

Theme: FREE TO LOVE

- I. Free love is known by God (vv. 1-3)
- II. Free love knows God (vv. 4-6)
- III. Free love knows how we came to know God (vv. 7,8)
- IV. Free love acts in deference to my brothers and sisters, for whom Christ died (vv. 9-12)

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone supposes that he knows something, he does not yet know the way he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, this person has been known by him.

⁴ So, concerning the eating of food from idol sacrifices, we know that an idol is not anything real in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵ Indeed, even if there are so-called “gods,” whether in the heavens or on earth (as in fact there are many “gods” and many “lords”), ⁶ nevertheless for us there is one God—the Father, from whom all things exist and we exist for him—and one Lord—Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and we exist through him.

⁷ However, that knowledge is not in everyone. Instead some, who are still affected by their former habit with the idol, eat the food as something sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

⁸ Food will not bring us closer to God. We do not lack anything if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do. ⁹ And be careful that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone sees you, a person who has knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of this man, weak as he is, be emboldened to eat food from an idol sacrifice?

¹¹ You see, the weak person is being destroyed by your knowledge—the brother for whose sake Christ died! ¹² And when you sin in this way against your brothers and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

¹³ Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I do not cause my brother to sin.

Loved by the Lord,

He was 14 years old when he did it. In a small town in Minnesota, a young kid mixed marijuana with alcohol and, in a matter of minutes, he entered his neighbor's house, shot the mayor, and and gunned down his wife. Although the young man became a suspect in the case, without a motive, police couldn't connect him to the crime. 20 years later, the murder remained unsolved. Until the man turned himself in. Urged on by his pastor, he confessed double homicide. When they committed him to prison, he remarked, "For the first time in 20 years, I'm finally free."

Prison probably isn't your portrait of freedom. In "the land of the free and the home of the brave," we prize our freedom, rights, and privileges. For all that, though, what does freedom really mean? What did the murderer mean with his statement about freedom? As we look at God's Word today, we find we are FREE TO LOVE.

"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols." What's that got to do with freedom? More on that later. First, we need to understand. **"We know that we all have knowledge."** We know that we know! But a little knowledge can be dangerous. An English learner knew enough of the language to get by. He began cruising around the country. Until a car accident pinned him in a ravine off a bridge. Still, when the police came by and shouted, "How are you down there?" he gave his trained response: "I'm fine; thank you!"

"Knowledge puffs up." If all you're full of is knowledge, you'll quickly become full of yourself. Every youth learns this, as a quote famously attributed to Mark Twain, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." Not to knock knowledge—it's a good thing—but if knowledge is the goal in and of itself, it just makes me proud of how smart I am! **"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."** Knowledge teaches us how we can be FREE TO LOVE.

When will we fully realize that knowledge? Might as well ask when you'll been done breathing! We won't know all there is to know until we reach heaven. That's one of the many reasons we need to be in God's house. When we aren't growing, we're shrinking. **"If anyone supposes that he knows something, he does not yet know it the way he ought to know."** That doesn't mean we need to give up learning! No, we want to learn because we love God. **"If anyone loves God, this person will have been known by him."**

We want to know God because we “**have been known**” by him. That’s a fascinating construction, called a perfect passive. Perfect doesn’t mean without flaw, but something that happened in the past *and* has ongoing implications in the present. God knew us in the past, and that remains relevant to this day! In the past, before God created the world, he knew you, loved you. Now he has revealed himself to you in his Word, calling you to be his own.

Not everyone knows that. Many people worship false gods. Since “**an idol is not anything real in the world,**” when people in Paul’s day ate meat sacrificed to idols, they were eating meat sacrificed to nothing. An idol is literally nothing! The false gods people bow down to are nothing more than ideas of their own imaginations, since “**there is no God but one.**”

How do we know that? God said it! That’s enough for faith, which he put in our hearts. Still Paul, the author, *seems* to make a concession for argument’s sake: “**There are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords.’**” Many people bow down to false gods. Many people look to earthly rulers as their lords and masters. Often as not, we also look to all the wrong things for comfort and reassurance—the government, our money, our knowledge, our families, rather than God. But you know more than that.

“**For us there is one God—the Father, from whom all things exist, and we exist for him—and one Lord—Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist, and we exist through him.**” When Paul says, “For us,” notice he doesn’t dive into some subjective speculation, but fact. This isn’t Christians living “their truth,” but God’s truth. God created all things. He created us; our entire being and existence is in service to him because we have one Lord. The fact Jesus is the agent “**through whom all things exist**” shows he is true God. Jesus is called “Lord” because he earned that title by saving us—“**we exist through him.**” Our existence as Christians is only through the saving work of Jesus. Jesus is the Word his Father spoke to bring us into existence *and* the Word God sent to bring us back to him.

So what’s the big deal with meat sacrificed to idols? To be fair, you probably didn’t go down to the nearest temple last week and eat meat sacrificed to Zeus! And even if you had, our God created the world. Zeus is a non-entity; meat sacrificed to him was sacrificed to nothing, so it does nothing. But “**that knowledge is not in everyone. Instead, some who are still affected by their former habit with the idol, eat the food as something sacrificed to the idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.**” Pagan priests in Corinth sacrificed the best parts of the meat to idols, then—with the people’s consent—sold some in the market some to

people at feasts. Christians, with the full knowledge that our God is the only God, were free to eat this meat, as there is no command from God prohibiting it in the New Testament. But not everyone thought that way. Christians had it in their heads, but it hadn't reached everyone's heart yet. Converts from paganism still thought of the meat defiled by their former false deities, and Jewish Christians had a hard time getting past Old Testament regulations that forbade eating it. Because Christ set us free, they were free to eat it, but they couldn't get past the road block, so if and when they ate the meat, it wracked their conscience with guilt and shame.

We know **“Food will not bring us closer to God.”** Whether the Corinthian Christians chose to eat or not, it did not affect their standing with God. It did affect their brothers and sisters in Christ, though. **“And be careful that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”** Paul lays out a scenario. A weak conscience, still stuck in the old way of thinking, sees his brother or sister in Christ eating meat sacrificed to an idol. This emboldens him to join in the activity, like peer pressure. But his conscience can't come to grips with it. He sins against his conscience, and worse, his faith is shipwrecked. He is lost.

What does that have to do with our freedom today? We enjoy many freedoms—freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press—and so on. Yet how do we use our freedom? Take, for example, the example of alcohol. Nowhere in the Bible does God prohibit us from using alcohol, so long as we limit it to moderation that does not harm to our bodies. We are free to drink it, just as we have freedom not to drink it. But that's where the discussion begins, not ends. How do we use that freedom? Do you use it to flaunt your freedom to a recovering alcoholic, risking their relapse? God's Word doesn't tell you which way to vote. But if we use that freedom to alienate those who are within our own family of believers, we have misused our freedom. Those are just two examples! What's worse, if by insisting on our freedom we ostracize sensitive souls, we risk pushing them away from Christ! **“You see, the weak person is being destroyed by your knowledge... and when you sin in this way against your brothers and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”** The word **“wound”** here, literally means **“strike.”** With your dangerous knowledge of freedom, you are capable of striking a blow to your brothers and sisters in Christ. When I do that, not only do I pound the hammer into their consciences, but I might as well be pounding the hammer that drove the nails into Christ's cross, as he died for them, and I am sinning against him, too.

That's why Jesus came. To go to the cross for sinners like me. Jesus was living in the perfect knowledge of eternity, in perfect freedom as God and Lord of all. He chose to set aside his freedom to FREELY LOVE you. He came down to earth for some 33 years, but never once in those 33 years did he drive the weak away. Every second of those 33 years, he was loving you. Jesus knew perfectly what perfect freedom was because he lived a life free from sin, in submission to all God's laws so he could take our place. At the cross, he willingly took on our sins, and the sins of the whole world, the sins of our brother and sister Christian. On the cross, Jesus gave up not just his freedom, but his life. All so you would know him. So you would know it's not the food you eat or the way you use your freedom that brings you to God. It's Jesus. Through Jesus, God has brought us to himself. Through Jesus, God has definitively proven to us how FREELY he LOVES us!

Jesus' love sets us free from sin, so we are finally FREE TO LOVE each other. And we do, albeit imperfectly. We need to ask for forgiveness for the times we have offended the consciences of our fellow Christians—and I'm no exception.

Just as Jesus thought you were worth dying for, he paid the same price for our brothers and sisters. We want to show the same love and concern Jesus did. Paul sets a great example of what it means to be FREE TO LOVE. He volunteered to become a vegetarian if it helped struggling brothers and sisters. **“Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never”** ever ever ever **“eat meat again, so that I do not cause my brother to sin.”** This is why, for example, we don't talk politics at church. If my personal views on a subject God has not commanded lays a snare for our brothers and sisters, then remove the snare. We want to make sure Jesus' people stay on the path to heaven. We are FREE TO LOVE, so if we go back to setting up stumbling blocks in the pathway of our brothers and sisters, we can deal great of damage. Whether it's the way we handle our liquor, the topics we discuss at church that aren't directly spelled out by God, the kind of meat we eat, or whatever else it may be—the overarching principle is LOVE. We are free to put ourselves aside so we can serve our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So what did the Minnesotan man mean when he said he was free for the first time in years when he went to jail? His conscience was finally set free from the guilt, because he had come to trust Jesus payment for his sin. That's also why he turned himself in—because he was finally free. No longer ruled by sin, he recognized he needed to show the proper love to those involved. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want, go wherever we please, or say whatever we think. Freedom is the ability not to sin. Freedom is the ability to put myself aside for the

1/31/2021

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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sake of my brother and sister in Christ. Freedom is Christ, who gave himself up to set us free from the old slavery to sin. That puts a new perspective on our fellow believers. They are precious souls for whom Jesus died. If we all always saw everyone that way, we would finally be free from sin and selfishness—FREE TO LOVE. When we know this, we take our knowledge and our freedom, and use them both to serve love, to serve Jesus, who is God's love made known to us. In Jesus, you are FREE TO LOVE. Amen.