

Food offered to idols: 1 Corinthians ch.8

Today's TFTD comes from Kate Pwaisiho. Kate is a trained Christian youth worker who has recently joined our congregation.

During my years at Bible college we have field trips to different religion venues and temples. And during one of those trips I experienced visiting a Hindu temple, where I saw the practice of food offering to idols.

Today's passage in Corinthians chapter 8 St Paul talks about food sacrificed to idols. In first-century Corinth, people were buying food that was sacrificed to idols and the practice was that those who were selling food would first sacrifice a portion of whatever they were selling to an idol and what is left they would bring it to sell.

And what happened was, there were some Corinthians who became Christians and began to develop some conviction and started to think, well if that meat been sacrificed to idols and we been taught that idols are sinful and there was only one true God, we shouldn't eat that meat sacrificed to idols.

But there was another group of Christians in the same church that didn't see anything wrong with that. They were saying, I have no problem whatsoever eating food sacrificed to idols because idols really mean nothing.

So then you have this disagreement between these two groups of Christians and that is why St Paul has to write this chapter we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 8.

Now Paul in his wisdom says, that for those Christians who thought that it was fine to eat food offered to idols, they must stop as it hurts the conscience of others and may become a stumbling block. 'Be Careful,

however that the exercise of your rights does not become stumbling block to the weak.' 1 Corinthians 8:9

The key message from this passage is that, the foundational principle of Christianity is not knowledge (gnosis) but love (agape). And therefore this principle of love should be our aim. Paul is not speaking about knowledge in general, but of a religious sophistication that is arrogant it puffs up. On the other hand, the love of which Paul speaks is a self-giving love. It is modelled on God's own love, demonstrated in the giving of his Son. It is a love not based on the worth or attractiveness of the other person, but generated from within. Love such as this, Paul says, builds up and edifies the community. The two terms are set against each other. Knowledge leads to spiritual self-promotion, whereas love promotes a healthy, vibrant, spiritual community.

The other key message of Paul for the church of today is that one may have freedom in Christ but it must be used with thoughtfulness and, in particular, with care for the sake of the vulnerable.

This message is more difficult when applied to corporate matters, so extra caution is called for in applying it to congregational life. For example, if a congregation faces an issue in which some members call for change, and others seek to preserve what is familiar, it can be too easy to consider one of the groups as in the know and the other as the weak. One should avoid thinking this way, and certainly not speak in those terms, for it only leads to feelings of superiority among some and the sense among others that they are not being heard.

Still, this text can be applied in a corporate setting. In that case, the use of freedom; indeed, the use of authority will not consist of abandoning one's convictions.

Instead, freedom and authority will be used to accommodate the views and feelings of all, making way for communal discernment and working toward a consensus.

In the end, decisions have to be made. But they are made best when steps are taken to open up dialogue and when genuine care is actually demonstrated.

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