

Love Builds Up

✦ **Surpassing knowledge (vv.1-3)**

✦ **Giving freedom (vv.4-13)**

In the name of Jesus, who shines on us the light of God's love, dearly redeemed of God:

Does today's text make you wonder, "What does idol meat have to do with me?" Until last Fall, I might have asked too. But then came our St. Croix Pastor's Conference. At the end we have a segment called "Questions of Casuistry" to ask fellow pastors for advice. WELS-Hmong Pastor Pheng Moua who has preached at New Life asked about meat sacrificed to idols. For our Hmong brothers and sisters, this is not theoretical. It's real. Our text was one of several passages mentioned to help Pastor Moua.

Even if you do not have relatives sacrificing pigs for parties, God has a word of instruction for us today. It's from the Holy Spirit's masterpiece. Remember? "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" (2 Timothy 3:16f NIV84) Anglo culture may be different, but this principle applies in every culture: **Love Builds Up** because **Love** is always ...

✦ **Surpassing knowledge (vv.1-3)**

Some of you have heard me say that if there were a store where you could purchase congregational problems, none of the labels would read, "Made in America," or "Made in China." All would say, "Made in Corinth." Corinth was a seafaring town full of worldly influences and immorality. But the congregation at Corinth was also filled with talented people making it one of Paul's most gifted congregations. That's why he had to warn them that "*knowledge puffs up.*" As Pastor Bentz noted in one of our Circuit Meetings, it can be like drinking too much pop too fast.

Can you see the connection? Let me illustrate with a word from the end of our text where this is heading. The Greek word is *σκανδαλον*, but the Holy Spirit means much more than our English *scandal* or *scandalize*. In the Bible *σκανδαλον* describes something like a death trap to someone's soul, "causing him to fall into sin." (Cf. v.13) Before Jim Merten found the thunder on our organ, I tried to illustrate *σκανδαλον* for the loud *strepitus* in a Good Friday Tenebrae service. I propped up a section of the footpace with a stick and practiced pulling it with a rope as I walked past carrying the Christ candle. The loud thump would be like the closing of Jesus' tomb, the *strepitus*. Despite practice, the rope caught, so I had to come back and loosen it. Adrenalin yanked the stick right past me my leg, slamming into the door.

It never fails in real life. I know **Love Builds Up – Surpassing knowledge**. But about the time I feel I might have a handle on love, I see again how far short I fall as a loving husband, father, pastor, friend, Christian. When I try to teach others, it's like that stick whipping past, grazing me.

That's why Luther warned pastors and people in his Preface to the *Large Catechism*: "It is unfortunate that people take the Gospel altogether too lightly..., and that despite our best efforts we accomplish but little....There are many who are so satisfied with themselves and so bored with God's truths that...having read [the Catechism] once, they throw it into a corner, as if ashamed to read it again.... Think of it! In one hour we can finish learning what God Himself cannot finish teaching, although He has been at it from the beginning of the world and will continue to the end; the prophets too, and all the saints have been busy learning and yet have always remained pupils and must go on being pupils."¹

¹ Quotes are from Martin Luther's Preface [1530] to *Luther's Large Catechism – A Contemporary Translation with Study Questions*, translated by F. Samuel Janzow. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1978, pages 5-9.

Love Builds Up – Surpassing knowledge. The dear Holy Spirit must first empty us of ourselves before He can fill us with Himself. For example, do you know that the Holy Spirit is God? “Of course, Pastor, we all know that?” Can you prove the Spirit’s deity from the Bible for others who need to know? Isn’t it amazing that all over the world new Christians are so hungry for these truths of God’s grace that we can’t teach them enough? But in America, have we become so puffed up with knowledge that less than 25% of our members attend Bible Class regularly? Let us, in Luther’s words, “guard [ourselves] with greatest care and diligence against the poisonous infection of false security and self-delusions.”

One blessing from God for me in 7th and 8th Grade was back-to-back Catechism classes – with the WELS pastor and with my father, a former Missouri Synod pastor. He assigned twice as many passages. Sometimes I apologize to New Life kids that my tests are too easy, but assure me they’re tougher than our Lutheran Schools. Isn’t this a blessing for our youth to have Christian teachers by day, plus weekly Catechism classes here too? What blessings humility gives to keep learning all our lives that we have so much to learn. **Love Builds Up – Surpassing knowledge** and...

✠ **Giving freedom (vv.4-13)**

This **freedom** Christ won for us when He humbled Himself to live under God’s law and keep it perfectly in our place. Twelve years old, and what was Jesus doing? Learning all He could in the temple. Imagine that! The omniscient, all-knowing Son of God, was willing to be taught. Do you remember what He said about knowledge when He died? “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*” Then He washed away all our sins of pride and arrogance to set us free. Your file in heaven reads: PAID IN FULL. It’s signed with the blood of Christ. Easter shouts that you are free because Jesus rose from the dead. Death itself cannot contain Him. Satan could not defeat Him. Christ is still **Giving freedom** from sin, death and hell to enjoy every day in time and eternally in heaven. How could we ever get tired of hearing such simple truths so dearly won by God’s one and only begotten Son?

But how do you use your **freedom** in Christ? That’s the question of this text? Corinthian Christians knew the truth. Greeks spoke of many “gods” and many “lord,” but those ancient Greek idols were nothing because “*there is but one God.*” So they were free to eat meat sold in the marketplace without worrying whether it came from some idol’s temple. But new Christians feelings needed to catch up with their faith to get heart and mind on the same page. If they saw someone eating idol meat, their conscience would cringe. For instance you might see Asian friends eat squid or seaweed, but your stomach disagrees. Eating idol meat anyway, could give spiritual indigestion to a weak conscience.

Luther knew from painful experience: “In heaven and on earth there is nothing more tender than the conscience, and nothing less able to tolerate abuse. It is said that the eye is tender, but the conscience is much more tender and soft. That is why we note in the apostles again and again how gently they have dealt with the conscience.”² Paul’s point is simple: Have a care. Be sensitive to the spiritual needs and weaknesses of Christians around you. Always when **Giving freedom, Love Builds Up.**

For one more example think of your Bible Class and worship as combat training. Christ won the war, but Satan will not give up until the last trumpet sounds. So how will the Holy Spirit train you if you’re not here? He wants to keep giving you battle tactics, arming you for the good fight of faith day by day. Maybe He sees a problem down the road, a landmine from hell. How can He train you to disarm it if you’re AWOL from Christian education? And your fellow soldiers, especially the new ones? Does your attendance encourage them to be faithful, or give the impression that growing up in **Love** is not all that vital? Are your actions **Giving freedom**, or stripping it away from weak souls?

Let the love of Jesus shine through your eyes as you help your fellow Christians. **Love Builds Up.** May God’s loving kindness and tender mercy always shine on you, dear saints of God. Amen.

² Dr. Martin Luther’s *Saemmtliche Werke*, Vierzehnter Band, (Erlangen, Verlag von Carl Heyder, 1828), p. 128. Quoted in Toppe, C. (1987). *1 Corinthians*. The People’s Bible (78). Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House.