

## Beyond Knowledge

*By Linda Rex*

**January 28, 2024, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday | Epiphany**—One of the things I had to learn early on as a fledgling pastor was the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. What I mean is, when speaking to the congregation, my purpose was not to inform them about a topic so much as it was to inspire them to follow Christ with greater depth and faithfulness. Fresh from my seminary classes, I was bubbling over with a lot of great information, but what was needed was not simply more theological information, but the living Word of God speaking a word through me that would touch the heart, that the Spirit could use to convict and transform the inner being of those who were listening.

In my family, as we grew up, one of the values that was important was knowing things or being well-informed on about every subject. This may be why I've always been fascinated by the newest discoveries in science, especially since reading Thomas F. Torrance's books on the interrelation between science and theology. Science and theology, I once heard Dr. McKenna say, are intended to inform one another, to work together in unity for the betterment of humankind. Often, sad to say, this is not what happens.

Today, our scientific knowledge is constantly reaching new heights. I'm inevitably amazed by the new things we are finding out about our cosmos. Lately my interest has been in quantum theory—of which I know very little, but from what I can see, seems to echo the divine three-in-oneness of the Trinity. All this new science is fascinating and challenging, but from what I have seen historically, every advancement in science needs to be tempered by other-centered, self-giving love, or it presents the possibility for destruction and catastrophe.

This brings me to the passage for this Sunday, 1 Corinthians 8:1–13, in which the apostle Paul addresses some questions regarding whether believers should eat food offered to idols. Even though some believers knew and understood that idols had no real life in themselves, and meat offered to idols really was just, in the end, meat that could be eaten, there were believers who had, for many years, sacrificed meat to idols. Even though they had abandoned paganism and its practices when they came to faith in Christ, their conscience and understanding were not yet at the place where eating meat offered to idols was clearly okay. They still had questions and concerns, and were vulnerable to falling back into their old belief systems and practices.

So, the apostle Paul reminded believers that more important than the believers' knowledge about meat offered to idols was their love and concern for their brothers and sisters. In other words, love trumps knowledge. Being knowledgeable can become a source of pride to us, and when we are not careful with it and insist on being able to do what we have a right to do or the freedom to do, we can severely injure others. Instead of trying to prove how knowledgeable we are or how free we are, Paul writes, we need to be concerned for the welfare of others, and do our best not to cause unnecessary harm.

Looking back over my brief years as a pastor, I see times when I was more interested in proving how much I knew and how right I was than I was concerned for the wellbeing of those I was ministering to. I was caught up in expressing my freedom in Christ—which is a good thing—but it was not always beneficial to those around me. If there are any who were wounded by this, I sincerely ask forgiveness, for I realize now that what I was doing was not always for the wellbeing of others.

Recently on Our Life in the Trinity, I talked about our sacred oneness, and my focus was on our human body, and the covenant relationship we have with God, and with our spouse. Our sacred oneness also involves our participation in the Body of Christ, the Church, for we are bound

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together by the Spirit to be of one mind and heart, for the sake of others. As brothers and sisters in Christ, united to God and one another by the Spirit, we are meant to live together, serve others, and testify to the love and grace of God in Christ, in sacred oneness.

Whatever the cost to ourselves today in caring for one another within and without the Body of Christ, it is nothing compared with the self-offering of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that we may live. When any one of us insists upon our rights at the expense of others, or expressing our freedom in Christ in spite of its affect on others, we violate the sacred oneness of the Body of Christ. In fact, we violate Christ himself. We're all on this journey together, growing up in Christ, but some of us are at different places along the journey. Rather than hindering one another's progress, we want to be careful to edify or build up one another instead. Because, when all is said and done, what will last on into eternity won't be "knowledge", but other-centered, self-giving, serving love (1 Cor. 13).

*Heavenly Father, you are the one from whom are all things and for whom we exist. Lord Jesus, you are the one by whom are all things and through whom we exist. Grant us the grace to always be careful not to injure or wound the conscience of others by our freedom in Christ. Fill us, by your Spirit, with other-centered self-giving love, and let it ever flow through us to others for their well-being, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

*"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble." 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 NASB*