



A Spiritual Encouragement Message July 17, 2020

All of Us Possess Knowledge

by Derrick Victor

Who thought in 2020 we'd be arguing over masks, gathering, and social distancing? Certainly not me! In fact, I'm a hugger. I didn't even know what social distancing was before all of this. I'd much rather socially suffocate! Yet, here we are. In the middle of a year that has caused tremendous difficulty for each and every person in our country and our world.

If our timeline made any sense or had any real direction, I'd go through the number of events that have transpired this year. Unfortunately, that would be the entirety of the article. So, alas, I am resigned to mentioning the most important facet; our weekly gathering. We've done only online services, socially distanced and masked services inside, and now we move towards a parking lot (socially distanced) service. The changes alone can drive a person mad!

Yet, there is something bigger and more nefarious at play here, than the many changes we face. That bigger aspect of all of this is the way we will interact with one another throughout the process. It seems, as Paul said, **"we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up."** (1 Cor. 8:1)

Some people possess "knowledge" concerning the virus and wish to take extra precautions to avoid such serious illness. Other people possess "knowledge" that the numbers are skewed and masks "do not work!" Naturally, when there are two opposing views of thought, we will encounter them within the body of Christ here at Johnson Ave. Having these two differing views is no trouble at all. What we do with our two opposing views is what really matters!

You see, in **1 Corinthians 8**, Paul was describing two groups of people. On the one hand, you have the people who **know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one."** (1 Cor. 8:4). Therefore, they eat meat not defiling their conscience and recognize the futility of idolatry. On the other hand, **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.** (1 Cor.

8:7). These two opposing points of view came in stark contrast with one another. The two cannot be fully reconciled, because that is not how ideas and thoughts work. Sometimes, people are unable to get past a position they hold, whether right or wrong. In this instance, their weak conscience will not allow them to contradict their thought. Frankly, they should not defile their conscience and go against what they believe to be true (**Rom. 14:23**).

So, how does Paul tell them to address the issue? First, he says that the food itself will not commend them to God (**1 Cor. 8:8**). Which means that with or without the food, you remain in the same standing before God. It does not enhance or take away from your faith, one way or the other. He then, encourages the strong not to allow their “right” to eat meat to become a stumbling block for the weak. What’s interesting is that he even discusses perception.

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? (1 Cor. 8:10)

Paul discusses the early advances of peer pressure. We all know and understand how this works. We hold some view or belief. Yet, when others are around who mock or disregard our beliefs, we have a tendency, at times, to go against the view so that we can “fit in”. Herein lies the danger of constantly sharing strong opinions. We discourage, divide, and create chaos by voicing our beliefs and opinions regularly and loudly. We have influence!

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the text is yet to be observed in our message. Here it is. Paul does not tell the weaker brother to “get woke”, “wake up”, “Stop being a sheep”, or any other offensive and hurtful language. In fact, Paul doesn’t even address the weaker brother, recognizing that they are not weak by choice, they are weak by conscience, time, and experience. Lord willing, in time, they will grow! Instead, Paul addresses the strong!

He says that though you have this “knowledge” that idols are worthless, and you can eat meat, you will destroy your brother by forcing your knowledge onto their weaker conscience. Then, he lays down the sacrificial hammer!

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Cor. 8:13)

Follow with me here. Paul acknowledges that idols are silly and non-existent. He acknowledges that one can eat meat and not go against God or their conscience. He even acknowledges that those who cannot eat meat are “weak” in the faith. Yet, in the midst of all of that, Paul’s encouragement is not for the weak to get strong, but for the strong to bear the burden. For the strong to “never eat meat again” for the sake of their brother.

In our climate of dissension, government mandates, and shutdowns, there are many opinions and people who “possess knowledge”. As I said, some believe the virus is being overly pushed and the real threat is minimal. Others believe that the mask is a necessity and we should be very careful! Here’s where the rubber meets the road. Neither side matters...

It is out of our hands. We have government leaders who are in charge of making the mandates and

decisions for our society. We have elders who are serving and praying for the best course of action for our congregation. If you fancy yourself as the strong brother or sister, consider with me once again, neither side matters... What matters is that we are willing to demonstrate obedience and submission to our leaders for the sake of our brothers and sisters. Let's paraphrase some of Paul's message and adapt it to our modern circumstance.

"Perhaps wearing a mask is pointless. However, if wearing a mask can stop my brother or sister from stumbling, I will wear a mask as long as necessary".

Folks, agree or disagree. Remember, we have all been bought with the blood of Christ. You are not worth more than me, nor I you. Let's work towards what builds up, rather than what tears down! It should also be noted that I am not deciding which side of the debate is "weak or strong". Frankly, the truth is too convoluted at this point. I will, however, say that strong people sacrifice for others. I love you, and God loves you!