

1 Corinthians 8: 9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

Prayer: Lord of Heaven and Earth, we bow before you this morning as your humble sons and daughters. We thank you for adopting us into your family and enlightening our hearts and minds to believe and understand your word of truth. Keep us Lord in your love that we might use our new knowledge and faith in your Word for the benefit of others and not selfishly or prideful. Move us Lord to think of others first as you thought of us first when you went to the cross for our salvation. Amen.

Introduction: The other day I was stopped at a red light. All of a sudden, I hear a horn getting blasted repeatedly from the truck behind me. This guy is shouting at me to go. My daughter says, “Yeah Dad, you can turn right on red.” I replied, “If no one else is coming.” The truth is you may turn right on red. You do have that freedom to go even when the light is red. But here is the kicker; you must yield to others. You must give up that right of way to others. Even though the man behind was honking at me to go, even though my daughter thought I should I go that doesn’t mean I have to go. For the safety of oncoming traffic and for the safety of my family I gave up my right of way and I did not turn right on red. I can see the faces now; “I would’ve been honking at pastor too.” The apostle Paul’s point to us Christians today is that just because we can doesn’t mean we should. The apostle Paul reminds us that God wants us to love our fellow believers and the world of sinners just as he did. And this love is to show itself by giving up the right of way and yielding to others.

Yield to others out of love for Christ!

Knowledge without love is “me first” arrogance

Knowledge with love is “others first” freedom

1) “Me first” Arrogance

Do you like Asian food? Have you ever been to a Japanese restaurant and seen a statue like this - a Buddha or Shiva statue or maybe the elephant looking one. Those are the false idols of Buddhists and Hindu followers that the food has been blessed by and that the owners or chefs have prayed to for a successful meal and business. Now you know, will you continue to eat there? If it is good, food, right? Well the Christians in Corinth had a big problem in their church. In the city of Corinth the best steaks were for sale from the temple market. They would sell the best portions of meat that had been sacrificed to the Greek gods. Now Paul says that the Corinthians had the right information, the right knowledge. The truth that they knew as fact was that there is only one God and one Savior from Sin the creator of the universe, God the father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no other god and there are no other gods; just one the triune one. Therefore there is no difference between a steak prepared for Buddha or for Shiva, Zeus or Apollo. They are nothing. A good steak is a good steak (period). Now that doesn’t sound like much of a problem does it? We can all eat food from the Buddhist and Hindu temples. Food sacrificed and used in pagan worship is no thing different from pork and beef from the farmers and ranchers in Oakfield.

But and here is the big but....recent converts to Christianity who grew up their whole lives in that temple worship of false gods were still accustomed to thinking that those idols were something. These recent young in the faith and understating of God's Word were appalled that Christians would eat the meat that was used for pagan worship practices. They still viewed that meat differently. So when they saw those Christians devouring the Zeus and Apollo steaks they thought it didn't matter what god you worshipped or worse that Christians didn't care what god you worshipped. Even some of those new converts were caused to sin and fall away from Christ, loosing their faith entirely.

The Christians in Corinth had the freedom to eat all the pagan blessed meat they wanted to, because there are no other gods out there. False gods are nothing. The Corinthian Christians were sinning because they were filled with arrogance in their knowledge and did not combine their knowledge with God's love. When I think of the Greek culture I think of the philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The Greeks admired knowledge, logic and the skills of oration and debate – they were deep thinkers. They held knowledge up as the highest of pursuits. Paul even says to the Corinthians, "We all posses knowledge." Paul brought the truth, the true knowledge of heaven and hell, sin and grace, sinners and Savior, Jesus Christ to them. They all had the knowledge of the one true God and His one and only Son our one and only Savior from sin death and the devil. But he turns it around on them and says, 'Which is better to know God or be known by God?' Being recognized and known by God is the most important and greatest honor ever. A while back I was at a conference and I spotted a couple of the members of the band Koine. AS they were walking out of the conference room I thought they were headed to talk with Pres. Schroeder of the WELS. When to my shock they both came to talk to me, 'Pastor Goelzer, wanted to say hi and see how things were doing in Oakfield. We enjoyed playing there for your church.'" I was surprised and honored to be recognized and known.

Knowledge of God's Word is used by the devil to give us big heads and arrogant hearts. We must remember to combine the knowledge of the truth which we all posses, with the truth of God's love. The truth is that we are sinful like all people – those who have the bible and those who don't are all the same in that they are sinful and in need of a savior. All people Lutherans, Catholics and pagans are in the same boat of sin. All of us are born with a sinful nature that is dead, unable to please God, unable to understand God's Word, unable to even choose to believe in God's Word. Because of God's loving mercy to us, by the power of His spirit through the Word of God he gave us faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. The Holy Spirit turned the light on in our dark sinful minds and hearts so that now we see, now we understand now we know and believe what God's love has done for us sinners. God came to us and now through Jesus Christ knows us by name recognize us and call us by name to serve in His family.

2) "Others first" Freedom

Even as Christians, who have been give a new heart and new mind, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we still have weaknesses, sinful traps we fall into. No one is perfect in their understanding or in their practice of living for the Lord. We all need God's patience and mercy to continue growing our understanding and belief in God's Word. I'm reminded of a man in the O.T. that is called the Father of all believers. Abraham – he showed such great faith when the Lord tested him and he proved to be the genuine article a believer in God's Word when he sacrificed his one and only son Isaac to the Lord. Abraham also showed his weakness of faith

in God's Word, His trust in His provider and protector. When Abraham went to Egypt with his beautiful wife Sara, he lied and played Sara off as his sister, so that He would protect his own skin. Abraham showed that even after he became a believer in God's promise of a Savior, he still had weaknesses of faith and fell into temptations and traps.

Abraham and his weaknesses remind all of us that we are not self-sufficient. We need God's help and the help of our fellow Christians if we are ever going to accomplish great works for God's glory and the growth of His family. We need to combine knowledge with love so we put others first. Simply put when the Corinthian were deciding whether they should eat the meat sacrificed to idols or not they didn't care about what others thought about it. They could do it, so they were going to do it.

Luther summed it up when he wrote in 1520: *"The Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. The Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."* In other words, while we are free in so many things, we use this freedom carefully and we use it with others in mind. That is, we love others more than our own freedom, more than ourselves. So true is this, that in the case of the Sacrament being given in one kind, Luther advised that this be fixed slowly, even though it was Biblically wrong, because people weren't able yet to understand why after hundreds of years of seeing the priest only consume the blood of Christ, now they could. There did, of course, come a time when Luther said they could wait no longer. But until that moment, he advised, with Paul, that the freedom of those with knowledge ought to yield to the consciences of those who are weak, so that they don't fall into sin.

God asked Cain, "Where's your brother?" Cain's reply, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer in Jesus' words is, "Yes, love your neighbor as yourself, especially your blood brother and sisters." You are your brother's keeper. Every decision we make is not just whether we can or not but whether it will be blessing to others or not. Some questions in life are easily answered by God's Word. Should I use God's name to curse people or things to hell? No, 2nd commandment – You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Other questions in life are not so easy. We call them adiaphron. These deal with things that God has neither forbidden nor commanded us about. At the congregational level, should we pay off our debt first or take out a loan for more gospel ministry? Should we build a new church first or a new school first? Then at a personal level - Should I go to Potawatomi and gamble at the blackjack table? Should I go to the bar and have a beer? You have the right of way, the freedom to do those things. But that doesn't answer the question yet, we need to ask ourselves what about others?

Can you go for a night of blackjack and slots at Potawatomi, yes we have the Christian freedom to do that according to God's will for all of our possessions. But what if your friend has a problem with wasting his money, with greed and coveting? Can you go to the bar and have a beer? Yes. But what if your friend has a problem with drinking too much, getting drunk?

Jesus summed up 7 of the 10 commandments with one phrase – Love your neighbor as yourself. That's a lot easier to remember than 7 commandments. Love others first before your own freedom to do as you please. NIV Luke 16:10 "Whoever can be **trusted with** very **little** can also be **trusted with** much, and whoever is dishonest **with** very **little** will also be dishonest **with** much. If the Lord cannot trust us to use the small resources he has given to us for his Kingdom work and the good of others, do you think he will give us more resources? Who do

you think has more freedom the man who makes \$45,000/year but gives \$15,000 year to Kingdom work or the man who makes \$30,000 and gives none to Kingdom Work? In giving our best to the Lord, we exercise our freedom from sin, death and the devil that have only this world on their mind. We are truly faithful and joy filled! God loves a cheerful giver.

You can turn right on red. You have that freedom. Next time remember it doesn't matter so much if you want to turn right on red as if it will cause anyone harm? If the way is clear go ahead and turn right on red. Next time you have one of those Christian freedom questions, ask yourself if the way is clear. If not yield your freedom out of love for Christ and His family.