

Well we are in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 so if you have your Bibles turn there with me. And as you do, let me give you a two-minute mental on-ramp to get back into the flow of the book.

The Corinthian church is a very privileged church and a very gifted church but the sin of pride is threatening to undo it completely. And Paul is confronting that sneaky sin.

It has been leaking out in all sorts of ways.

- pride as expressed in personality cults
- Pride as expressed in wanting to be wise in the world's eyes and a reluctance to be a fool in the world's eyes
- pride in their sexually progressive views
- pride in their perceived rights to bring lawsuits against one another.

So selfishness and pride have been a big focus. Most recently in chapter 7 we learn that the opposite of pride isn't necessarily humility; it's being kingdom minded! And this kingdom-minded living extends clear down to the bones of who you are." And so all through chapter 7 Paul talks about singleness, marriage, widow, slave, free

as unique platforms for gospel ministry.

Now when we turn the page and get to chapter 8, we get a topic shift. He's going to continue to address pride but through an issue that was very current in their day. Any time the gospel penetrates a culture, the new believers have to wrestle with the implications of the gospel to the norms of culture. And in the case of the Corinthians, one of the issues at the very top of the list was food sacrificed to idols. Some in the church were participating in feasts in which meat that had been sacrificed to idols was being served to them. And for some, this was no issue. They had no scruples about it. They understood that lifeless statues can't spiritually poison meat. For others the participation was a violation of their conscience. They felt that participation in these events was being unfaithful to God.

So Paul is going to address this issue of meat sacrificed to idols but it's all part of this much greater issue of what to do with your Christian liberty that Paul will address clear into chapter 10.

The problem as we are going to see is that the Christians whose conscience was free were right. They were correct. It is true that lifeless idols can't spiritually poison meat. But the problem was they were using that truth to justify their unloving behavior. They were flaunting their freedom and it was causing others to struggle and stumble which is very unloving.

So Paul corrects this truth problem by giving them some Truth about Love.

1 Corinthians 8:1-3, Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge."

This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

So that's all the further we will go today. We will get much more involved in the actual details of this meat sacrificed to idols business in the weeks to come but today we are just going to establish the relationship between truth and love because this principle is going to work itself all through this upcoming section on Christian liberty. Now Paul begins by reminding them of the danger of intellectual pride.

Paul says in verse 2 that knowledge has this very real potential of puffing us up. The word puffed up is such a great word. Picture a distended organ, maybe an appendix drum tight on the verge of explosion. It's inflated beyond it's proper size. That's what ego is. A view of yourself that is inflated beyond it's proper size. It is larger than it should be.

Now in this case it has to do with knowledge. It is possibly for us to believe that we know more far, far more informed than we actually are. Intellectual pride thinks it knows more than it does. If you are a human being you have done this. We tend to get arrogant, we tend

to inflate our ego when we feel we have the truth, when we are RIGHT.

TRUTH ABOUT LOVE

- We love *self* because WE have known 'truth'

Now the emphasis of this first point is on the word WE. Intellectual pride is a result of this feeling that WE have discovered truth and because WE have discovered it and other have not, WE are therefore better than others. I put 'truth' in quotes because we are speaking of a piece of truth.

When we credit ourselves with the discovery of truth and think that the truth we discovered is somehow ultimate, we get prideful, puffed-up spiritual bellies. Our ego gets inflated.

So Paul is pointing out this connection between pride and knowledge. Essentially he says, "Watch out! Any time knowledge is in the equation, there is the possibility for pride." Knowing that there is this undeniable connection between knowledge and pride it is easy to mistake the enemy. Some will say, the enemy is knowledge.

The enemy is truth.

One of the absolute worst ways to approach this text is to make knowledge and love diametrically opposed to one another. It's a terrible approach but totally understandable. Here's the logic breakdown. Perhaps a criticism is voiced about a church that really focuses on theology and truth. The church has great truth, great theology, tons of knowledge but they legitimately lack love. They are all head and no heart. And honestly the criticism is a fair criticism. We begin to notice a pattern. It seems that it's always connected. Lots of theology, lots of knowledge and no love. And so this verse gets quoted, "Knowledge puffs up." The enemy must be knowledge! Knowledge causes lack of love.

And while this is an understandable reaction it's not a logical conclusion. That's like saying, "Food makes people fat but water hydrates. I don't want to be fat so I will focus exclusively on drinking water not eating." It's true you won't be fat, but you will also be dead.

The problem with getting overweight is not food; it's the misapplication of food, the abuse of food. We get bellies when we use food to try and fill emotional needs instead of fulfill our energy needs. The problem is not food. We need food. The problem is viewing food incorrectly and using food in the wrong way. And in a similar way, the problem is not knowledge. The problem is viewing knowledge incorrectly and abusing it.

The way to obviously show that God isn't anti-knowledge, the way to show that increasing in knowledge doesn't automatically produce arrogance is to point out that God himself is all-knowing but that doesn't make him proud and that certainly doesn't make him unloving. God is both knowledgeable and loving to the infinite

degree. So how do we be like God in applying our knowledge?

Now listen carefully as this is key: The Corinthians were using their knowledge as justification for their unloving behavior. They said, "Listen, I know I'm right. And my rightness gives me the right to do what I want to do."

God does the opposite. He says, "Of course I'm right. I'm God. I know everything there every is to know about everything." And I'm going to use my knowledge to love you. I'm going to take everything I know and use it not to serve and love myself but to serve and love you.

Now let's get real practical here. How often do you use your knowledge, your rightness, your correctness to love others? Think about it in just the simplest terms.

Maybe you are sitting around talking about how hot it is outside. And one guy says, man it's a hot day. We must be pretty close to the sun. And you can't let that go, "Actually it's not the distance from the sun that makes it hotter, it's the tilt of the earth." And he says, no it's not. How could the tilt of the earth do anything. It's how close we are to the sun that matters. And back and forth the conversation goes. Finally you say, "Let's just google it." And so you google it and then you get that surge of adrenaline and exhilaration - you are right! You have the truth. You had the knowledge. Seasons are caused by the tilt of the earth. Paul is asking us? What are you going to do with that rightness? What are you going to do with that knowledge. Maybe even now you have in your heart the swell of pride that says, I knew that seasons were caused by the tilt of the earth.

99/100 that knowledge goes straight to head. I was right, therefore, I

am better than you. Here's you. Here's me. See, I'm better. See the difference. You know this and I know this. Therefore I am better. Knowledge puffs up.

Let's say you get in an argument with your spouse. Normally you come home at 6:00 but today you came home at 8:00. You walk in the door and you are greeted with

- You never said you were going to be late coming home.
- Yes I did. I told you yesterday I had to work late.
- Listen, I would have remembered if you said that.
- No, I explicitly told you because last time we had this argument I made it a very high priority to tell you.

This conversation is purely theoretical. I think people back East tend to struggle with this. Now let's just say at that moment you had a tape recorder that could replay yesterday's conversation at the exact moment. Maybe it comes back that you actually did say it and the other person was distracted. Or maybe it comes back that you were distracted and you just thought you said it.

What if you were vindicated and the truth came back. What would you do with that truth? So often we use it to justify our actions.

- I have every right to be mean spirited in my voice because you obviously are a terrible communicator.
- I have every right to be frustrated with you, short, kurt. I have every right to rub in my rightness because you were so insistent you were right.

It comes across again and again, "Because I'm right, I'm better." Because I have this perspective and you don't I have the responsibility to show you how stupid you are for not seeing it.

Now here's the problem. Is the problem knowledge and truth? No of course there is an actual answer of what was said. Is the problem being right? Of course not. One person is factually right and wrong.

The problem is what you do with it. Are you going to use your knowledge to justifying your unloving behavior or are you going to use your knowledge as a way to love your spouse more.

Let's take the example of communicating when you'd be home. Let's say you play back the conversation and it could be shown that you did say the words. That part is true. That is the 'truth' in quotes.

It is 'true' that I said the words. But what is the bigger truth? The bigger truth, is that you still didn't communicate. The bigger truth, is that communication only happens when the words get from one person's brain to the other and it's your responsibility as the communicator to make sure it got there. The 'truth' is that you said the words. But the TRUTH is that you are still a poor communicator.

You see you could use that same knowledge in a loving way by saying, "Wow, I thought I communicated and it turns out that I actually said the words, but I obviously didn't communicate. I surely could have gone to a greater effort to make sure it got across. I clearly didn't interact with you, I just talked to you. I am going to make sure that this doesn't happen again. How can we fix this going forward."

We get so hung up on little T truth. I got this fact right. I remembered the events correctly. I got this piece of doctrine right. But the bigger truth is missed entirely.

- We are correct on the fact and entirely selfish. That is the truth.

- We are correct on the doctrine and indifferent toward people. That is the Truth.
- We are correct on the details but unloving and uncaring toward those we care about most.

When we see the Truth, the full truth, the Big T truth, it humbles us. We've missed the entire point of truth.

LOVING TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH AND LOVE

- We love *ourselves* because **WE** have known 'truth'
- We love *others* because the **Truth** has been known

The Big T Truth is that we barely know anything of the truth and the truth we do know we use incorrectly. The truth is we have been unbelievably loved in our arrogance.

You see there is always more truth to be known.

- How much perspective do you have on yourself. How accurately do you see yourself?
- How well do you really know that other person you think you know.
- How well do you know God?

It should greatly trouble you if you think you basically know all there

is to know about yourself, God and others.

Even at our very best, we only know a billionth, trillionth part of truth. And when we realize how little we know it produces humility. Really what we are saying is that the problem is not too much knowledge, the problem is not enough knowledge. You think you know but you really don't know at all. If you knew what you think you knew it would never make you proud. It would humble you. Paul says in verse 2

1 Corinthians 8:2, If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

The ones who know the most are the ones who confess how little they know. The guy in verse 2 imagines he actually knows something. He's got a picture of himself that doesn't match up to reality.

When you go to a Star Wars early release, a lot of people dress up and get all festive, but there are a few that cause you to raise an eyebrow. I think that guy really believes he's a Jedi. He imagines himself a Jedi and he wears the costume but you just look at the guy with pity and shake your head. He's living in a dream world. Poor

guy. Paul uses that exact same sympathetic tone in Galatians 6:3

Galatians 6:3, For if anyone thinks he is something,
when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

That's kind of humorous but also frighteningly close to home. I am so embarrassed at times in my life that I imagined that I was impressively knowledgeable in some area. I can replay the video in my mind from years ago on how dogmatic I was, how absolutely declarative I was.

- I was certain I knew how to parent.
- I was certain I would make the perfect husband.
- I was 99 percent proficient in automechanics.
- I basically understood physics, chemistry and computer programming.

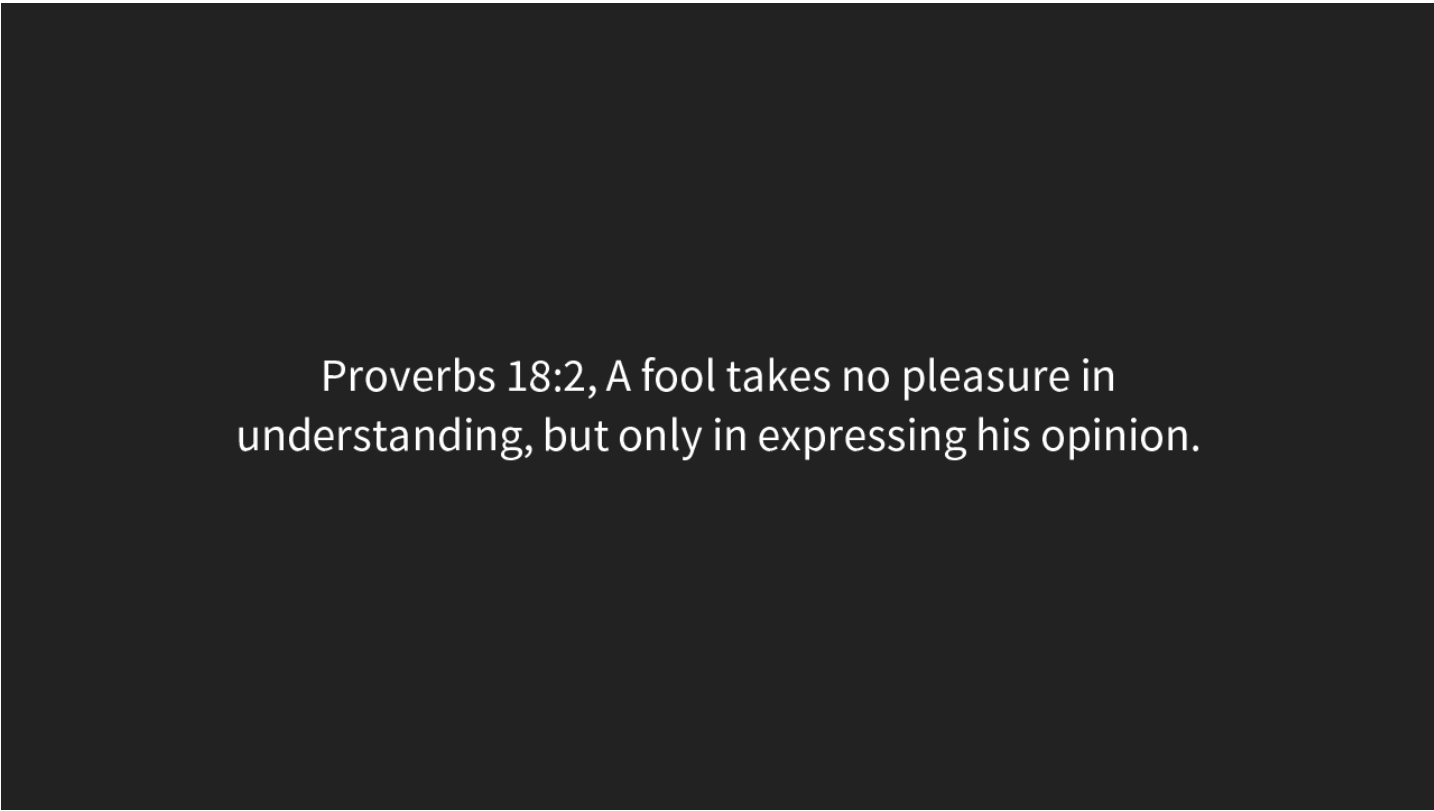
I look back and I am so ashamed at how certain I was I knew something and now from my current perch am made very aware that I know less than zero. I am 100 times less confident about that fact than I was 20 years ago even though I've learned 100 times more. How can that be? Because as we grow in knowledge, we learn how

little we know.

In the field of psychology this is called the Dunning–Kruger effect. This is where psychologists have recognized that people of low ability have this imagined superiority and mistakenly assess their cognitive ability as greater than it is. The lower your ability, the less able you are to accurately assess competence or incompetence because the very skill you need to properly assess yourself, you lack.

The title of their book captures it pretty well: "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments"

Essentially the Dunning-Kruger effect is the world's way of identifying what Proverbs calls the fool.



Proverbs 18:2, A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

The fool just wants to tell you what he knows. He knows he knows when in reality he knows nothing. His ignorance makes him confident.

So what are we learning? It's not that knowledge makes you arrogant. The text here is actually saying the problem is not knowledge. It's incomplete knowledge. You actually need to learn more. You need to learn that knowledge is a gift that was given to you. You need to learn that God is the author of knowledge. You need to learn that that knowledge was given for you to serve and love others. As you grow in that kind of knowledge you then have a more complete truth. But how does this really translate into love for others?

How do we use our knowledge to love others? Here's the most amazing part of the text. Here's where I hope the light bulb turns on.

LOVING TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH AND LOVE

- We love *self* because **WE** have known 'truth'
- We love *others* because the **Truth** has been known
- We love *God* because the **TRUTH** has known us

Now this final point is astounding to me. I love it when the Bible throws a curve ball at me that I don't expect and this is definitely one of those cases. Look at verse 3

1 Corinthians 8:3, But if anyone loves God, he is known
by God.

The way this sentence is phrased intentionally disrupts what you would expect. You would expect, "If anyone knows God, he loves God." That would be the logical progression. You start by getting to know God. And when you discover that God is worthy, that he is all-powerful, that he is loving, your affections are captured and you end up loving him. So the knowledge of God leads to your love of him. That's what you would expect. Your knowledge of God, precedes your love of God.

And that may be how it feels to you. But that is an absolute illusion. That's not at all the order in which it works. The text here says, If you love God it's because God has first known you. It's God's knowledge of you that precedes your love of God. It's God who does the initiating work of knowing you, reaching out to you and that in turn produces you loving him.

So if you find yourself loving God, know that it's because he already knows you.

Now why is that significant in the broader argument here? We are talking here about the right use of knowledge. So when the text says we are known by God, what does that mean?

- That means that God has information about you.
- He has investigated who you are.
- The mystery of who you are has been revealed. The mystery has been removed and now he knows you.

Now I want you to think about that. Is that good? What truth does God discover when he begins to investigate who we are? What does God know about us? What knowledge does God have of us?

I can assure you that the truth, the reality of who we are is not very flattering. I can assure you with absolute confidence that when God initiates with us and begins to know us that the TRUTH of that discovery is horrific.

If you were to see the truth it would strip you bare.

Now how can HIS knowledge of US possibly lead to us loving him? If a judge pulls up your entire track record and knows all the evil that you have done in your life, he knows everything about you, how could that possibly lead you to love him?

And the answer has to be the way he uses that truth. He uses the truth to help you, not to hurt you. How does God use the knowledge that we are sinful? He uses it to love us. What do these children of mine need? They need all sorts of help and because I know them, I can help them. I know them and what they need is redemption.

Now today is communion Sunday and in just a moment Nate is going to lead us through a time of responding to this but I want to

read two verses to set us up for this. How did God use his knowledge of us to help us?

Romans 5:8-10, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

1 John 4:10, In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.