother who doesn't know that? Because he's not sure. He's still conflicted about it, and if you go around exercising your freedom in front of your brother, it could potentially cause him to stumble in his faith, and that is a serious matter.

Can I just tell you, God takes it very seriously when we do or say things that potentially stumble a young believer who has not yet grown or matured in their faith, so this is a serious issue. That's why he goes on to say in verse 2, if anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know, but if anyone loves God, he is known by God. Love is preeminent. Knowledge is great, but love is the best, and that's something he's going to get to, you know, when we get to chapter 13, which of course you guys all know is the love chapter. The whole purpose for Paul writing that chapter is to explain the preeminence of love, how love is superior to all other things, because love is the heart of God.

So let's get into this issue now here about laying down my rights. Verse 4 says, therefore as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know—that's knowledge, we know—that an idol has no real existence. In other words, it's either a hunk of wood or a hunk of metal, and there's nothing to it, all right? And that he goes on to say in verse 4, there's no God but one. We know this.

This is part of our knowledge base. Idols are stupid and they're nothing. God is all. He is the only God. There's only one God.

You know, God made that clear even in the Old Testament. In, I believe it's Isaiah, the Lord spoke to Israel and said, before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me. I and I alone am the Lord God. So this is something that God has been communicating to mankind for a long time, and this, Paul says, we know. Now he goes on to say something that has caused some consternation for some people, and that is in verse 5.

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things. All right, let's talk about this. This has kind of tweaked some people. Is Paul going back on what God himself said in Isaiah when he said, before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me? No, he's not.

However, the Apostle Paul is speaking here about the existence of other small-g gods and lords, and God isn't afraid to use that term, small-g gods, to describe certain beings. First of all, I need to tell you—and I've already kind of betrayed my interpretation of these verses—but I need to tell you that the two main interpretations of these verses, when Paul says, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, some people interpret this verse as essentially saying, to the pagan mind, there are many gods and many lords, but we know there's only one God. That's one interpretation. The other interpretation—and this is the one I subscribe to—is that the Apostle Paul is talking about the small-g gods and lords that make up the principalities and powers of God's creation. We know from other passages of Scripture that there are princes, there are powers, there are principalities, demonic and angelic, which rule over and watch over certain areas of the world.

We learn in the book of Daniel that there was a prince of the Persian kingdom that actually resisted the Lord in getting a message to Daniel in answer to his prayer. When this angelic messenger arrived to speak to Daniel, he said, the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me for a period of time, and eventually Michael, your prince, meaning the prince over Israel, came to my aid, and so forth. We know that there are principalities and powers. Paul talks about this in the book of Ephesians, and so I believe that's what he is referring to here when he talks about God's small-g, and we're not talking about eternal, all-powerful gods. There's only one God who created all things, all right?

And before him was nothing. As he said in Isaiah, before me no God was created, nor will there be one after me. And he's talking about anyone who could challenge him as creator God. There's only one God, and we know that. But there are created beings that take on the name of Lord and prince or principalities and powers and so forth, and so I believe that's what Paul is talking about here.

But he says as far as we're concerned, there's only one God, right? From whom are all things, and that means everything comes from him and for whom we exist. And of course there's one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things. He also is the creator, right? Because he's the Word of God.

That's how God created. He sent forth his Word. Jesus is the Word of God and through whom we exist. So verse 7 he goes on and he says, however, not all possess this knowledge. And he's making it very clear that in some cases there are believers in Jesus who love the Lord, but they don't have this kind of knowledge.

They've not yet broken free from some of their paganistic roots, and they still believe that some of these pagan deities are real. And that can present a problem when you go to the marketplace and find meat that was sacrificed to these pagan deities. I'm in the middle of verse 7. But some, through former

association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled, right? In other words, they're emboldened to eat it, but once they do, their conscience is defiled.

And they begin to feel guilty and regret, and then the enemy gets a hold of that and makes them miserable. And God cares about that. But Paul goes on to say, okay, here's the knowledge that we ought to all possess. Verse 8, food will not commend us to God. There you go.

It doesn't matter whether you eat this or eat that. That is not going to commend you to God. In other words, it's not going to improve or become a problem to your relationship with God. It just simply isn't going to do it. He says, we are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

It simply doesn't matter. And of course, this is exactly what Jesus told us in the gospel accounts when he was confronted by the religious leaders who accused him and his disciples of not washing properly, and therefore defiling their bodies with by eating food that was handled with unwashed hands. Jesus said, don't you know that what goes into the body goes through the stomach and then is expelled? It doesn't make a difference. In fact, the Bible goes on to say in that passage that by saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean because you know, to the Jew, there were clean and unclean foods.

We go on in verse nine. After expressing what we know to be true, Paul now says in verse nine, but take care. And this is one of those key verses. But take care that this right of yours to eat this meat does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. And now he explains how that stumbling block can take place.

For if anyone sees you who have knowledge, in other words, you're a mature believer and you know that that meat isn't gonna make a difference in your life, so you go ahead and eat it. But so they see you eating it. In fact, you might even be eating it in an idol's temple, which by the way, Paul will later on say, that's not a good idea. He says, will he not be encouraged if his conscience is weak to eat that same food? The food that was offered to idols?

Well, we know what's gonna happen later. He's gonna think about it. He's gonna become condemned and it's gonna stumble his faith. Verse 11, and so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed. He said, this is your brother.

This is your brother for whom Christ died. You can see what the whole idea in this chapter is, can't you? He wants you to love your brothers and sisters. He wants you to love your family. And if it means laying down your rights, so be it, lay them down.

That's what we're called to do. Here's the simple message of the chapter. Love trumps our rights. Love is greater than our rights. They're more important.

Love is more important than our rights, okay? He says in verse 12, thus sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you therefore sin against Christ. Why? Because your brother is a member of the body of Christ. And when you sin against your brother, you sin against Christ.

And then that final, and again, key verse in verse 13, therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, if that's what's gonna cause him to stumble, I'll never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble. All right, let's bring this to the current year, shall we? Shall we modernize our kind of our understanding of the theme that the apostle Paul is giving here? Again, you're not gonna be dealing with anyone who's gonna have a problem with you eating meat sacrificed to an idol. However, what are some of the things that you may have the right to do that your brother or sister may not have the right or freedom to do?

Can I tell you what I do see from time to time? Although I don't spend a lot of time on Facebook, I do have a Facebook page, but I don't spend a lot of time watching or looking at other people's Facebook posts. But I've been around long enough to know that there are born-again Christians who will at times take pictures and post them on their Facebook pages doing things that other Christians can't do for whatever reason. And one of them is drinking alcohol. Now, we need to talk about drinking alcohol for a second because you need to know and understand that the Bible does not condemn all drinking of alcohol.

You simply can't, you can't support that conclusion. Now, I don't drink at all. I made that decision as a pastor and as a believer, but I can't condemn my brother if, for example, he decides to have a glass of wine with dinner. I can't do that. Although I will tell you this, the wine that we drink today that comes out of a bottle that you might purchase today is much more potent than the wine they drank in biblical times.

And yes, in biblical times, they did drink wine, but they also mixed it with water. They watered it down. And it would take a lot more wine back then to become inebriated than it does today. That's just an important point you need to be aware of. But here's the deal.

Let's say, for example, you have the freedom and the right to have a glass of wine with dinner. There's no problem with that. There's nobody who can point to any verse in the Bible that will condemn you for doing that. But let's say during dinner, you take a picture of you drinking wine, and you post it on your Facebook page or maybe some other social media. And there is a brother or a sister in Christ who has a weaker conscience and believes very strongly that all drinking of alcohol is wrong.

Or you have a brother and sister who see that photo who has a past of alcoholism. They're not free to drink, not even a sip, let alone a whole glass of wine, but they see you doing it. And they recognize you as a Christian who has knowledge. You know that you have the freedom. You know that you have a right to do that if you so desire.

And they admire you. And so they are emboldened and they think to themselves, well, he can do it, she can do it, why can't I? And they're emboldened to do it. And either their conscience becomes defiled and condemned, or they fall back into a pattern of drinking that could be extremely detrimental. Now, I'm just using one example.

And I'm just using simply the example of drinking wine or drinking alcohol, could be a beer for that matter. Listen, you have the right and the freedom as long as you don't become drunk. The Bible firmly condemns drunkenness. Okay, I think we all know that. But you do have the freedom and the right to have a glass of something like that from time to time.

But you don't have the freedom to cause your brother or sister to stumble. So don't take a picture. And don't post freedoms online that other people don't have. Love builds up. This is a theme that Paul is not done talking about.

And by the time we're done with 1 Corinthians, you're gonna get a lot more insight into this issue of loving your brother and sister in Christ, even if it means taking your freedoms and setting them aside. Now, Paul lived in a day and age when there was no such thing as taking pictures and posting them on social media. So what was his conclusion? If food makes my brother stumble, and by the way, he's gonna include wine in that a little bit later. But if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat.

What's Paul saying? He's saying, I will lay down my rights. If something, anything causes my brother or sister to stumble in their faith, I simply won't do it for their sake. It's not worth it. It's not worth exercising my rights if they're going to suffer.

That's the message of chapter eight. And it's a hard message to hear, as I said, for we particularly who live in the United States of America and so dearly love our rights, and we hold on to them passionately. Well, political rights are one thing, but any right that causes a problem for my brother is something I need to think twice about. So let's pray about this, shall we? Father, thank you for this chapter.

Thank you for the reminder that we are to lay down our lives for one another. And if that means setting aside our rights, we need to be willing to do that. And I pray, my Father, that you would give us the

courage and the insight to do that very thing. And help us, Lord, to be aware. of those areas that we take for granted that someone else could be stumbled by.

We know this is important to you, Lord, and so we want it to be important to us as well. And we ask you to guide us and direct us in this, and we pray it in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.