

**Further Reflection and Discussion Material**  
**The Church THEN and NOW**  
**Social Challenges (1 Cor 8:1-13)**

**Background:**

In Ben's sermon last week he outlined for us a challenge faced by the Corinthian Church. Believers were not only consuming food that had been sacrificed to idols, but encouraging others to do so as well. This occurrence took place both in the marketplace where individuals would purchase meat, but also within the pagan temples (where believers were still attending). For some of the believers, they saw no problem with this, as they understood that there was only one true god. But for others who were also being encouraged in this behaviour, they saw this as their own participation in pagan worship, and struggled greatly with this fact.

As Paul responds to this particular issue that's causing obvious division within the church, he provides explanation as to how the church ought to live in their new found **FREEDOM**. Before we begin to explore chapter 8, it's helpful to remember that this passage is part of a larger idea, as Paul unpacks first 'freedom in social spaces' (ch 8), then 'freedom as an apostle' (ch 9), and finally freedom in religious spaces (ch 10).

**Intro Questions**

- What are some challenges that new believers might face today as they step into their new found freedom?
- Earlier this year we explored at GWAC the idols of our culture today. What do you recall of this series, and the six idols that we focused on?
  1. Comfort
  2. Greed
  3. Control
  4. Approval
  5. Power
  6. Family

**Purchasing Meat In Corinth**

If you lived in Corinth during the time of Paul, it would have been extremely difficult to abstain from any interaction with pagan worship. The types of places where you would likely gather socially were exactly the same places where you would expect to find sacrifices offered. Even food purchased at the market would have likely been offered first as a sacrifice at one of the temples of Corinth, thus making it almost impossible to abstain completely if you wanted to eat meat!

**Freedom In Social Spaces** - Read through together 1 Cor 8:1-13

- What stands out to you?
- What questions do you have of this passage?
- Are there any imperatives that we ought to take note of in this passage?

As Paul writes to the church in Corinth, he provides three pieces of advice to them regarding what real freedom looks like in a world that pursues idols that instead lead to slavery.

### **1. Real Freedom Pursues Love (1 Cor 8:1-3)**

The challenge that some of the believers had in Corinth, was that they believed that Christian conduct is predicated on “knowledge”, and that this knowledge gives them the freedom to act as they wish.

- What do you think Paul means when he speaks of “knowledge” that puffs up, while love builds up? How would you explain this?
- Where might we see “knowledge” causing harm to others in our wider church context?
- Paul says that “those who love God are known by God”. Why do you think he phrases the sentence this way, instead of saying that “those who love God know God”?

### **2. Real Freedom Pursues Truth (1 Cor 8:4-8)**

It’s tempting to think that Paul might simply be suggesting that love rather than truth is all that is required for the believer. Yet Paul then explores what real truth, bound in love, really looks like. The “truth” of the Corinthian believers is incomplete, yet they failing to realise this fact.

- Where do we sometimes fail to realise that our knowledge is incomplete?
- Where have you seen your knowledge deepened in an area of your life and faith?
- What truth is at the centre of Paul’s explanation here in verses 4-8?

### **3. Real Freedom Pursues Freedom**

Real freedom ought to always bring about greater freedom, not simply for oneself, but for others too. Part of the Corinthian’s challenge was that they failed to realise that their personal freedom wasn’t the most important consideration, but that of the freedom of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Take a look forward to chapters 9 and 10, and consider how the freedom that Paul speaks of there might enhance our understanding of his teaching here in chapter 8.
- As you consider the idols studied within our earlier series, how might freedom in Christ provided freedom from these idols of today?
- In what ways today do you think that our “freedom” might impact upon the freedom of others if we were not careful?

### **Final Thoughts**

Ben spoke on Sunday of the temptation experienced by the Israelites to return to slavery in Egypt (Ex 16) after finding themselves seemingly stranded in the wilderness. In their moment of despair, they voiced something that we all face from time to time; that slavery is difficult to escape from, and easy to return to. We all find ourselves at times wanting to return to what once enslaved us, and willing to take others there with us.

- What idol of our day do you find most difficult to leave behind?
- In and of themselves, these idols are nothing but ‘good things’ that we have turned into ‘great things’. Is there a ‘freedom’ (a ‘good thing’) that you have chosen to give up for the sake of another?

### **As you have explored chapter 8 of the letter to the Corinthians...**

- Is there anything you have sensed God saying to you?
- What are you going to do about it?
- What does accountability look like and who will hold you accountable?