

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, January 31, 2021

Is It Worth It?

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

8:1 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

8:2 Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge;

8:3 but anyone who loves God is known by him.

8:4 Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one."

8:5 Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as in fact there are many gods and many lords--

8:6 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.

8:7 It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

8:8 "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

8:9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

8:10 For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?

8:11 So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.

8:12 But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

8:13 Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

For so many decisions are based on a cost-benefit analysis. As the name implies, those who make decisions this way add up the benefits of a course of action and then compare these with the costs associated with it. The “payback period” is the time it takes for benefits to repay costs. We may be surprised that Paul uses a form of cost-benefit analysis when he addresses the church-in-conflict in Corinth.

Christians in Corinth had to figure out how to live out their faith in the midst of a city and culture in which many faiths and beliefs were being practiced. While it is certain that these religious differences were the cause of some tension and discord in the culture and city, with competing claims of truth, knowledge, and piety, we learn that tensions rooted in these differences also existed among the Christians. In this case, there were differences of belief and practice as to whether Christians could or should eat meat that had been sacrificed to other gods. One camp espoused that since they did so with the full knowledge and confidence that there was only one true God, any rituals that had been performed in worship to some other false god in the process of butchering and meat preparation were irrelevant and beyond their concern. The other camp felt to partake of such meat was blasphemous and irreverent. Paul essentially asks, “Is it worth it?” While eating of the meat is lawful, is eating it worth the risk of possibly causing another Christian to be distracted, vexed, or turned off to the point of disunity.

Lately, there has been much talk about personal liberties, even down to the wearing of face masks when the most reliable scientific research at the moment shows the benefit of doing so. In the spirit of Paul’s advice and teaching, it seems that a cost-benefit analysis is in order. Is one’s personal liberty worth the risk of jeopardizing the health of others?

Often differences in community have a way of becoming exaggerated and distorted to levels that usually do not warrant the amount of attention and energy spent. Paul suggests that we pause and truly examine the cost. So many of the choices we make in our faith walk and life in general depend on what we value.

Being right and winning the debate—how much is it worth? Securing victory for your side—how much is it worth? My personal likes, dislikes, and liberties—how much are they worth?

The well-being of our neighbor—how much is it worth? Unity in diversity—how much is it worth?
Loving as Christ loves—is it worth it?

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—Reflecting on the scripture, what might you be called to sacrifice or let go of for the physical or spiritual well-being of another?

PRAY:

Gracious God, may I never become a stumbling-block in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ or place an obstacle in their path, because of the freedom I have found in you. Thank you that there is nothing in heaven or earth that can separate us from your love, which is in Christ Jesus. May I be sensitive to the Law of the Spirit of life in him, which has freed me from the law of sin and death. Help me to carefully consider the needs and sensitivities of others before my own, for your greater glory - this I ask in Jesus' name, AMEN.

adapted from: <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/1-Corinthians/8>

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, what can you do to help you in the process of letting go on behalf of others? Do a cost-benefit analysis and try starting a conversation with someone close or once close to you with whom you have had a disagreement. In this Season after the Epiphany, do what you can to show the urgency of now; help others and yourself by practicing social distancing as much as possible, washing your hands often, and wearing face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

Song: As we consider 1 Corinthians 8:6.

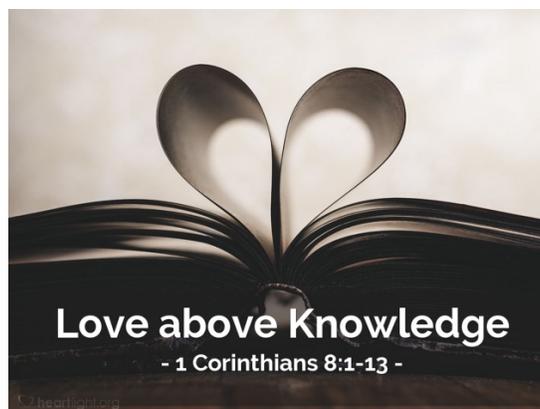
Gloria Patri (Glory Be to the Father)
AMEC Hymnal, #626

Glor-y be to the Fa-ther
and to the Son and to the Ho-ly Ghost;
As it was in the be-gin-ning, is now, and ev-er shall be,
world with-out end. A-men, A-men.

Alternative Song: *If I Can Help Somebody*, performed by the Aeolians of Oakwood University and arranged by Nathan Carter: https://youtu.be/kZMGS_lq1eQ

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.