

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-24

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Introduction to 1 Corinthians 8:1-13: Pagan worship often included animal sacrifice, followed by a meal in the temple in which what had been sacrificed was the main dish. What was left over was then sold in the local market. It was hard to avoid meat that had been sacrificed to false gods when you lived in Corinth and it could be hard for those recently converted to distinguish between the menu and the venue.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-24 (CEB)

¹ Now concerning meat that has been sacrificed to a false god: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes people arrogant, but love builds people up. ² If anyone thinks they know something, they don't yet know as much as they should know. ³ But if someone loves God, then they are known by God.

⁴ So concerning the actual food involved in these sacrifices to false gods, we know that a false god isn't anything in this world, and that there is no God except for the one God. ⁵ Granted, there are so-called "gods," in heaven and on the earth, as there are many gods and many lords. ⁶ However, for us believers,

There is one God the Father.

All things come from him, and we belong to him.

And there is one Lord Jesus Christ.

All things exist through him, and we live through him.

⁷ But not everybody knows this. Some are eating this food as though it really is food sacrificed to a real idol, because they were used to idol worship until now. Their conscience is weak because it has been damaged. ⁸ Food won't bring us close to God. We're not missing out if we don't eat, and we don't have any advantage if we do eat. ⁹ But watch out or else this freedom of yours might be a problem for those who are weak. ¹⁰ Suppose someone sees you (the person who has knowledge) eating in an idol's temple. Won't the person with a weak conscience be encouraged to eat the meat sacrificed to false gods? ¹¹ The weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² You sin against Christ if you sin against your brothers and sisters and hurt their weak consciences this way. ¹³ This is why, if food causes the downfall of my brother or sister, I won't eat meat ever again, or else I may cause my brother or sister to fall.

Introduction to 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-24: The argument Paul is making continues through to the end of chapter ten and includes verses 23-24 of that chapter which are a nice summary of Paul's main point:

^{10:23} Everything is permitted, but everything isn't beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn't build others up. ²⁴ No one should look out for their own advantage, but they should look out for each other.

SERMON

UPSET: The letter I received last week about a large Christian gathering featuring a speaker who calls themselves a "recovering united methodist."

DEEPENING: It ruined my morning, but I made a phone call and got myself some pastoral care. [Elaborate]

And then I woke up the next morning and remembered that I don't have bad experiences, I have sermon illustrations. And that invitation was a great sermon illustration for the ways in which many Christians are asserting their first amendment rights. [Explain those rights.]

We may have a right to gather in person in large numbers, maskless and sing at the top of our lungs, but that doesn't mean it's a good idea. Furthermore, we have radio and online streaming and the Holy Spirit it's not necessary. [Elaborate]

This pandemic was a great opportunity to build character and things that build character often draw us closer to God. But not very many of us have taken advantage of it.

And Christians insisting on their first amendment rights no matter what has often been detrimental. To them, and to the community, and to the proclamation of the Gospel—unchurched folk will not be won over by reckless disregard for their safety.

SUDDEN SHIFT AND GOSPEL: The event I received an invitation for and countless other Christian events like it provide a modern day example that violates Paul's ancient principle that "Everything is permitted, but everything isn't beneficial."

UNPACKING: All things are permissible, but we are called to be less concerned with our rights than our responsibilities and more concerned for our neighbor than we are for ourselves. Both together as a church and as individual Christians (membership brings no additional rights or privileges, only added responsibilities).

That's why we continue to worship the way we are. But our commitment to caring for our neighbor will not stop when this pandemic comes to an end.

At the last Church Council meeting, those present authorized a "Re-Opening Team" to talk about what kind of church we want to be when we come back. What do we need to restart, what do we need to let drop, what new things do we need to begin? I don't know the answers to those questions, I don't know what this church will look like post pandemic, but I trust that we will remain committed to enacting our faith and exercising our rights in ways that are beneficial.

Amen.