

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
I Corinthians 8:1-13 (Series B)
“To Know or To Be Known”
February 1, 2009

Grace, mercy, peace to you from our Heavenly Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior, and King. Amen.

“Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.” We know it’s true that Jesus loves us. We know it’s true He suffered, He died, and He was raised from the dead, all because He loves us. We know what His love for us is all about. We know all of this because the Bible tells us so.

Not only do we know all this, but we are convicted of it. We’re sure of it, we trust it, and believe it to be true for each and every one of us. And, we gladly, with smiles on our faces and on our hearts, rest upon such knowledge made known to us by God.

None of us, I’m sure, would ever deny the importance of knowing about God. All that we need to know is right in His Word. We teach our children to grow in the knowledge and in the truth of the grace of Jesus Christ. We adults attend our Bible study, we do our devotions at home, and we listen to our Christian radio talk shows.

Philippians 1:9- “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,...” Colossians 1:10- “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” I Peter 2:2- “Like newborn infants, long for spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation...”

Friends, it’s important to grow in the knowledge of the One who gave us life. No question about it.

Let us take a moment and consider our Epistle reading from I Corinthians, chapter 8. To give a little context, something dreadfully wrong was going on here. Sure, these Christians knew of God’s love for them. They knew what their Lord, Jesus Christ, endured for them on the Cross of Calvary for all of them. And, I’m sure, that they were convicted of this truth and trusted that it was true for them too. But, something was going on.

Well, let’s consider the context of this reading. These Christians who Paul was writing this letter to were in a Greek region filled with pagans and

idol worship. It was so prevalent that going to the market to buy some meat, one might happen to buy some meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. How would this make any of us feel about the meat we buy at our local grocery store? A little uneasy about eating it?

The meat an animal brought to a Greek temple for idol sacrifice was divided into several parts- a part as an offering on the altar, another part usually eaten at a sacrificial meal, some was given to priests, some taken home. Then there was, sometimes, a portion of this meat sold in the meat market.

Now, there were some Christians, some very devout and convicted Christians, who were buying this meat, ignoring the fact that it was meat from an idol sacrifice, taking it home and eating it. What nerve, huh? Didn't they realize that this was wrong?

Actually, Paul made clear to them, as we find in chapter 10 of this same New Testament book, these Christians were free to eat this meat. The reason...because it did not belong to the idol but to the Lord. Paul's reasoning behind this, and he was right, idols didn't really exist. Their statues and images do, but idols themselves are not real beings. These Christians were able to relax and know that this meat never belonged to anyone except the Lord who was providing it to these people to eat.

So, the Christians, relaxed in this truth, and who really rejoicing that this was food provided them by the One true God, went ahead. If this meat was purchased and eaten for the right reasons and with full thankfulness in their hearts to God for giving it to them, there was no wrong in what they were doing.

The one thing they were guilty of, and this was Paul's concern, was that they were causing other Christians who didn't understand this to stumble. Some of the Corinthian Christians had just recently been rescued from idolatry and brought to faith in the true God through Jesus Christ. And, they were feeling uncomfortable about any contact with any aspect or reminder of former idol worship. Paul knew these new Christians were distressed by the example of their fellow, more experienced brethren. These more experienced Christians knew God did not forbid the eating of this meat. Their consciences were not bothered by this. But the consciences of the newer Christians were quite disturbed. They had not yet obtained, or been taught, that this was alright.

Wouldn't you think that these more learned, more experienced Christians would have taken this into consideration and not have confused the others? Instead, they went ahead with no regard as to how it was affecting others. They did not consider that, while they were eating meat provided to them by the One true God, others were seeing them eating meat from an idol sacrifice.

Friends, knowledge about God, what He says, and who He is to us, is important. But, when that same knowledge, which no one Christian acquires on his own, but only by the grace of God, is used negligently and at the expense of the comfort believers, something is dreadfully wrong. What is wrong is that it is used for a reason other than God gave that knowledge in the first place. Suddenly one's knowledge of God is detached from the love of God. And, really, what is knowledge of a loving God without the love of God in the heart? Clearly, there is a right reason and a wrong reason for using our knowledge of God.

What is the right reason then? What do we use the knowledge God has given us about Himself to be used for?

Well, friends, the answer to this question is: while it is important to know about God, it is more important to be known by God. We would have no knowledge of God, of His love for us, and what He did for us through His Son if God did not first know us.

Let's take a quiet moment to consider this. Here we are, with all our troubles, our fears, our struggles in life. Here we all are facing the worst fear of all, death. And, there is our Creator, an almighty God, whose ways go beyond anything we can understand. Who should have just turned His back to us because of our rebellion against Him. But, who has not. With all the infinite ways God could keep Himself entertained He looks upon us with love. And, He smiles, because He knows us. He knows us because the blood of His own Son washed us clean from all that would keep Him from knowing us, from looking upon us in favor.

Now that's something to rejoice at isn't it? All the things our Almighty God has done for each of us. Knowing of His knowledge of us is something incredible.

And, friends, once we have heard this great news our hearts and minds become fixated on...God. We suddenly can't help but notice His love for us. Suddenly, we want to serve Him. We want to do all we can for

Him. And, there is something else. We suddenly become aware that this same God loves others just as much as He loves us.

Yes, being God's children means we are free. Free from the guilt of sin, free from our fear of death, of course. But, we are also free to worship Him. We can sing, we can come here together, and we can even choose the color of the carpet here and the time and day we come together. We are free to choose how to dress. The new freedoms we have in Christ Jesus are endless. Yet, the reason we choose what we do, to serve Him, is to glorify Him who gave us this wonderful freedom.

And, even as we grow in our knowledge of Him who first knew us, we may do so for the reason because we sincerely want to know more and more about Him. And, we also do so that we have plenty to tell others about. Ultimately, our knowledge of God is nothing to be proud of but, rather, thankful for. So thankful, that we want others to know too. And, so we learn more and more because we want to share all we can with others.

I Peter 2:16- "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God." And, joyfully live in this new freedom, realizing that this same love of God that has freed us frees others. Just as I Thessalonians 5:11 states- "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

Friends, I am a firm believer, that if we, as God's children, focus in on the spiritual needs of everyone else around us (whether they be family, friends, co-workers), learn what they need to know of God's knowledge about them, and share it with them, we can't help but selflessly grow in the process.

We have been liberated. Liberated to grow in knowledge of God, to share with others, and to serve God by serving others the way and for the reason He wants us to serve others. Amen.