

# Love • Liberty

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MUSIC: SHAWN HOELSCH

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The Gospel commends God's self-limiting love for you and me  
1 Corinthians 8:7-13

## The Function of the Conscience

The conscience is our internal moral "umpire", approving or condemning our behavior based on our own internal rulebook. (see Rom. 2:14-15.) It is not infallible: like a baseball umpire it "calls 'em like it sees 'em".

Unless informed by the Spirit—God's standards of goodness—consciences can be **sickly** (through lack of knowledge, see 1 Cor. 8:7), **seared** (through repeated violation, see 1 Tim. 4:2), **defiled** (overly self-condemning, see Titus 1:15), or **evil**, (commending our additions to Christ's perfect sacrifice, see Heb. 10:19-23)

**Pro Tip:** Love "fulfills the law" (Rom.13:8,10), so loving action is "pre-approved" by the umpire!

## Review:

- Paul's letter addresses distortions of the Gospel in the Corinthian church
- vv.1-3: Love, not mere knowledge, regulates the use of our Christian freedom
- Vv.4-6: Our new relationship with God determines how we make ethical decisions

## An insecure conscience produces unwarranted condemnation

**1 Cor.8:7** *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. 8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.*

## Loveless, flaunted liberty by those "in the know" has severe consequences:

### 1) Infirm Christian siblings are emboldened to disloyalty

**1 Cor.8:9** *But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 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? 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.*

### 2) The loveless exercise of knowledge is a violation against Christ

**1 Cor. 8:12** *Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*

**Phil. 2:4-7** *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

## Christ's love is the driving motivation behind self-limitation

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

**1 Cor. 13:2,4-5** *... if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge... but have not love, I am 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...*

## Principles from Paul's letter

1. Knowledge in the church varies from person to person so love for others must lead.
2. Believers in a church will have varying understandings of their freedom in Christ.
3. Extreme exercises of knowledge without love are destructive to God's family.
4. Our "rights" must never encourage a Christian sibling to return to their "B.C." life.
5. Recalling Jesus' mission and example deflates "puffed uppers" and promotes love.
6. Foregoing a right is a small thing in order to build up others in the love of Christ

## Reflection/Discussion:

1) Share examples of things some consciences might condemn in which the gospel gives freedom. Share examples of loveless "knowledge" that is/has been harmful to the Christian community in recent days.

2) How does Paul characterize "stumbling" in 1 Cor. 8:9-10? How is "stumbling" different from a mere difference of opinion on a particular issue?

3) Think of current events or "hot button" topics of opinion. How does the love of Jesus control our response to each other? (Rom.14:3)

4) As God's children, we are called to share our Father's values and attitudes. Identify elements in Paul's description of Christ's "journey" in Phil. 2:1-11 that should inform how we think of our own lives within the VBC family?

## SONGS

"Come Thou Fount" - Robert Robinson

"God Is For Us" - James Ferguson, James Tealy, Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson

"Cornerstone" - Eric Liljero, Reuben Morgan, Edward Mote, Jonas Myrin

"Living Hope" - Brian Johnson and Phil Wickham

## BUDGET

GIVING LAST WEEK: \$24,556.54  
WEEKLY NEED: \$35,272.00

YTD GIVING: \$1,256,916.04  
YTD GENERAL NEED: \$1,340,336.00