

From Knowledge to Love
1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Debates are always learning experiences for me. Listening to each side share their knowledge of the subject can be very educational, but, when a personal experience is shared I listen with different ears. My High School earth science teacher, Mr. Miller, gave the class the assignment of debating creation vs. evolution. We divided up into two teams and began our research. I was on the side of creation and we were determined to win. I remember the evolution side arguing how an explosion of gases reorganized the atmosphere. As a quiet reserved student, I didn't speak unless asked directly, until, I heard them talk about the explosion. I simply said, "Where did the gases come from? The bible says, 'In the beginning **God** created the heaven and the earth, the earth was a formless void....' I believe God create the gases that exploded." Others on my team shared their beliefs as well, needless to say, there was no arguing and we won the debate. Knowledge won the battle, but I wonder what would have happened had the question, "Who is this God and how do you know he exists" would have been asked? Paul's answer would be I know God because of the Christian acts of my family and friends. Knowledge is great, but putting our knowledge into loving practice is the purpose of a Christian.

As Christians, every aspect of our lives is demonstrating for others the love of Christ. Christians don't just set aside a time of their day, week, month, or year to say, "Today, I'm going to go show someone God loves them." A Christian's

behavior models God's love with every word and act even if it goes against traditions of the church. For example, Rev. Dr. Thomas Bramwell Welch was a Methodist minister and a dentist in the late 1860's. He, along with the church, had seen the harm alcohol could play in a person's life. Rev. Welch watched as his church members come to the table for communion and then later returned to the church in a drunken stupor. He, also, watched some choose to not partake in God's great feast because they knew one sip of alcohol would be detrimental to them.

As a result, Rev. Welch, chose to create a way to preserve the juice from the grape and bottle it, unfermented, to make communion available to all. His decision was based on the knowledge that everyone could come to the table, but the elements of the table were harmful to some of God's people. He put that knowledge to work through providing a safe taste of Christ's blood as an expression of love to his alcoholic neighbor. As he tried to share this with other congregations, he found great resistance. Can you imagine a church not making Christ's table a safe place for all to come and partake? The understanding of the Eucharist elements was to use the exact same elements that Jesus used which included wine. Therefore, the church leaders insisted the contents of the cup be wine; disregarding any expression of love to all their neighbors, even if it caused them harm. Rev. Welch took his knowledge of God's love, offered through the sacraments, and turned it into loving act for all God's people.

In our lesson today, Paul uses a similar dilemma to help the people of Corinth understand that knowledge alone isn't enough. Instead of wine or juice, his example is whether one should eat the leftover meat from the sacrifice. Regardless of the topic, Paul's concern is what others, who are of "weaker" faith (like those tempted by alcohol), will learn from our behaviors as Christians. A "weaker" faith for Paul are those who are just learning about their faith. In other scriptures, Paul refers to this same group of Christians as infants who are still eating only formula or children who are just learning their ABC's. As Christians who are further in our faith journey, we have the obligation to teach with our actions in addition to our words. Remember the old saying, "Do as I say, not as I do." Paul changes this to, "Do as I say and watch what I do."

Paul wanted to be very clear to the people of Corinth that their behaviors were being watched carefully by those who were searching for knowledge about their God. Paul believed that the best way to teach this knowledge was to put it in action by offering them God's love. After all, this was what Jesus modeled when he shared his final meal with his Disciples. First, Jesus taught the disciples, the significance of the bread and cup. Jesus broke the bread saying, "This is my body broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." Jesus spoke about how the hour was quickly coming that he would die for the sins of all. Throughout their ministry with Jesus, these men learned about how the world was broken but God's love would heal its brokenness. As the Disciples gathered

knowledge about how the world was broken by sin, they also watched as Jesus offered God's love to heal the hurt and pain of the broken. They watched Jesus turn knowledge into love.

The love Jesus spoke of was what we call the cup of salvation. After the meal was over, Jesus took the common cup, filled it with the common drink (wine), and described this cup as his blood that would be shed as a new covenant of God's love, grace, and mercy offered to all. Then, he shared the cup with the Disciples say, "This is my blood poured out for you, drink this in remembrance of me." Jesus had spent the last three years of his life teaching that knowledge and understanding came along with the actions of God's servants. We may not fully understand the reasons Christ died, rose, and ascended into heaven, but, we do know it was the only way God could show us the depth of God's love for us.

The Eucharistic meal is a sacrificial meal that moves from the altar into the world via your actions. You come to the table to received God's love, grace, and mercy, but, God is calling you to show this love, grace, and mercy to those you encounter in your world. I believe the beginning of this journey is to identify where you are on your own journey with God. This means taking an internal soul check of what you know about God and asking what else do I want to know. Your soul in relationship to God is like a small child learning to eat solid food, walk, talk, and read. Without a proper environment where there is

encouragement, support, and curiosity to grow, the mind and spirit is limited to simple basic information.

Recognizing your spiritual intellect is the first step. The second step is to decide how you can put your knowledge into practice. Transitioning from crawling to walking is done with trust, encouragement, support, and allowing oneself to fall and get backup to try again. This is where you, the church, comes into play. We are all at different places in our spiritual journey. Some have more knowledge and experience with God than others. Your voice, presence, and action within the walls of the church are the ones the “weak” in faith will come to for help. You are watched by those who want to know more about God or are questioning the existence of God. Likewise, you watch others that you believe should have a strong faith to find answers for yourself. What are you seeing? What are others seeing in you?

We live in a world where the debate is “Religion vs Spirituality: Can we be spiritual without a religious denominational association?” I believe the church is the safe place to come and explore what I believe, to ask questions, gain understanding and knowledge, as well as, the place to gather collectively and share God’s love with the world. The church is the place where I find food, encouragement, and support to help me grow stronger with God. As I interact with you, God’s children, I hear your experiences of God and join you as you offer God’s love, grace, and mercy to all. But, most of all, the church is where I

can experience God's grace, love, and mercy as I come to the table and eat the same meal as the Disciples and feel strength and courage directly from God. What wisdom would you have to offer for this debate? Where would you find support for your argument? The church isn't a perfect place, but it is a starting place for your journey with God. How are you putting your knowledge of God to use? Whose example are you following? Amen.