

Series - Be Wise (11 of 22)

Date/s - 11 August 2019

Topic - Knowledge, Love & Food (1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

Speaker/s - Lam Zhengxin

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "This Is Amazing Grace", "Servant King", "How Deep The Father's Love For Us" or "Highest Praise".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Be motivated to exercise knowledge in the context of love; and
2. Be committed to exercise freedom in the confines of love.

Word [45 min]

The church in Corinth was not much different from the church of today. Both were made up of believers who come from different backgrounds (a gathering of both Jews and Gentiles), with varying levels of spiritual maturity, and who hold on to differing convictions. One of the themes of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth was to address the issue of some Christians being stumbled by the practices of other Christians who considered themselves more mature. Specifically, the issue was whether believers could consume food that had been offered to idols (1 Cor 8).

Background

Corinth was a deeply pagan society. This means that the Corinthians believed and worshipped many gods, or idols. Meat used in religious rituals was first offered to these idols. Meat left over from these rituals were brought to the market to be sold as food. Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians, having been brought up in a pagan society such as this, may have viewed the meat as "unclean" and would have refrained from eating it. Jewish Christians on the other hand, having been brought up in a monotheistic faith that believes in only one God, may have no issue eating this meat as they believed that idols were not real.

The problem the church in Corinth faced was this: The Christians, whose conscience was weak, were being stumbled by the freedom that the stronger Christians exercised by eating meat that had been offered to idols. The stronger Christians may have had the correct knowledge that there was nothing wrong with this, but Paul reminded them that *knowledge and freedom must be submitted to love*.

1. Knowledge must be submitted to love (1 Cor 8:1-3)

1 Cor 8:1 tells us that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Later in chapter 13, Paul reminds us that if we have all the wisdom of the world but not love, we are nothing (1 Cor 13:2). Many Christians seek to increase their knowledge of God by reading more Christian books, attending more Christian seminars, signing up for

more bible classes. These are good and beneficial in themselves and should be encouraged. But without love, the knowledge gained will only lead to pride.

Zhengxin shared some indicators that we may be prioritising prideful knowledge over love for one another:

1. We spend much time talking and debating about secondary things (correct mode of water baptism, pre/post-tribulation, etc).
2. We seldom recognise that we have blind spots, and we lack the humility to acknowledge these, even when they are pointed out to us.
3. We often criticise others.

Zhengxin reminded us that knowledge that is not submitted to love will place more emphasis on us being right, rather than for building up the other person.

2. Freedom must be submitted to love (1 Cor 8:7–13)

In 1 Cor 8:9-11, Paul said that the Christian whose conscience was weak may be stumbled by other Christians who exercised their freedom to eat meat offered to idols. Zhengxin explained that conscience is not the law itself but bears witness to that law. It is the internal court where our actions are judged and are either approved or condemned. Since the conscience is not law, it can sometimes be incorrect or “weak” in 2 ways: it either 1) condemns us when there are no grounds for condemnation, or 2) fails to warn when we are about to do something wrong. In the case of the Corinthian church, although it was not sin for the Christians to eat meat offered to idols, but they were being accused by their own weak conscience. In our day and age, while we may not struggle with eating meat offered to idols, a parallel might be found in the way we consume alcohol, dress, or spend our money.

Alcohol

The Bible does not say that drinking alcohol is a sin. However, there may be brothers or sisters in our midst who are struggling with alcoholism and are doing their best to distance themselves from alcohol. You may not struggle with alcoholism yourself, but would you refrain from drinking alcohol (at a social/cell gathering where this person is present) so as not to stumble him/her?

Dressing

Dressing is very subjective and is a highly personal expression of taste and fashion. What may be acceptable to one may be offensive or provocative to another in terms of graphics or words printed on clothing, or the style of the clothing. Would we be more mindful in our dressing so as not to stumble our fellow brothers and sisters?

Use of Money

There is no rule against spending our money for our own comforts. The question is, how does our spending reflect kingdom values? Are we good stewards of our money? Could the way we spend our money be a stumbling block to others (cause others to covet the luxuries that we own)?

The Bible provides a good guide to how we can avoid stumbling others: Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Cor 16:14). May we be obedient to the Word of God and all learn to love others through what we do or do not do.

Summary Of Sermon

1. The actions of the mature Corinth Christians in grey areas stumbled those who are less matured in the faith.
2. All our actions in grey areas must be submitted to love.
 - Knowledge must be submitted to love. If not, it puffs up and we will focus on our rights.
 - Freedom must be submitted to love, so that others are not stumbled.
3. Our common goal must be to build up each other through our actions, and not to stumble one another.

Discussion Questions

1. **Read 1 Corinthians chapter 8. What are some similarities that you can see between Corinth and Singapore? Discuss.** [15 min]

Leader's Notes: *This is a relate question. Similarities between Corinth and Singapore include being a cosmopolitan city with many religions and faith traditions. A large proportion of Singaporeans adhere to religions that believes in many gods. Some of these religions may require eating foods offered to idols or deceased ancestors. If members are unable to list these points, the leader can bring them up. The purpose of this question is to help members see that our context is not that different from that of the Corinthians.*

For some Christians, food sacrificed to idols remains a pressing or emotive concern. Closely analogous issues are whether or not (or to what extent) to participate in various rites of ancestor veneration or worshipping in ways reminiscent of other religions (e.g. meditative traditions). Christians, therefore, continue to disagree as to whether believers may be involved, and to what extent. Room must be left for that disagreement to continue, so long as Christians agree on the larger principles at stake.

For one who is deemed "stronger", even though their knowledge may be technically correct, they can still end up being in the wrong, because they lack love and consideration for others. We must target to build people up through love and not legalism, both listening in love and speaking in knowledge. Therefore, we must seek to understand first, rather than to be understood – knowing that our past and upbringing have continuing hold on our perspectives in life. (Adapted from 1 Corinthians (The NIV Application Commentary Book 7 by Craig L Blomberg.)

2. **All of us have preconceived perspectives on life that were formed by our upbringing. Thinking back to your childhood, how do you know right from wrong? What are some habits or rules that your family had that have formed your views of right and wrong?** [15 min]

Leader's Notes: *This is a reflect question. It is easy to study 1 Corinthians 8 and think that others are the cause of church members being stumbled, not me. But this question hopes to draw out the point that all of us have different preconceived perspectives on life, and none of us are immune to it. Especially so for believers who were brought up in non-believing families before they accepted Christ. As such, we should be mindful that none of us are totally free from a "weak conscience", and thus all of us should be sensitive to one another's conscience. Leaders should highlight this point to summarise the discussion.*

3. What is one thing your cell can do/do less/avoid doing to prevent stumbling fellow cell members? [15 min]

Leader's Notes: A response question. This question is meant to have cell members commit to practical actions in response to the sermon. The leader may begin with the 3 areas mentioned in the sermon i.e. alcohol, dressing, or use of money, but feel free to explore other areas as well.

For example, if it is known that one cell member is trying to break free from an addiction to alcohol, the cell can commit to not consume or even display alcoholic drinks when that member is present. There is no need to call that person out by name. The cell could draw up a list of areas to be cautious in, and the action to take for each area, without bringing any particular cell member(s) into the spotlight. Remember, this should be done in love.

If this discussion turns into a debate on what is right and wrong, draw the cell back to the main point of the sermon: we are to submit to each other's conscience for the sake of the other person. It is not about me. Rather, we should consider these timeless principles: what is safe for one Christian may not be for another; true discernment always requires love as well as knowledge; and believers should not demand certain freedoms if they in turn prove detrimental to those around them.

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. Every RiverLifer will conduct their lives in a manner that shows love and mutual respect to each other.

Announcements

1. **Marriage Preparation Course**

8, 15, 22, 29 Sep & 6 Oct (Sundays, 1.45pm-5pm) and 12 Oct (Sat, 9am-5pm)

\$260 Per Couple | Faith Chapel, RiverLife Church

Register at the Information Counter by Sun, 1 Sep. For enquiries, please contact Christine Tan at

christinetan@riverlife.org.sg or 65114141

Church Vision:

"A radiant disciple-making church catalysing Kingdom transformation in our communities and the nations."

Mission:

We exist to make disciples who behold Christ and reveal Him.