



(1 Cor 8:1-13, 10:18-24)

VIDEOS

Doing videos – having the knowledge – working a video camera, getting the light right etc., video editing software – knowing how to use it how to get the right effect.

All very well knowing how to do this but of no use at all if you don't have any material for a video! A Christian video is not of any use if the script doesn't help anyone.

TITLE

Corinth was a church who had many people with lots of knowledge about God and excellent understanding – but their behaviour did not match their knowledge as far as Paul was concerned. In particular, there were some people who thought that they were “super-Christians”. They thought that because of their knowledge and supposed maturity in Christ, they were allowed to behave in any way they liked towards their fellow believers - because they were right as far as they were concerned.

EXTREMISTS

There is no-one more dangerous than a religious person who is so convinced they are right that they don't care who they hurt in the process. Think carefully to some of the big issues in the world in the last couple of centuries and you'll find religious people participating in atrocities of various kinds:

- Muslim extremists
- apartheid

Their actions didn't connect with their conscience or their scriptures although they just bent their meaning to fit. The problem with Corinth was that it was characterised by divisions and right at the heart of the problems they had was that they lacked in respect for the views and feelings of others .

AGAPE

Christian love – agape – is the foundation of how God acts towards us and how we as His people should act towards Him and others. For God so loved the world that he gave Love the Lord your God, love your neighbour. Love is at the absolute foundation of our faith.

Let remind you of what love – agape – is about. It's selfless care and consideration. It's about putting the needs others before ourselves, whatever the cost. W E VINE *“Love can only be known from the actions it prompts”*

VERSES

Let's look at a couple of the verses in chapter 8: *We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But the man who loves God is known by God.*

I said a moment ago that love is at the absolute foundation of our faith. In Corinth there were those who had lots of knowledge. But did that make them “super-Christians”? Not as far as Paul was concerned. Knowledge in itself doesn't build us up – and by that Paul means spiritually and in terms of maturity. Only love when applied to knowledge builds us up. And true knowledge isn't about knowing but being known by God: *the man who loves God is known by God.*

KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP

Knowledge on its own just puffs us up – rather like balloon. And what happens to balloons, they either go down or they burst! The result is either disappointment or you may hurt yourself.

In my 44 years of being a Christian I've experienced plenty of balloon Christianity and done a bit of it myself! I thought I knew better and hurt people because of it. Passages like this one make me far more circumspect.

I said last week that if we want to know the mind and will of God, then it's all here in God's word. But knowledge in itself does not mean that we know God. It's through God's word that God can engage with us

and we engage with Him as His Spirit works in us, bringing those words to life. Knowledge in relation to God's word should be about taking us into a place where our relationship with God and love for Him grows and the basis of that growth is love. *"The man who loves God is known by God"*.

If you have a thirst for knowledge then good. I encourage you to study God's word – but make the end of it that you know and love God, not just know a pile of theological stuff.

ALEXANDER POPE

Because knowledge without love is incomplete and as Paul says The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. It reminds me of an old saying by Alexander Pope: a little learning is a dangerous thing.

In Corinth, the behaviour of the "super-Christians" who had a lot of knowledge but were short on love was so divisive. Yet if they had applied love to their knowledge they should have realised they were out of order.

PAGAN TEMPLE

The issue was over pagan temples and food! It was difficult for ordinary people to buy meat as they didn't have the means to buy what was an expensive commodity. However, meat that had been sacrificed to idols often sold cheap in the markets. Many of the Christians at Corinth bought this meat even though it had been associated with idolatry. Some commentators have suggested that some of the richer Corinthians were actually even going to dinner parties at the pagan temples, which would have been expected if they were senior members of society. Chapters 6 and 10 both suggest that they were into the immorality of the local society as well as the parties and social circles associated with the temples. They may not have worshipped there, but they certainly felt it was OK to be there.

There were many other believers in Corinth who would not touch the meat at any cost or go anywhere near a pagan temple. They regarded it as a no-no and were hurt, stumbled and maybe shocked that believers they thought more mature were eating food sacrificed to idols.

GREEK IDOL

Was it wrong to eat food sacrificed to idols? On the face of it there seemed nothing wrong in it. Paul says this: *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. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*

If what Paul says here is true then an idol is just a lump of wood isn't it? If that's the case we have the freedom to eat as we please don't we? It's perfectly permissible.

In that case said the "super-Christians" these other believers with a difference of opinion should just get over it. If they are offended then that's their hard luck. Now how many times have I heard that logic in churches when opinions between believers differ. Where's the respect and love?

REALITY CHECK AHEAD

Paul found their attitude of the "super-Christians" flawed in two ways.

KNOWLEDGE WAS APPLIED WITHOUT LOVE

They boasted of their great knowledge that idols were just lumps of wood and that there was yet one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made. They went further than that as Paul tells us in chapter 10 they went on to say that Jesus gives freedom so that we are not victims to superstition because "everything is permissible". But in their enthusiasm to exercise their freedom, they failed to respect the people who felt it was inappropriate to eat food sacrificed to idols, however cheap it was in the market and they certainly didn't go near temples. Paul refers to them as "weaker" believers. I think if there had been inverted commas in Paul's Greek he would have used them. As we shall see in a moment, they weren't as weak as people thought.

I've heard it so many times in my life – people dismissing the thoughts and ideas of others as ignorant, immature, superstitious, narrow-minded, old-fashioned and the rest. Where's the respect? Where's the love? Where's the sensible discussion? Where's the agree to disagree?

As we look in chapter 10 we read these verses from Paul about "Everything is permissible"

VERSES

*“Everything is permissible” – but not everything is beneficial.
“Everything is permissible” – but not everything is constructive.
Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others.*

Just because something is permissible doesn't mean it is good to do it if we are going to hurt others by it. Just because it's permissible, doesn't mean it's going to build people up.

Let me give you a few simple examples. As far as I'm concerned I don't have a problem with modern worship that involves loud music with lots of movement and arm waving. It's perfectly permissible – yea, even scriptural. But some of you would be horrified if you arrived one Sunday morning to find 100 decibels of sound. I could arrange it but for the vast majority of you it would be neither beneficial or constructive.

The same applies with our personal relationships – to not seek our own good but the good of others. It starts with us thinking what's beneficial and constructive to the others God has placed us in fellowship with rather than pushing our own wares. It's a mark of maturity.

KNOWLEDGE WAS INCOMPLETE

But there was something far worse with the “everything is permissible” attitude that the “super_Christians” had towards idolatry – their knowledge was incomplete and their little learning had become a dangerous thing that was divisive within the church. Idolatry was not idle clap-trap, behind it was something sinister. It was true that the gods of Greece like Zeus and Artemis didn't exist. All their statues and altars were rubbish, but behind their existence was the demonic.

VERSE

.. the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

Satan and his cohorts were behind it. To play around with it was playing around with the demonic. There was more to it all than they had imagined and satan was using their stupidity to cause division in the church. The “weaker” believers were not so weak after all. They saw the issues.

This is quite topical is tomorrow is Halloween. It is one of the sacred pagan days. In modern society it has become associated with demons, witchcraft and the like. Should Christians be involved in celebrating Halloween? Many do. Is everything permissible making Halloween harmless fun, or are we taking images and attitudes to the demonic too lightly? We tend to follow the Americanised version of Halloween here in the UK with pumpkins, zombies and monsters and the like. But in the past Christians recognised the undercurrent of paganism that hung over in our own society (and still does) by celebrating Halloween in a different way – by having a service repudiating evil and affirming the victory of Jesus over all evil powers and authorities.

So as I conclude, I would say that these passages have two things to say to us as regards a formula to encourage us to respect one another.

REMEMBER THAT LOVE BUILDS UP

I can remember as a young man being part of a church where if you heard the words “I say this in love” that something rude was about to come out! Agape is about *Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others*. It is the formula of ultimate care and respect. The good of others can mean that we have to surrender our own pride and wanting to have everything our way for the good of the fellowship. Too often we don't do that do we. We know we're right. We will prevail.

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On the other hand it also doesn't mean surrendering to something that is blatantly wrong and out of order. Sometimes to say something in love means having to stop someone else hurting others or the fellowship as a whole. Paul writes some harsh and upsetting words here to the “super Christians”. Some were upset and resented him for it. In fact the reason he sent the letter was because a visit to them would have been far more painful! The act of love by Paul was correcting them and doing it in the most caring way possible: this letter.

MAKE SURE KNOWLEDGE IS COMPLETE

We know we're right. We will prevail. How many times have I heard words like this as people try to correct others or even correct me. I don't mind people trying to correct me. I'm the first to admit if I'm wrong, particularly if my knowledge is not complete.

But what annoys me most are people who make issues out of things they don't have full knowledge about. Or even worse, passing on an idea they like from some Christian teacher or other they like but have never thought it through themselves – and looked as what Scripture says.

Or worse, there are those who will hang on to something and be divisive about it, separating themselves from other believers and splitting churches. And often the most divisive issues aren't worth dying for let alone upsetting everyone in the fellowship.

STONE

Our forefathers had a way of resolving that which was important from those things which we may differ about but are not worth falling out about. I found it on the foundation stone of Swaffham Baptist Church and it read like this

In all things indifferent - Liberty

In all things essential - Unity

In all things - Charity (Love)

What did they mean. Things indifferent are those things which Christians disagree about or do differently about but have no bearing on the basic truths of the Christian faith or the way of salvation. In those things we should have the liberty to believe what we will and openly discuss them with others and expect to give and receive respect and love as we do so.

Things essential are the essential are those things that are essential to the Christian faith and salvation. Those are listed in Christian creedal statements – Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, Statement of faith of the EA. If people are outside these, then we must tell them that they have big problems to say the least. Come to the Church Meeting in a couple of weeks and you'll have something to decide along those lines.

So what are things indifferent about. They are all things interesting but not worth dying for – how God created the world (we're not told in Scripture), what version of the Bible to use, how reverend our worship should be, what type of music we should have in church, how and when Jesus will return, mode of baptism, how we dress and all the rest of it. I cringe when I hear Christians denouncing other Christians because they don't do things the same way as others. What matters are the essentials.

Load in heaps of love! *Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others.* Respect one another – you may actually learn something new!

But even in matters essential – don't be quick to condemn those who disagree with the basic tenets of the Christian faith. I also cringe when I hear Christians suggest we abuse those of other faiths like burning their holy books and disrespecting their ways. Whether or not they do the same to our people, our job is to love them by speaking the truth and winning them for Jesus! You win by loving, by telling the truth in love, not by insults.

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 30/10/11
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