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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 18, 2018
4th Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Mark 1:21-28

Hymns: 231; 416; 464; 412 (242:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. ² And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

⁴ Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), ⁶ yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*.

⁷ However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

⁹ But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ¹² But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin

against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Living as Christians in a Heathen Society

That was the challenge that the Christians in Corinth faced every day. Corinth was so far gone into the lusts of the flesh that even other Greeks made a verb out of their name. When someone or someplace was “Corinthianized” everyone knew what that meant; one was given over to the excesses of the flesh. Corinth had the temple of Aphrodite with over 1000 sacred prostitutes. Yes, going into a prostitute was considered a sacred thing, an act of worship. And there were many other pagan temples with so many pagan sacrifices and rituals being celebrated every day that there was more meat offered on to the idols than the celebrants could consume. The pagan priests sent that excess meat out the back door of the temple to the market where it was sold to the public. It was almost certain that if one purchased meat at the market at least some of what you purchased had been sacrificed to an idol. What was a Christina to do?

Paul had to address the avoiding of the immorality that was not only permitted, but celebrated in their society. He also had to address this problem of whether one could or should eat meat that may have been sacrificed to an idol. This Paul addressed as something that fell more into the area of Christian liberty. It is good for us to understand that Christian liberty is not simply doing whatever feels right to you. That is baseless. Whatever is not of faith is sin. That makes this a matter of concern. Of course many Christians today may look at these verses of Scripture and that think none of this applies to us. After all we don't really have a lot of pagan temples scattered about town. This isn't really simply about avoiding pagan temples, or even eating the meat offered to an idol. It is about --

THEME: Practicing Evangelical Christian Liberty.

What many in Christians in Corinth understood was that they were --

I. Free from the Constraints of Legalism.

The Old Testament laws regarding clean and unclean meats and how or where things were butchered no longer applied. Jesus had come into the world to fulfill the law of God in our place. So also all the ceremonial laws found their fulfillment in Jesus. These Corinthian Christians knew the gospel; Jesus' perfect righteousness was now theirs through faith, even as it comes to us by faith. They knew the gospel, they knew that Jesus had satisfied the law's righteous requirements, paying the price for our sin with His one sacrifice upon the cross. All other sacrifices were of no effect. They had knowledge of the truth on their side. We share in this knowledge of the truth and rejoice in the liberty by which Christ has made us free!

They also knew that these idols weren't really gods. There is only one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one Lord Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. So then the Father and the Son along with and the Holy Spirit who called them by the gospel, these three are the one true God. All the rest are pretenders, all the rest are imitations. All the rest, even among men who claim to be mighty in deed and word, are lords only in so far as God and our Savior Jesus Christ allow. That's knowledge. That is all great to know. And we should act according to knowledge, right? Well, yes and no. We should act according to faith, which encompasses knowledge of the truth, but includes more than that. Knowledge is of the mind, and does influence the heart, but sometimes knowledge is of the mind, but the conscience is still troubled.

That is what was going on in Corinth. There were Christians who had practiced pagan worship for most of their lives. They had participated in the sacrifices and the orgies, and the feasts to excess in celebration of the false gods of the Greeks and Romans. Now they knew better. They had the same knowledge, but they were still troubled by the association with the paganism that went with eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. They also understood that the laws of the Old Testament were not the issue. For them serving the Lord in purity and faith was the issue.

So what does that say about Christian liberty? Aren't we back to where we started? Everyone can do what they feel is right for them. Or is there something else? Paul wrote near the beginning of our text: "*Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.*" (v.1) In our Christian liberty we are --

II. Bound by Christian Love.

It is not only about me and what I know to be sin, or know not to be sin, or what I may do and in my mind and heart glorify Christ, or what I avoid glorifies Christ. It is about my fellow Christian as well. Our behavior, our choices go beyond ourselves. Everything is NOT just between me and God. While I may appreciate the gospel for myself, my behavior should not undermine the faith of my fellow Christian. Love directs me toward building up the faith of my brother. That is the principle that Paul lays out for us in our text.

1 Corinthians 8:9-12 "Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ¹² But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ."

"This liberty of yours." For the Corinthians it was all about the eating of meats. Paul's point is that it isn't just about the eating of meats. It's about your Christian brother or sister. Your actions, your choices your behavior influences your fellow Christians. Paul talks about causing someone else to stumble in their faith. If a knowledgeable Christian in Corinth was seen eating meat with others who were celebrating a feast to an idol, he could deeply offend his fellow Christian. That means more than just upset his feelings, but rather lead him to behave in a manner that is not good for him spiritually. One might cause him to act against conscience, and so in his heart to act against God and his Savior Jesus Christ. To act against one's conscience is to sin, for whatever is not from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23)

For us it could be a number of other things that could trip up a Christian brother or sister in their faith. It could be the use of alcohol. We act according to knowledge. We know it's alright to drink in moderation. But for some it troubles their conscience. It could be the movies we choose to see. It could be the music we choose to listen to. It could be where we choose to have dinner. Some might go to the casino for their dinner, but another Christian might be influenced by our choice and tempted to gamble. One area of sensitivity in our time is choosing a college. While one might choose a school associated with another church, a false teaching church, and do so with both knowledge and care, avoiding religious association in that school, another could easily be misled by that. It could cause another Christian to stumble in fully associating with a false teaching church, and their faith could be harmed. *"And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"* (v. 11)

Another one that is more common is when one chooses not to come to church. It is going to happen with all of us at one time or another that we will be going somewhere or doing something other than going to church on a given Sunday. I won't say you can't do that, because the Lord doesn't say that. We have the same knowledge on our side that the Old Testament strict regulations regarding worship were all fulfilled in Christ. But we also know that coming to church is not only about me and what I do in my relationship with the Lord. It is also about my Christian brother or sister. So we consider love for our brother in our choices, even about coming to church, or more pointedly exercising our liberty to occasionally miss church. It may impact another's view of church attendance that could weaken their faith. And yes, it is true that we can't always know what it is that might cause another Christian to stumble, but it is a matter of such concern that in love we will exercise caution lest in our liberty we hurt the faith of another.

Christ came into the world to give His life a ransom for all. He paid for our sins with His holy precious blood and His innocent sufferings and death. Everything Jesus did throughout His life was done in love for others and in service to His Father in heaven. We can't even begin to comprehend the sacrifices He made in His love for us. He loved us with such a great love that He saved us in spite

of our sins. That's the love that has taken hold of our hearts. It is a love that we give back to the Lord Jesus, but more than that, it is the love that we direct to our fellow man, and especially our Christian brother. The sacrifice of a choice for recreation, or membership in an organization, or a simple pleasure of life is really of no account when we consider the value Christ has placed on the soul of our Christian brother or sister.

So we all have knowledge. We all know to flee the evil of this world. We all know that Christ has freed us from the constraints of the law having secured God's righteousness for us. We also all know that gives us a great deal of Christian liberty in our choices in life. Let us temper our knowledge with Christian love that the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of our brother comes before our personal desires or freedoms.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.