

1 Corinthians Chapter 8

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

- [0 : 0 0] I'm not usually this high up, feeling a little bit giddy, a bit of vertigo I think from being up quite so high, but as you can see we're sharing in the Lord's Supper and communing together later on during our time of worship this evening.
- And again, if you're a visitor amongst us and you know and love the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, trusting Him as the one who has taken your sins at the cross, then we do welcome you to share with us as we remember the amazing love of Christ that bore our sins away.
- I wonder if you would turn with me please to Psalm 62. That's page 579, if you've got one of the church Bibles. Page 579, Psalm 62.
- Just by way of us coming to God in worship, thinking about who it is that we praise, who it is that we are meeting with when we come to church.
- It's good that we are to fellowship together, but of course we know that we are here because we long to meet with and draw near to our God and our Saviour.
- [1 : 0 4] Psalm 62 is one of those Psalms of David in which he reiterates his faith in the Lord, but also speaks about the real struggles he's facing and difficulties that he has.
- So I'm going to read the Psalm, just follow through together, and we might make a few thoughts. Truly my soul finds rest in God.
- My salvation comes from Him. Truly He is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress, I shall never be shaken. How long will you assault me?
- Would all of you throw me down this leaning wall, this tottering fence? Surely they intend to topple me from my lofty place. They take delight in lies.
- With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse. Yes, my soul, find rest in God. My hope comes from Him. Truly He is my rock and my salvation.
- [2 : 0 7] He is my fortress, I shall not be shaken. My salvation and my honour depend on God. He is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in Him at all times, you people.
- Pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge. Surely the low-born are but a breath. The high-born are but a lie.
- If weighed on a balance, they are nothing. Together they are only a breath. Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods.
- Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them. One thing God has spoken. Two things I have heard. Power belongs to you, God.
- And with you, Lord, is unfailing love. And you reward everyone according to what they have done. So here's David renewing his faith in the Lord.
- [3 : 0 4] Clearly there are those who are opposed to him, who think of him like a leaning wall, a tottering fence, feeble and weak, able to overcome him. But his strength is not in himself.
- It's found in the Lord, who he speaks of twice as, my rock and my salvation, my fortress, I shall never be shaken. And he speaks about how depending on the Lord and calling on the Lord is that place of refuge in the difficulties, in the storms, in the troubles of life.

And he reminds us that no matter who we are, whether we are very important or very rich, or whether we are lowborn, if he puts it, really life is just a vapor. It's just a breath.

It's just for a while. And not to put our hope and trust in the things of this world, which pass away, but our hope is to be in the Lord our God and his unfailing love.

And reminding ourselves that as we live, so we shall be judged and dealt with according to God at the end on that day of judgment. So God is our hope and our rock.

[4 : 08] And our first hymn reminds us that we are to worship him and praise him with our very soul, with our heart of hearts, with all our being. 625. Oh my soul, arise and bless your maker, for he is your master and your friend.

So God is your master and your friend.

So to rock the rich in tender mercy, worship the Savior, Jesus.

King of grace, his love is overwhelming. Red of life, he's all I ever need.

For his blood has purchased me forever, Lord, at the cross of Jesus.

[5 : 39] And I will sing for all my days, Let his love come now. His breath I take, will sing his praise, Until he calls it home.

Home. Then one day, I'll see him as he sees me, Days to face, the lover and the light.

No more, the longing will be over, Then with my precious Jesus.

Then one day, I'll see him as he sees me, Days to face, the lover and the light.

No more, the longing will be over, Then with my precious Jesus.

[6 : 46] It's been a great day when we will see the Lord Jesus Christ, As he truly is. A great day of joy and rejoicing for us, his people.

But the wonderful thing is that even now, Though we do not see him, Yet we can draw near to him, And speak with him as we do in prayer. So let's do that now. Let us pray together. Oh Lord our God, we thank you that you understand us and know us.

We thank you that when we read of people like David of old, Men who put their trust in you, We know that their life was not easy. Their life wasn't free of problems or troubles.

There were those who were against them. There were times when they felt themselves to be a leaning wall and a toppling fence. They felt themselves to be those that at any moment may be overwhelmed by the trials of life.

But Lord, we thank you that you never let them down. You never failed them. And because you are the same God then as you are today, We know that all who trust in you will never be let down.

[7 : 57] You'll never fail us. We fail you often. We know that. We know that we sin against you. We sin against your word, your truth, your laws. We sin against ourselves by the way that we do not put right our relationship with you.

The way that we seek after relationships and situations, Lord, which are destructive and harmful. Lord, we do ourselves so much grief, Simply because we do not put you first and seek your will.

So, Lord, we do want to ask that even this evening you might renew us in our faith and in our trust in you. That you would draw near to us and speak to us in your word. That you would help us to be able to say, Truly, my soul rests in God.

For there is no rest in one sense. There is no peace in this world. There is only peace, O Lord, in you, in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, Who's coming we are looking forward to and celebrating very soon.

The coming of the Son of God to us. For we could never come to you. Our sin is always the stumbling block. We are powerless, impotent. We're crippled, as it were, by our own sin.

[9 : 07] But, Lord, you did not wait for us to come to you or be good enough to come to you. But you came to us. You came to us in the sin and the mire and the mud of our lives. You came to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Not to just pity us or not to sympathize with us, but to deal with us, to lift us, to raise us up, to rescue us. We thank you, O Lord, our God, that you are indeed our salvation.

And that at the cross you've paid the price for all our sin. And at the cross you've conquered death. And at the price you've triumphed over the evil one. And at the cross, O Lord, you have made that everlasting life ours simply by faith.

Nothing we can earn, nothing we can do, but your wonderful gift. We thank you, O Lord, that, yes, we look forward to the day when we shall see you as you truly are.

When we shall be known as we truly are. You know us, O Lord. We pray that even in this day, before that time comes when we stand before you in judgment, may, Lord, we kneel before you in worship and praise.

[10 : 11] May we, Lord, stand before you as those who seek to do your will. And may we know again your rich blessing in our lives. Thank you that you are here by your Holy Spirit.

Be at work, we pray, in us and through us. And, Lord, we ask these things. O Lord, our God, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Well, we're going to read together in our Bibles from 1 Corinthians and chapter 8. 1 Corinthians and chapter 8 and the whole of the chapter.

Now, for those of you who come with us regularly on a Sunday evening, we've been looking at this letter of Paul's written to these Christians in Corinth, part of modern-day Greece.

And we have been seeing how, as a church, they were in all sorts of trouble, mainly of their own making, mainly because they were fighting with one another and arguing with another.

[11 : 07] And they allowed all sorts of wrong behavior and practices into the church. And people were saying all sorts of wrong things. Don't ever think that there ever was or ever is a perfect church outside of heaven.

There never was. And so we've been looking at Paul as he's been dealing with these things, speaking directly into those problems with God's Word. And we come now to chapter 8, and we're going to read from verse 1.

So if you've got that, it's page 1149. If you've got a Bible there, 1149 at the bottom. Concerning food sacrificed to idols is the subtitle. Now, about food sacrificed to idols.

We know that we all possess knowledge. But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.

But whoever loves God is known by God. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols. We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one.

[12 : 13] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father from whom all things came and for whom we live.

There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god.

And since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God. We are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?

So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

[13 : 31] Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall. And we know the Lord will help us to apply his word and his truth to our lives as we think about it in a moment or two.

So we're going to sing together now. There are no notices tonight, except to remind you that everything's on the new sheet for the month. Please take one of those.

And to remind you, of course, that fortnight today is going to be our carol service. And please do take some of the invitations and make use of them with your neighbours, friends.

There's a Christmas message on there, one side, and then a list of the events for Christmas on the other. Please be praying for that too. And reminding you as well, on Thursday at...

Escot. That's it. At Escot, the nursing home there, there's going to be a service at... Three o'clock. Three o'clock. Please, if you can help and come along for carols, that'd be great.

[14 : 38] So if you've got your Bibles, please have them open then to 1 Corinthians chapter 8. I'm not sure what your particular favourite sort of television shows are.

I do enjoy quiz shows, general knowledge type of quiz shows. Pointless, something of a habit of watching just before tea time.

Sometimes The Chase. Even occasionally, I'll flick over and watch a bit of Mastermind. But there is one quiz show that I do not watch, and that is University Challenge.

The reason for my dislike of University Challenge, above all other quiz shows, is very simple. I never know any of the answers. And the quizzes that I like all have one thing in common.

They all have some questions that I can answer. And when I answer a question, I feel it makes you feel good, doesn't it? It makes you feel like you've got a certain amount of knowledge. It sort of empowers you.

[15 : 38] It makes you think, well, you know, I'm quite clever, really, if I can answer that question. The trouble with the University Challenge is I never answer any of the questions, and therefore I feel a real dunce. And I feel like I know nothing at all.

And so I avoid that at all, because that really isn't what I want to feel like when I'm watching telly. But that's the problem, isn't it? The problem with having some knowledge is, as Paul puts it here, it puffs you up.

It makes you feel good about yourself. It makes you have a certain amount of pride. It sort of smooths and polishes your ego when you're able to get a question right.

And also, of course, it makes you just that feel a little bit superior to other people who don't get the question right, particularly if it's a contestant on the show. And you think, well, I could have got that.

If I'd have been there, I'd have got that. And so there's a certain amount of pride, exalting, puffing up. Now, when we come to the church in Corinth, as I mentioned earlier on, here's a church which has many problems.

[16 : 45] And one of the problems is that there were certain people saying certain things. There were common sayings that were being used to excuse behavior. We've looked at some of them already. Just turn back there to chapter 6, verse 12.

One of their sayings was, I have the right to do anything. Very modern day sort of expression, isn't it? I can do whatever I like. I have the right, my human right to do this or do that.

We saw in chapter 1 and verse 7 as well, there was a strange saying and teaching going around. It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. That was part of the problem, the sexual immorality that was going on there.

And then we come to this other one. And again, hopefully, the NIV puts a little quotation marks around it. We all possess knowledge, one of their sayings. We can do this or we can do that because we all possess knowledge.

And these phrases were being used by a group, as it were, within the church. A group of people who thought of themselves as more knowledgeable, more spiritual, more godly than the rest.

[17 : 50] And had a sort of a superiority complex. Not an inferiority, but a superiority complex. And we notice that whenever Paul meets head to head with these phrases, he doesn't disagree with them or poo-poo them, but he always replies with a thoughtful, but.

But. You see that there in chapter 6, verse 12. I have the right to do anything you say, but, says Paul, not everything is beneficial. Chapter 7, verse 1.

It's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman, but, says Paul, since immorality is occurring, and so on. And here we have as well, we all possess knowledge, but knowledge puffs up.

And the subject about which some in the church had knowledge and others did not have knowledge was in respect to idols and the offering of food to idols as part of the worship, part of the sacrifice to those pagan idols and their temples to gain favor, to gain help, to secure a harvest, or whatever it may be.

And this question of the idols is, again, part of Paul answering the letter he's received from the church in Corinth. Remember that we saw in chapter 7, verse 1. Now for the matters you wrote about.

[19 : 08] These weren't just things that Paul plucked out the air, they weren't his soapbox concerns or the things he liked to get on and rant about. They were the things that concerned the church and he was bringing God's Word to bear upon those situations.

And I think that's very important for us to remember again, that whenever we are faced with challenges, decisions in our lives, then God's Word is the place we need to look to to give us understanding, leading, guidance in.

Because God's Word is the Word of our Creator, our Maker, who knows us and understands us so very well. I'm just going to read to you now concerning this whole matter of food and idols because to our minds and our thinking it seems completely alien, and in one sense it is, and strange, though it is something that still has a place in many parts of the world.

Derek Prime, who wrote a commentary on this letter, this is how he explains the problem that was facing the church in Corinth. He says this, Meat sold in a market in Corinth could have first been used as a sacrifice in a heathen temple.

Part of it would have been burned on an altar, part of it would have been eaten at a solemn meal in the temple, and the remainder of the meat would have been sold in the market for home consumption.

[20 : 27] Now some in the church who had once believed in these gods and to whom they had offered sacrifices were now finding themselves uncomfortable about eating meat offered in this way because they felt that it was a denial of their Christian faith and the knowledge that there is only one true God.

However, others in the church recognised that an idol is nothing in the world. This indeed is what Paul says here, again quoting from them. There is no such thing as any other God apart from the Lord God.

And so they had no problem in eating meat. It didn't really matter whether it was offered to an idol or whether it was simply just sold in the market. And though their conclusion was right, says Derek Prime, some had become proud of what they felt was their superior knowledge in this matter.

As we've looked in the background of Corinth, if you remember, it was a city which was full of all these temples to Greek gods, Roman gods, idols, and people were involved in prostitution, temple prostitution was involved as well, and sacrifices, and all sorts of things were going on.

And as Paul speaks to these Christians, they had all been involved in that at one time. Before they had come to faith in Christ, that had been their lifestyle as well. But now things have changed.

[21 : 52] But when things change, there's a tension that goes on. We find it ourselves as Christians in the world where we live, particularly if we've been not brought up in a Christian home, but even if we have, there's a tension pulling us one way and yet Christ and his word taking us the other way.

How do we work out that tension? How do we live for Christ in a world which is so set against his truth and his word? And so, that's the problem here.

And it's creating again a division. As we've seen again through the letter, there's this division again and again. And it's an important division because Paul is going to spend the next three chapters talking about this whole matter of what we eat and when we eat it.

In fact, it goes all the way through until we get to the end of chapter 10 and verse 31. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Do not cause anyone to stumble. So it's a matter that is going to be dealt with by Paul and God willing by us in the coming weeks too. Now, as I read that section from the commentary and as I've been talking about these things, it may be that in your mind there's been a switch that's turned off because you've said, well that's got nothing to do with us.

[23 : 12] Nothing to do with people in Whitby in the 21st century. We don't have temples and idols. We don't have sacrifices going on and meat sold in the market which has been used in some other way.

We may do that. As many of you know, there's a great move within our land for halal meat, for meat that is acceptable to Muslims.

And many of the foods that are sold to us may be involved in that sort of process whereby a prayer is put over the meat or the animal before it's killed in a particular way.

But that isn't actually the problem that I want us to think about. Whether we should eat halal meat or kosher meat or whatever it may be. There is relevance here. And the relevance isn't necessarily to do with the meat that we eat or our diet.

I'm not about to give a lecture as some people may like me to. Not here in the church. I had a man come in a few weeks ago who gave me a long, long lecture about the importance of not eating anything apart from organic food and not eating bread made with the wheat that we have nowadays and so on.

[24 : 22] I'm not going to do any of those sort of things. So you're safe. You're safe in what you eat. I don't really... I'm concerned about it. Now the question for Paul is not food and idols. Rather the question for Paul is this problem of division.

This problem of one group feeling themselves more important, more superior than another. And particularly of course it's important to us because in every church we find that there are those believers who are mature and strong and long in the tooth as it were in the faith and those who are weak in the faith, those who are young in the faith, those who struggle with things and are working out things for themselves in seeking to know Christ.

We might put it that way. We have knowledgeable disciples and those who lacked knowledge at the moment. So it was in Corinth so it was here in Whitby as well.

And the challenge for us all is to make sure that we seek to love one another and prevent there from being divisions within the church and particularly that we seek to build one another up.

So Paul says here knowledge puffs up but love builds up. This is indeed the whole challenge to us. How do we build one another up in the faith?

[25 : 45] So knowledge has the problem of puffing us up. We think better of ourselves than we should. We therefore think less of others than we should. So those in Corinth who understood that idols were nothing and that there was only one God looked upon the new converts out of paganism with a certain amount of pride.

They weren't convicted about what they did but some of those young Christians struggled and found it hard. They flaunted their knowledge.

They acted and spoke to them in a way which was derogatory. They seemed to flaunt their freedoms without any real concern or care for younger believers.

Now we can all be guilty of that. We can all be speaking perhaps to a young Christian about something which we've worked out for ourselves at some length or in some way and a practice that we are doing and they say well I'm really struggling to speak in sort of in our hearts if not in our mouths speak down to them.

Don't you understand that yet? Don't you understand substitutionary atonement and propitiation and all these big words? Don't you know what a covenant is? Because we have grown because we have learnt those things and for some of us for many decades there can be a lack of grace in the way that we speak to others.

[27 : 11] Well surely you should know that it's wrong to do that. Well how should they know? Why should they know? We do need to take on board what God's word has to say to us here I believe.

For myself I say that too and for each one of us as well. So how does Paul answer this? How does Paul deal with this predicament? How does he teach the church to love one another to be united with one another to be thoughtful towards one another so that these divisions do not become part of the church life and so that we do not create and cause stumbling blocks to one another?

Well first of all again he sets before us some very clear principles. Knowledge is good but love is better. Knowledge is good but love is better.

That flies again in the face of really the world in which we live where everything is about what you know and who you know. The full force of course of Paul's argument is going to come out in chapter 13 that glorious chapter which is all about love where Paul speaks about love being better than everything including knowledge.

He says here in 1 Corinthians 13 verse 2 if I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge if I have faith that can move mountains but do not have love I am nothing.

[28 : 38] I am nothing. Why is love superior to knowledge? Again that's the argument perhaps for those around about us they would say well look at the advances that we have had in technology in medicine in travel in all the arts in every field of life it's knowledge that has advanced humankind it's knowledge that has brought us to this place where we are able to cure so many illnesses and sort out so many problems.

That may be true but without love all of those things have really advanced the human race not one step have they? why do we still have wars?

Why do we still have hate? Why do we still have crime? Why do we still have a breakdown in society? Why do we still have all of these things as I shared this morning and talked this morning about the great needs amongst young people in our generation?

One in three teenage girls suffering from depression can science cure those things? no love is much better than knowledge because without love life isn't worth living is it?

You can have your health you can have money you can have your own private jet you can have whatever you like but if you do not have love what's it worth?

[29 : 57] If you can't share it with anybody you can't enjoy it with somebody knowledge improves life but love makes life worth living love is the reason for living love is the reason why God created us and made us love is the reason he sent his son into the world love is the reason that he brought us to himself that we might know his love that we might love him and one another that's why Paul says love builds up it builds up it strengthens it encourages it it promotes for us to use a gardening analogy love is the miracle grow of the Christian church without love every single church dies without love every single Christian spiritually dies so what will build a godly church?

What will grow a spiritual fellowship? What is it that we and every single church like Corinth need? More than knowledge more than books more than understanding more than even Bible teaching if I can put it that way we need love what was it that Jesus spoke to his disciples when he was with them in the upper room more than anything else on the night before his death he spoke to them about love and gave them a new commandment love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another and as we go through the letters of Paul and Peter and John in the New Testament again and again you find them in every letter saying love one another more love one another more love one another more that's how the church will grow how are men and women to hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ yes we need to know and understand it but we've got to be moved by love to share it if we're not moved by love to share it it doesn't matter what we know we'll keep it to ourselves how can we reach a generation of people who have no time for God except that in our lives we show the reality and the power of the love of Christ yeah knowledge is good please grow in knowledge please read please study

God's word please understand the truths of God's grace but make sure that as you do so they are they are always painted with covered with saturated with love because if we simply have a cold understanding of gospel truth or a cold understanding of the doctrines of grace or whatever it may be if we can read in our Bibles backwards and forwards and upside down but we haven't loved then we haven't got what's needed for ourselves for the church this is Paul's words to us the second thing to notice as well is that knowledge has its limitations but love is everlasting knowledge is limited isn't it no matter how much we know we still know very little no matter how much we cram into these pea sized brains of ours the fact is that we can never know everything sorry that's not right teenagers know everything but everybody else doesn't know everything until we get to our 20s then we realize that we didn't know everything but we don't know everything this is again what Paul says here those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know a real knowledgeable

Christian is someone who knows that they have much much more to learn a spiritual and godly person is someone who is able to say I know who I've believed but I know that I need to know much more I know there's so much that I don't understand so much of God's word that I want to understand more person who thinks that they know everything well actually knows nothing there's nothing true knowledge is humbling because the more we see of God the more we understand of his grace his love his forgiveness his power the more we realize Lord I I've not even I've not even skimmed the surface yet I've not even touched the tip of the iceberg yet when it comes to the things of God true knowledge is humbling not producing pride look at our Lord Jesus Christ just for a moment again he's our example in all things he knew everything he knows everything doesn't he what does the Paul tell us in Philippians he humbled himself condescended

Jesus came yes with the truth of the word of God but you notice how he came with it he came with it with love when he stands by the Samaritan woman at the well and he says you've not just had one husband you've had five husbands is there condemnation in his voice is there a superiority in his voice no there's love and mercy in his voice for her a new command love one another knowledge is limited but love doesn't end it's it's unending because God is love he is eternal and everlasting so love is everlasting and eternal and that's what really counts in our relationship with God for somebody to be a Christian it's not for them simply to be able to agree to a set of doctrines or rules or statement of faith it's not for them just to sort of tick off and say yes I believe in one God yes I believe in God

[35 : 47] Father Son and Holy Spirit yes I believe in Jesus Christ Son of God I can tick all those things off I believe all those things therefore I'm a Christian no because being a Christian means loving God what's the greatest commandment the first commandment love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength not know the Lord your God or understand the Lord your God I have a have a degree in theology about the Lord your God love him so our relationship with God begins with love and if we love him we want to know more about him just as you do with your sweetheart your husband or your wife or your fiancé or they are you want to know all about them you want them to talk about themselves and share with you about who they are you don't want simply to know these things so that you might be able to use them against them you want to know these things about them because you want to love them and you do love them and you want to love them more their warts and all their failings and their foibles course and so Paul says if knowledge if our knowledge of the things of God if our knowledge of God's word if our knowledge of truth actually causes a weaker brother or sister in Christ to sin then that knowledge is absent of love and he's quite strong isn't he when he says that but he says in verse 11 so this weaker this weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge when you sin against them in this way you wound their weak conscience and you sin against

Christ that's powerful stuff isn't it that that's that's sharp words knowledge has its limitations love doesn't have its limitations you can never dear friends over love somebody you can never show them too much love there's a difference between that and an infatuation okay love is not infatuation is not stalking somebody okay it is love is love for them for who they are you can never love so much too much think about it if God who is infinite in love loves you and me with an infinite unending love it's not too much is it it's more than we deserve but it's not too much and thirdly knowledge of Christ will create love for our brother or sister in Christ so actually true knowledge creates love true knowledge creates love think about the Lord Jesus and this is what he does he brings us right back to Christ himself doesn't he he says this verse 11 this weak brother or sister for whom Christ died why did Jesus die for us on the cross he knew that we needed our sins to be pardoned he knew that we are sinners who stand before the judgment of God and will be punished according to how we've lived had spoken and thought and done he knows that there is the wrath of God upon us was it only that knowledge that moved him to come into the world to rescue us no of course not it was his love for us combined with his knowledge of our need that brought him into the world to be our saviour and if he died for us upon the cross if he died for that person who is weak in the faith and young in the faith and doesn't have the knowledge that we have then surely we need to love them too if he went to such a cost if he values them so much that he would die for them then surely we must value them too when we become a Christian we enter into a knowledge that sets us free sets us free from the things that bound us sets us free from the divisions that separated us sets us free from the things that enslave us when we come to Christ we are brought into the freedom of the God who loves us to live out that life of love to live out that life of love that Christ lived which puts others first before ourselves the freedom to love those that we once despised the freedom to say no to ourselves and yes to someone else

Paul always brings us back to Christ and to the cross because that's the place where we need to go to that's the place we need to be reminded of again and again the cross what is it but the very the very essence the very manifestation of love so Jesus died for the weak he died for the ignorant he died for the troubled he died for the helpless therefore dear friends if we have knowledge and we use that knowledge in any way to harm to put down to destroy to discourage then surely we are not those who truly have grasped the power of the cross I want to close just by thinking of two examples because I think sometimes we can read the God's word and we think well again how do I apply this what do you mean you're talking about being proud yes that's one thing looking down and disparagingly upon others who don't haven't grasped the things perhaps are understood or have that knowledge but is all that is that all it is no I think there's very practical outcomes here very practical outcomes that Paul speaks about here he says in verse 13 therefore if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin

I'll never eat meat again so I will not cause them to fall so I want to use just two examples I want you to imagine that by God's grace wonderfully into the church comes somebody who is a recovered alcoholic somebody who once was an alcoholic but has come to faith in Christ and they know that God has set them free from that addiction but they know that they can never touch a drink again because that would be very dangerous for them and they would probably slip back into alcoholism very quickly so they come into the church and you welcome them and it's lovely to have you with us and you decide you're going to invite them for a meal one day or one evening to your house and because it's your usual habit that when you have a meal and friends open you open a bottle of wine you think nothing of it and you offer them the wine to drink and they of course refuse they may even say well I was an alcoholic and I mustn't touch it anymore but later on as they go home they think well hold on here's a Christian and he's able to drink alcohol why shouldn't I be able to drink alcohol as well why can't I and so the devil of course who wants to trip him up and then the sinful nature which is still there and that urge is there and in a moment of weakness they give in buy a can of special brew or cider whatever it may be that they used to drink now you can say

I've done nothing wrong and indeed you haven't but a little loving understanding might have meant that on that one occasion when you knew they were coming you would not have had wine because you didn't want to put that stumbling block in their way another example perhaps somebody in the church has been brought up in a very strict Christian home and they've been brought up to consider Sunday as the Sabbath a day in which no work no shopping or any kind should be done we talked about this the other week didn't we but for you you're somebody who thinks of it as a day yes that you spend in church worshipping the Lord but you have no real problem with perhaps having a Sunday meal out or even occasionally going to watch sport or something like that what happens if this sister who has been brought up in that very strict home sees you doing something on a

[44 : 36] Sunday which really goes against their conscience and they're troubled a little bit like the alcoholic they think well why shouldn't I they've got freedom to go and do their shopping on the Sunday they've got freedom to do this or that why shouldn't I but when they go and do it they find that their conscience is severely pricked and troubled and wounded and they feel overwhelmed with guilts Paul talks about just an exact case like that in Romans 14 so what should we do dear friends what should we do in these matters well here's Paul's word if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin I'll never eat meat again in other words what we do dear friends is this we relinquish our freedoms for the sake of those who we love we don't do those things which we know will be a stumbling block to them or cause them difficulty or cause them to sin and you may say that's not fair that's far too drastic why should I give up my right why should I give up my freedom well why what did

Christ do for you and for me we think it's too drastic we think it's too severe here's what Paul has to say in 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9 what is being a Christian after all if it's not being like Jesus let's pray together shall we whenever we come to your word oh lord our god we find it's like a mirror held up to our minds and our souls because it shows us some of the grubby and the unpleasant things about ourselves it shows us those stains of pride and ego and selfishness and love lovelessness it shows us oh lord again just how really selfish we are and lord we're thankful for your word that it does that we don't like it it's painful but lord we thank you your word shows us these things that they might be dealt with and changed you show us our sins so that we might repent and be forgiven and made right with you you show us the necessity of your holy spirit's work in our lives thank you that when you save us you begin a wonderful process of transforming sanctification us we don't want to be the people that we are anymore we don't want to continue lord to exalt ourselves we don't want to be unloving we want to be gracious patient tender thoughtful and caring we know we're going to get it wrong lord you know that too we know that we're not always going to get it right and occasionally we will cause one another to stumble by the way we act and speak and think but lord please help us not to count that as okay not to be able to say well that's just the way i am or the way i made help us oh lord to realize that that is part of that sinful nature that you've come to transform and so we pray that as we've been thinking upon your word as you've been speaking to us as individuals so we pray oh lord that you'd give us not only the faith to trust you but lord the grace lord to follow you bring love to our hearts bring patience and tenderness we pray too for we ask these things in the name of our lord jesus who was rich but made himself poor for our sake amen please remain seated and i'm going to hand over to graham now who's going to lead us as we come to the lord's table