

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-8

CERTAINTIES: WHEN COMMON KNOWLEDGE FAILS

“Concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

“Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

“However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.”¹

“**E**veryone knows...” No doubt we have each heard this phrase used—perhaps we’ve even used it ourselves. Usually, the phrase is employed to mask a deficit of knowledge. “Everyone knows” sounds as if it is an appeal to common knowledge; however, momentary reflection will demonstrate that common knowledge is often anything but common, let alone knowledge. In many instances, common knowledge cannot even qualify as knowledge—it is more akin to bias, prejudice, unfairness! Common knowledge almost always is built on supposition that may have only a tenuous relationship to knowledge. The appeal to common knowledge often reflects social bias rather than encouraging rigorous thinking. The concept of “crowd sourcing” can become a means of ensuring that we achieve the lowest common denominator rather than reaching for excellence in our reasoning.

Many people are not aware that the appeal to “common knowledge” as an argumentative device is not an invention of the contemporary western world—it has ancient roots. While I suspect that a minimum of research would allow us to demonstrate such linguistic devices are found in almost every culture throughout the ages, it is assuredly the case that among the earliest churches people appealed to common knowledge as a means of disarming those with whom they were arguing. “Everyone knows” was apparently bandied in the first bloom of the Faith.

In the Church of God in Corinth, a saying appears to have been commonly employed to cut off argument. That phrase was “All of us possess knowledge.” Today, we would say, “Everyone knows...” It was a phrase that would be employed whenever someone wanted to end the argument. After all, who can argue against the majority? We who call ourselves by the Name of Christ today, need to hear again the words of the Living God: “You must not follow a crowd in wrongdoing. Do not ... go along with a crowd to pervert justice” [EXODUS 23:2 CSB]. When everyone agrees, make certain the agreement aligns with the truth!

WE KNOW THAT “WE ALL HAVE KNOWLEDGE.” “Concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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The Apostle Paul appears to have received a letter from the Congregation in Corinth. Though the entire congregation had not necessarily drafted the letter, some leaders were sufficiently concerned to ask for guidance in meeting some major issues. They didn't realise that all the conflicts had one major root; they were fighting multiple battles rather than addressing the one great necessary issue. The dysfunctional congregation revealed their immaturity in the missive; they asked several questions and made numerous statements to explain what was going on in the assembly. What a church! In almost every way, the congregation was just like so many churches in this day. They really were our spiritual forebears!

The congregation was blessed with powerful spiritual gifts. As Paul opened this letter, responding to their several inquiries, the Apostle noted, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" [1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9].

Despite this rich blessing, the congregation was infantile, infected with a deadly strain of the virus that contaminates those identified with the world. The people were self-centred, focused on fulfilling their own desires. This dreadful malady was witnessed in several ways, one of which was a disregard for the welfare of fellow Christians. Most within the assembly had stumbled into the concept that "church" was what they did for a brief time one day each week. For the most, "church" had become an activity rather than being a living entity.

Let me caution those who listen today—*lost people go to church; Christians are the church*. By that, I mean that the assembly of the righteous is the Body of Christ. Church is not what we do; church is who we are. In this day, the world has invaded the life of the churches. Contemporary congregations are more likely to reflect the world than they are to reflect Christ. The world neither fears nor respects the Faith; and the reason for this lack of respect is that we are just like the world in every respect, except we claim to be righteous.

The American actress, Sam Sorbo, says our culture is undergoing a hostile takeover.² We have witnessed a transition from a moral standard of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" to one best defined as "YOLO." We can deplore the social transition all we wish, but until we confess that the attitude has infiltrated the congregation of the righteous, nothing can possibly change—things will only grow more chaotic, more topsy-turvy.

I take heart in knowing that the situation is not unique to this present generation. As I read the New Testament letters, I witness churches reflecting much the identical attitudes as witnessed in this day. In the Church of God in Corinth, the individual assumed exaggerated importance. This is evident from the opening words of our text. The big issue in that day was "food offered to idols." Today, it might be patriotism—should one kneel when the national anthem is played, should one honour those who defend the nation. Perhaps it would be a political position of whether people have a right to defend themselves, or whether they should meekly submit to evil when threatened. The point is, that one group insists it is right, forcing a tribal attitude on society, or in the case of the congregation, forcing the assembly into separate tribes, each holding a slight different view of matters.

² Sam Sorbo, "Our culture is experiencing a hostile takeover. We must stop rejecting God if we ever want it to end." Fox News, November 11, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2017/11/11/our-culture-is-experiencing-hostile-takeover-must-stop-rejecting-god-if-ever-want-it-to-end.html>, accessed 11 November 2017

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In the Corinthian congregation, the issue of “food offered to idols,” among other issues, had segregated the assembly into tribes. One tribe consisted of those who were unable to separate food from the provider and another was composed of those who were concerned only for whether the food was edible. The issue was larger than it appeared on the surface.

In that day, there were no grocery stores, no super markets. What foods were to be consumed were either grown for use of the grower or it was offered in the “agora,” the marketplace. The various merchants selling in the agora would be members of a guild. Guild members would have a god or goddess as a patron. Whenever an animal was killed, the meat would be offered to the patron god or goddess. Normally, this would involve a symbolic offering on the altar of an idol representing the god or goddess. This offering indicated that the patron was recognised as owning the entire animal since the meat was dedicated to that god or goddess. Thus, meat offered in the agora was considered to belong to the patron.

Those Christians who were only recently removed from idolatry often had a difficult time separating their past practises from reality. For them, eating any food that had been dedicated to an idol belonged to that idol. They quite naturally feared ritual contamination should they eat any such foods. Actually, their fear may have been even more intense than we can imagine, since they would have witnessed demonic possessions. Eating such foods would, in their view, expose them to control by the demon behind the idol.

Other, “stronger” Christians, recognised that the demons are subject to the Prince of Peace. They were not concerned about where food came from, only whether the food was edible or not. They had heard how the disciples exulted, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name” [LUKE 10:17b]! They had taken to heart the message delivered by Paul, “[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” [COLOSSIANS 1:15-20]. They had seized upon the truth delivered by the Apostle, “I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” [ROMANS 8:38, 39].

So, the tribes were created—unwittingly, perhaps, but created nevertheless. Now, the “weaker Christians” were arrayed on the one side, concerned with honouring the Master by maintaining purity, and the “stronger Christians” were arrayed on the other side, emphasising the freedom that Christ brings. There was no room for compromise in the view of either of these tribes. Each was assured that they were right—the other tribe must submit to the superior knowledge possessed. This was the impasse facing the Church of God in Corinth.

The Apostle quickly cut to the heart of the conflict. Both tribes were resorting to the argument, “Everyone knows,” talking past one another. Paul asserts that Christians intuitively know that because we are Christians, we possess knowledge. However, the knowledge we possess, if held in isolation, generates pride, pretension, arrogance, vanity. In the absence of love, knowledge can only exalt the individual. Love is required to build up the congregation. It all one is concerned with is the “self,” there is no need for love. However, to build up others, love must be involved. In fact, to build others, love must prevail.

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This is obvious from even a cursory reading of “The Love Chapter” of this same letter. Paul writes in **1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13**, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Paul’s statement is, “if anyone loves God, he is known by God” [**1 CORINTHIANS 8:3**]. His statement anticipates the writings of John, the Apostle of Love. Listen to a few instances of John’s theology. John has written, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So, we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” [**1 JOHN 4:7-21**].

Love looms large in the theology of the spiritually healthy believer. In fact, the absence of love demonstrates that we have not known the love of God. Tragically, many of the professed saints in Corinth, even down to this day, reveal dark hearts that show nothing of the love of God. John writes, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” Focus, in particular, on the following verse: “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” [**1 JOHN 3:9, 10**]. In a world that is inured to strong language, John’s words are shocking! Failure to love the brothers demonstrates that an individual does not belong to God!

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WHERE KNOWLEDGE SHOULD LEAD — “As to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:4-6].

Now, the Apostle tackles the heart of the controversy then dividing the congregation. Again, he appeals to intuitive knowledge a Christian holds when he says, “We know” (*oidamen*). Because the Spirit of God lives within the believer, and because the Christian is born from above, the believer knows two great truths—“an idol has no real existence” and “there is no God but One.” Perhaps Paul is citing Isaiah and Moses when he states this truth. Let’s review what is written so that we understand where the Apostle is coming from.

Addressing the idols which Israel found attractive, God, through Isaiah, challenged:

“Set forth your case, says the LORD;
bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.
Let them bring them, and tell us
what is to happen.
Tell us the former things, what they are,
that we may consider them,
that we may know their outcome;
or declare to us the things to come.
Tell us what is to come hereafter,
that we may know that you are gods;
do good, or do harm,
that we may be dismayed and terrified.
Behold, you are nothing,
and your work is less than nothing;
an abomination is he who chooses you.”

[ISAIAH 41:21-24]

It is interesting that the Prophets often spoke of the idols as “nothings,” a somewhat literal translation of the underlying Hebrew. Jeremiah writes:

“There is none like you, O LORD;
you are great, and your name is great in might.
Who would not fear you, O King of the nations?
For this is your due;
for among all the wise ones of the nations
and in all their kingdoms
there is none like you.
They are both stupid and foolish;
the instruction of idols is but wood!”

[JEREMIAH 10:6-8]

“The instruction of idols—literally, *nothings*—is but wood.” How devastating; how degrading!

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God, through Moses, lamented,

“They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols [with their *nothings*].
So, I will make them jealous with those who are no people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.”

[DEUTERONOMY 32:21]

The writer of the Kings notes that God judged Israel because Baasha and Elah provoked the LORD God of Israel with their idols, with their *nothings* [see 1 KINGS 16:5-13]. Likewise, the LORD God judged Israel because Omri acted deceitfully. The writer states, “Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did more evil than all who were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in the sins that he made Israel to sin, provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols (by their *nothings*)” [1 KINGS 16:25, 26].

Having appealed to the Pentateuch, the writings and the prophets to demonstrate that idols have no real existence, the Apostle reminds the Corinthians that there is but One God. Moses, in the Pentateuch, taught people of God’s singular existence. Moses wrote, “To you (Israel) it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him” [DEUTERONOMY 4:35]. Soon after making this affirmation, God spoke again through Moses. “Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other” [DEUTERONOMY 4:39].

In a series of statements, the LORD God iterates this truth through Isaiah, when He says,

“I am the LORD, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God.”

[ISAIAH 45:5]

“For thus says the LORD,
who created the heavens
(he is God!),
who formed the earth and made it
(he established it;
he did not create it empty,
he formed it to be inhabited!):
‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’”

[ISAIAH 45:18]

“Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.”

[ISAIAH 45:22]

Paul emphasises this essential truth for the Corinthians, and consequently he emphasises this truth for us, when he writes, “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:6].

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I have mentioned in earlier sermons delivered from this pulpit, how I would hear the Shema recited as I walked the halls of the Einstein College of Medicine. The Shema is the prayer of pious Jews which begins, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” [DEUTERONOMY 6:4].

Knowledge of God, and thus, knowledge of what He has done for us, should lead us to humbly accept that He is sovereign. Because He is sovereign, reigning over all things, and assuredly reigning over the congregation of the faithful, we should treat one another within the assembly with consideration and gentleness. Do you know God? Do you understand Him character? If so, then you will know that one is not a Christian because they were born that way. Neither is one a Christian because they have undergone a rite or participated in a ritual. Knowing God, you will know that one is a Christian when they are born from above and into the Family of God through faith in the Son of God. This is the consistent teaching of the Word!

Writing in the encyclical we have received as the Letter to the Church in Ephesus, Paul says, “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:8-10].

The passage with which I conclude almost every message speaks of God’s salvation. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation” [ROMANS 10:9, 10].

When a jailer in Philippi pleaded with the apostles to tell him how to be saved, they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” [ACTS 16:31].

When a crowd of people sought Jesus after He had fed the multitude, the Master said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” [JOHN 6:29].

We do not become Christians because of parentage or heritage. We do not become Christians because we have united with an organisation, even if it is a religious organisation. We do not become Christians because we accept a creed. We are not Christians because we submit to a rite. We are Christians because Christ the Lord has set us free from condemnation and placed His Spirit in us. Therefore, our sins are forgiven and we are received into God’s Family. Here, there are no superior or inferior followers of the Christ. All Christians alike are redeemed individuals. Each Christian is recipient of the grace of the Living God. Each Christian has the Spirit of God living within his/her life.

This is the basis for the Apostle’s admonition to those who seek to follow the Master, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” [COLOSSIANS 3:2-4]. Focus on that third verse: “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

How true is the Apostle’s statement of the life of the child of the Living God! “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:20].

Indeed, “The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:14, 15]. Amen. Amen, indeed!

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CONSIDERATION FOR THE WEAK EXPECTED — “Not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:7, 8].

Despite the intuitive knowledge each follower of the Christ now possesses, some Christians still struggle with the past. Consequently, there are Christians who are wounded by the actions of other believers who enjoy freedom in the matter under scrutiny. It is not because there exist degrees of freedom, it is because the past has left an indelible mark on many followers of the Christ. There are Christians who have been delivered from a life of dissipation; they cannot treat actions they associate with the past in a casual or nonchalant fashion. Some followers of Christ, having been saved out of a life of slavery to alcohol can be deeply offended by the freedom other Christians have to drink alcohol. It is all well and good to say that the one who is offended should “man up” and learn to tolerate the freedom of others. However, Paul stresses the responsibility to employ freedom responsibly.

I remind you that the same Apostle who admonished, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” [GALATIANS 5:1], also wrote, “You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” [GALATIANS 5:13]. Do you imagine you are the stronger Christian because your freedom is not compromised? Then, you have responsibility to consider your fellow saint! Can you not forego even one meal without your glass of wine for the sake of your fellow believer? Will you really insist on the right to enjoy a cooler even though it crushes a brother or sister in Christ? Who is the one acting in love in this instance?

There are Christians who were saved out of a life of abuse, and they are deeply wounded by thoughtless acts or unthinking comments fellow Christians make. Perhaps we should take seriously our responsibility to know one another, avoiding words or actions that open old wounds. Perhaps there exists believers who are prone to depreciate the wounded Christian, but in that instance, who is acting in love? Should we not take to heart the admonition of the Master, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” [JOHN 13:34, 35].

Early in my ministry a wise pastor advised me to always remember that I would be preaching to wounded people. The secret pain many Christians carry cannot be set aside for some. They remember things they did before they came to Faith. Paul struggled with the knowledge of his choices and his actions before he came to faith. Remember his words to Timothy in his first missive? “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” [1 TIMOTHY 1:15, 16].

Writing these same Corinthians, Paul will testify of himself, “I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” He recognised the heinous nature of his sinful actions when he was unsaved; and his previous life distressed him. However, he did not wallow in the wickedness of his past; rather, he focused on the grace of God and the mercies of Christ toward him. He testified, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:9, 10].

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The tribalism that marks so much of contemporary society seems to mark the churches far more often than we could imagine. A sense of smugness often invades the life of the faithful. We anathematise fellow Christians because they are too enthusiastic, or not enthusiastic enough. At other times we look down on others because they worship differently from the way in which we worship the Son of God. Perhaps we need to hear the words of the Master spoken when some of the disciples were intent on shutting down what they saw as competition.

“John said to [Jesus], ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us’” [MARK 9:38-40]. There’s a novel concept! “The one who is not against us is for us.” Think of that! Wearing different labels and part of the same team!

During an earlier ministry in the Lower Mainland of the province, one of my closest friends in service to the Lord was an Anglican priest. He was what some have described as “high church,” wearing cassock and broad brim hat. It was an education for me to discover that Bob loved God, though the expression of his worship differed from mine. The Master was teaching me to see devotion and not focus on the expression of that devotion. I still recall with some joy the day Bob announced to me that he was planning “an evangelical weekend” for his parish. The use of the term in that manner was unusual in my church tradition, but Bob’s intent was to issue an invitation to faith in Christ.

Paul exults in freedom, and in our text the Apostle does not depreciate the freedom that “stronger Christians” may enjoy. He does remind those who think of themselves as qualified as “stronger Christians” to accept responsibility to avoid wounding their weaker brothers. In this vein, the Apostle will write, “Take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so, by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:9-12]. The admonition is iterated elsewhere when the Apostle writes, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves” [PHILIPPIANS 2:3 CSB].

Each Christian is responsible to ensure that his or her freedom is exercised responsibly. Each of us must accept responsibility for one another. To the Romans, Paul will instruct believers, “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” [ROMANS 14:1-9].

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Recall Paul's earlier word to the Romans: "By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" [ROMANS 12:3-5].

Permit me to conclude with this one word to my fellow saints. The words serve to bind together what Paul had written the Corinthians. In the Ephesian Letter, the Apostle has written, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" [EPHESIANS 5:1, 2].

Can it be that we have exalted ourselves against other believers? Can it be that we have tolerated a sense of superiority when we think of other Christians for whom Christ died? I suspect that there is room for repentance among many of God's choice saints. Repentance will not be a bitter experience if we turn from pursuing our own desires to again focus on how we can honour the Risen Son of God. I call on each one who is a follower of the Saviour to seek His glory, even today. Amen.