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Knowledge, Idolatry, & Surrender

I Corinthians 8-9 | Week Six

Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Where We Are Now

Last time we met we read about singleness, marriage, and calling, noting that God's calling is central. We should have a God-centered focus in our lives. This includes how we pursue our academic studies. In addition, both marriage and singleness have their benefits and challenges.

This Week

In this lesson we'll read about knowledge, idolatry, and surrender. Knowledge in and of itself is not necessarily wrong, but the way we behave as a result of knowledge can lead to difficulties such as arrogance over love. We also need to be careful about how we act in certain situations, especially as we seek to avoid causing fellow Christians to stumble.

The Big Idea

Instead of making ourselves the center of our focus in life, we should remember that it's far more important that we are able to winsomely share the gospel, be mindful of how our actions impact others, and seek a humble attitude of surrender over a desire to be "right" or assert our rights at any cost.

Memory Verse | Cor. 8:6

Looking at the Text

Ask someone to read I Corinthians 8:1-13 - *Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up.*

Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

Don't Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. **3** But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. **4** Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” **5** For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— **6** yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. **7** However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. **8** Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. **9** But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. **10** For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? **11** And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. **12** Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. **13** Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

1. Paul contrasts knowledge that “puffs up” with love that “builds up” (v. 1). What are some of the differences? Why do you think Paul is concerned with the character of the Corinthians?

Knowledge that “puffs up” refers to knowledge that can lead to pride and arrogance. Love, on the other hand, seeks to build up—to strengthen, edify, and encourage. Proud knowledge seems man-centered, while love is in line with God’s desire for how we should behave. Paul doesn’t just want the Corinthians to obey out of duty, but instead he wants them to really change for the better, growing as Christians.

2. What does Paul mean in verse 9? What steps can you take to avoid becoming a “stumbling block” to other Christians?

Verse 9 means that stronger Christians should be careful that they don’t cause weaker Christians problems. Not all Christians are at the same level of maturity, so we should all be careful when it comes to our actions. To avoid becoming a “stumbling block” to others, we should think about our actions and the impact they will have not only on ourselves, but also on other Christians. Part of pagan worship involved the sacrificing of animals to their idol gods. When the people would offer these sacrifices, a third of the animal meat would be burned up, a third given to the priest performing the sacrifice, and a third given to the individuals offering it. It was common for the pagan priests not to eat their portion of the meat. Instead, they would often sell the meat in open markets. A controversy had risen among the Christians over whether or not it was permissible for them to eat this meat since it had been dedicated to another god. One group said ‘no’ while the “mature believers” argued that they knew there was nothing wrong with it. They knew these other gods were not real and took it upon themselves to self-righteously educate the others in the church about their point of view.

Ask one or two people to read 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 - Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we

Think About It

Illustrate It

Do you know anyone who knows a lot about their area of study, but isn’t very good at being humble about their extensive knowledge? Without specifically naming that person, what is it about how they come across that is negative rather than positive? Share about that experience with the group or invite others to do so. What can you do to avoid some of these negative things in your own life?

Tie It Together

We should all be on guard about knowledge that “puffs up” versus love that “builds up.” In our academic studies it can be easy to fall into the trap of thinking we know it all or are somehow better than others. Instead, we should seek to root our knowledge in love, allowing God to work through us as we seek to edify others.

Illustrate It

Francis Schaeffer used to say that the choices we make in life are like ripples in water, making an impact not only on those near us, but also potentially making a much greater impact as the ripples spread out. Thinking about our actions in this way will help us better see that we have the potential to do harm, but also to edify and build others up as a result of our choices that ripple throughout and beyond our lives.

not have the right to eat and drink? **5** Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? **6** Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? **7** Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? **8** Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? **9** For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? **10** Does he not speak certainly for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. **11** If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? **12** If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. **13** Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? **14** In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. **15** But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. **16** For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! **17** For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. **18** What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

3. In this section Paul willingly gives up or surrenders certain rights he is entitled to as an apostle. Why does he give up these rights? How can you learn from his example?

Paul knows that as an apostle he is entitled to certain things, such as support from the Corinthians, but he gives these things up so as not to cause spiritual tension with the Corinthians. He also gives up his rights so that his actions don’t result in obstructing the advance of the gospel (v. 12). Paul’s example should remind us that sometimes it’s more important to keep the peace with fellow Christians, remain humble, and see that the gospel is spread, rather than always trying to assert our own rights. Surrendering certain things is sometimes the better choice.

Ask someone to read verses 19-23 - *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. **20** To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. **21** To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. **23** I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

4. What do you think Paul means when he says he has “become all things to all people” (v. 22)?

We should seek common ground with non-Christians, not offend them unnecessarily, and be sensitive to where they are in life so that we can have an opportunity to share the gospel in a winsome way.

Surrender: In its most basic sense “surrender” means to stop resisting and, instead, submit. This is foundational to the Christian life. We must surrender to God, setting aside our own self-centered pride. There are also instances where we must surrender to others. Paul essentially surrenders his rights. He knows that there are more important things that claiming and asserting his rights, especially if his actions could hinder the spread of the gospel and cause unnecessary tensions with fellow Christians.

Tips for a Better Discussion

Focus on the main points of the passage you are reading and seek to draw out responses to those main points from the text itself. Be careful about reading into the text what is not there. Every passage has its own context, which we should respect, that is part of the book or letter as a whole, as well as being part of the entire Bible.

Often your peers have similar struggles regardless of their spiritual interest. Listening to “their story” and caring about their issues can open doors for you to share your struggle, and the hope within you. I Peter 3:15

Ask someone to read verses 24-27 - *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

5. In pursuing your academic studies you are running a race. What disciplines are necessary to completing your course of study successfully? How do some of these disciplines also apply to the Christian life?

Some of the disciplines necessary to completing studies include dedication, diligence, the ability to focus on tasks, a desire to understand the material not just memorize it, and a commitment to completing the tasks that are required to the best of your ability. If we're serious about our faith, we should be dedicated to it and not take it lightly. We should also seek to diligently understand our faith, not just view it as superficial or as just another "part" of our lives.

Wrapping Up

6. Paul writes that he doesn't "run aimlessly" (v. 26). This implies that he seeks to live with purpose. How can you live your Christian life more purposefully, both academically and in reference to your involvement with other Christians?

If we don't already set aside meaningful time to build up our faith, we should do so. We should seek to live our Christian life in a way that supports our dedication and commitment to it. This means we should, for instance, not neglect times of Bible study, fellowship, and prayer. Academically, we should have a plan in place on a big scale—such as completing our degree path—as well as on a smaller scale—such as plans to complete specific assignments or prepare for exams. You can be a success personally, spiritually and professionally by exercising the disciplines required for each. The faithful steward lives to hear the words from his Master, "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master." Matt 25: 21

As your discussion comes to a close, end the session in prayer.

Illustrate It

Corinthians knew all about races. Every two years they hosted the Isthmian Games, which were second in popularity only to the Olympic Games. The Christian life is like a race, but instead of a prize that will pass away, our Christian lives will make a difference throughout eternity. In Philippians 3:14 Paul wrote, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." What can you do to run a good race and press on toward the goal?