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Title: MARKS OF THE SPIRITUAL

Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

*8“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup>If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup>But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.*

*<sup>4</sup>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.’ <sup>5</sup>For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ – <sup>6</sup>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.*

*<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. <sup>9</sup>But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup>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? <sup>11</sup>And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. <sup>12</sup>Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup>Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”*

As we continue our series in 1 Corinthians, we move to a new section of the letter, in which Paul talks about our freedom in Christ and just where do we draw the line. He referenced this idea briefly in chapter 6 when he said... *“‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything”* (1 Corinthians 6:12, ESV). Which means – just because we CAN do something doesn’t mean we SHOULD! The next few chapters of 1 Corinthians address what this means and how we are to apply it to our lives in a way that brings honor to Jesus. Paul addresses several topics in these next chapters. One recurring topic, the topic on which he seems to base his entire argument, is one that hardly applies to us. The question he sets out to answer here for the Corinthians is whether or not it is okay to eat food that has been offered to idols. Anyone here eat food offered to idols for breakfast this morning? Anyone eat food offered to idols this week? This year? Let’s read verse 1-3 again looking for two key words. *8“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess KNOWLEDGE.’ This ‘KNOWLEDGE’ puffs up, but LOVE builds up. <sup>2</sup>If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup>But if anyone LOVES God, he is known by God.”* What are the two key words here? KNOWLEDGE and LOVE. Knowledge PUFFS up. Love BUILDS up. Knowledge has to do with our BRAIN. Love has to do with our HEART. This passage is directed toward those who have their facts right, but their hearts are wrong. Here Paul addresses the intelligent but unloving. He addresses people that technically have the right theology but are wrong because of their lack of love.

What is one decision we will ALL likely make in the next hour or so? (Hint – it has something to do with food.) WHERE are you going to eat? WHAT are you going to eat? In making that decision, are you more inclined to use your BRAIN or your HEART? If you use your brain, you’ll likely pick a place or food that caters to providing healthy options. If you use your heart, you might choose a buffet because you can eat all you want and whatever you want OR... You might pick a place that fixes food you LOVE with little regard that it might not be a healthy choice. It tastes good. It’s my favorite. In this example of food, you’d probably do better by using your BRAIN. Choose healthy. In the area of relationships and people, Paul tells us we do better – MUCH better – by using our HEARTS. With our heart we LOVE.

Let’s get back to meat offered to idols. This is the issue that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 8. The Corinthians had come out of pagan backgrounds. They once had worshipped idols. They had believed that meat was

inhabited by demons, so they would offer the meat before their idol. The idea was that the idol would cleanse the meat of the demons, so when they consumed the meat, it would be clean and inhabited by their god instead. It was an act of worship to their idol. They had grown up doing it that way – and some of them were still affected by this way of thinking. BUT... Some of the Corinthian believers who were MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE were saying, “Idols aren’t real. Now that we’re Christians, we know that idols are a farce. Just eat the meat. It’s not a big deal.” But the weaker Christians who had spent their whole lives thinking another way, having not yet reached a certain Christian maturity in thinking, were sensing in their consciences, “I CAN’T eat that meat. It’s been offered to an idol. That’s like worshipping an idol, and I can’t eat it.” Meanwhile, the more knowledgeable Christians were saying, “Just eat it! There’s no such thing as an idol.” So, listening to this informed but unloving counsel, the consciences of the less knowledgeable were being wounded. So, Paul addresses the problem. “Yes, you’re right; the idols are NOT REALLY GODS. But that’s not the point. The POINT IS that in using your knowledge, you weren’t giving any consideration or concern for your brother. He didn’t yet feel right in his conscience about taking the meat, and yet you unlovingly pushed him toward it because of your knowledge. You wounded his conscience. Why would you do that? Why in the world would you do that to your brother? Look what Paul says in verse 13 – *“If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”* Paul loved his brothers and sisters in Christ SO MUCH that if he knew that their seeing him eat meat would cause them to stumble, then he simply will stop eating meat. He’d go vegan. Eating meat is not that big of a deal compared to loving his brother. He loves his brother MORE than his freedom to eat meat. So, these more knowledgeable Christians are right that it is okay to eat the meat, but their problem is that they are not thinking of their less knowledgeable brothers.

Wherein eating meat offered to idols does not fit our experience, it mattered a great deal to Paul’s original readers. In the non-Christian culture of first century Corinth, there were temples scattered all over town where people would go to offer their sacrifices to their various gods – such as Aphrodite, Apollo, Poseidon, and a host of others. People would go into these temples and purchase various food items, typically meat, and offer it to the gods to win some imaginary favor for their generosity. And... Then these items would be sold in the marketplace – the idea being that this steak is special because it’s been offered to some idol, and so you might score some points for eating food that was offered to one of the gods. As Christianity continued to spread throughout cultures where this practice was common, the question often came up: Should a Christian eat meat that was sacrificed to a pagan god? There were many who said, “No, you shouldn’t. This food would be tainted by its association, and by eating it you could consume a corrupt spiritual influence.” There were others who said, “Nonsense. These gods don’t even exist. They’re just make believe, and they have no power over anyone. You can eat whatever you want.” Some who had come out of that pagan culture could not imagine that it would be okay to eat such food. In fact, they were afraid it would draw them back into their pre-Christian lifestyle. ILLUSTRATION: I know of a missionary/musician to Brazil who enjoyed much, if not all, of the different styles of Brazilian music. He found it new to him and very interesting to listen to even though he didn’t understand most of the lyrics because his Portuguese wasn’t so good. One day his friend who hadn’t been a Christian so long said to him, “I can’t listen to those songs anymore – or even that style of music – because it is so closely connected to the sinful life I led before coming to Christ. When I hear it, it feels like it’s drawing me back.” That’s how many of the Corinthians felt about the temple atmosphere and the practice of temple restaurants and markets selling food that had been sacrificed to idols. Even though the Apostle Paul clearly leans toward what we might call the more “enlightened view” on this topic – that these so-called gods were all figments of the cultural imagination and that eating food sacrificed to them didn’t affect you spiritually – he still recommends a more tempered approach to the topic. He suggests that we make such decisions NOT based solely on THIS IS MY RIGHT but based on WHAT IS BEST FOR OTHERS. The young man mentioned earlier said that when he hears certain music it reminds him of a life or a time he never wants to experience again. It would be wrong, then, to try to persuade him that this style of music is harmless – even though the words themselves may be, in fact, quite harmless.

Earlier this week I read some words shared by George Wood, the former AG General Superintendent on

1 Corinthians chapter 8. He shared that at a time when he was ministering in Eastern Europe among Eastern European Pentecostal brethren, that it was regarded as sin to attend a soccer game or movie theater or for women to wear pant suits. Yet there was no conviction at all in respect to the drinking of beer. My mom attended church here for over 50 years. I doubt that anyone here (except Diane) ever saw my mother in a pair of slacks. We saw her in a pant suit one time for about 2 minutes. My sister-in-law had bought her a pant suit for Christmas. At our prodding, she tried it on ONCE. I loved that about my mom. She held to her convictions. At one time, I thought she didn't wear pants because she thought it was wrong or because in her younger years, she was preached to that it was wrong. If you look at our church history pictures from 50, 60 & 70 years ago, the ladies ALL wore dresses. Now I think that mom might not have worn slacks because she didn't want to offend a weaker brother or sister. That conviction likely comes from the scripture that speaks of women wearing men's apparel. Interestingly to me, in the pictures or rendering of Jesus and His disciples, their attire looks like dresses to me.

Years ago, my Sunday School teacher, Joe McGown, would take us Junior boys on an outing on a Saturday nearly every month. (He would have been 96 this past week.) He'd take us swimming, fishing, bowling, or skating. He took some classes hunting. It was because of him that I learned to roller skate. Then we got a new pastor and his wife had been an accomplished skater. As I remember, skating had almost become her God. She lived for skating. She felt that she had to give up skating for her spiritual well-being. To her it was sin because it took away from her walk with God. To me, my Sunday School teacher, and my classmates, it was merely a bit of entertainment that we took in every few months. Skating didn't have any effect on our walk with God as skating never was a god to any of us. For one it seemed to be a sin, for others it did not. The Corinthian church was a church of contrasts. There were those who were legalists and those who embraced their liberties. There were those who had to have the rules and wanted everyone else to live by their rules. There were those who threw out the rules; they were now free in Christ. There were the mature in Christ and the new or immature believers. There were those who followed Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Jesus. There were likely at least subtle differences in their presentation of the gospel. In a manner of speaking, Paul says that more important than what they did or didn't do was their attitude – especially their ATTITUDES and BEHAVIORS toward others. Paul speaks about their attitudes more in the next chapter when he discusses his own approach to ministry.

The guiding principle behind it all – and we'll hear this idea through this section of 1 Corinthians – is that we make our choices NOT based on our own sense of privilege, but RATHER based on what is BEST FOR ALL INVOLVED: What will build the church? What will bring more people to Christ? What will give the greatest glory to God? Herein we see what TRUE SPIRITUALITY is. It's NOT about living an austere lifestyle any more than it's about disregarding all the rules and claiming that they don't matter. Here's what true spirituality looks like. *"Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup>If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup>But if anyone loves God, he is known by God."* We often try to measure our spirituality based on HOW MUCH WE KNOW. God uses a different standard. He measures our spirituality based on HOW MUCH WE LOVE. Yes, we're called to obedience, and we are called to study the Word. But... You can do BOTH and STILL MISS THE MARK. But... *<sup>3</sup>"But if anyone loves God, he is known by God." "And how dare we claim that we love God if we don't love our brother and our sister?"* (1 John 4). How can we say we love God when we haven't seen Him, and... Then not love our brothers and sisters who we have seen? Let me put it this way: **True spirituality is defined NOT only by how good you are, but HOW GOOD YOU ARE TO OTHERS.**

Today, the debate about eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols is not exactly part of our cultural conversation ... but the PRINCIPLES Paul discusses in this chapter are as relevant as ever, because they show us what True Spirituality REALLY looks like. Paul makes it rather clear that it's NOT determined by whether you eat certain types of meat, but by your ATTITUDE TO OTHERS.

Today, I want us to consider these three others-oriented marks of True Spirituality. If you want to be, in Paul's

words, “*known by God*,” here are three attitudes to develop. First of all, ...

**1. True spirituality is evidenced by LOVE.** If you want to become spiritual, there are a few things you must master in your personal life. **A. We need to be committed to THE GOAL OF SPIRITUALITY.** We should want to grow spiritually. If we don’t have that desire, something is likely wrong. We need to be able to say, “I’m not going to let the world, or sin, or money, or enemies, or friends, or family stand in the way of my becoming close to God.” **B. We also need to be DISCIPLINED.** We need to be able to govern ourselves and force ourselves at times to do what we don’t necessarily feel like doing, and at times, NOT do what we really want to do. It takes discipline. **C. We need to be CONSISTENT.** We need to make a regular habit of prayer, Bible study, worship, and service to God. These things can’t be done in a half-hearted “when I feel like it” fashion. They must be done consistently. **D. We need to be TEACHABLE.** We need to become students of the Word. We need to know what the Bible says – about GOD, about HOLINESS, about FORGIVENESS, about MARRIAGE, about CHILD-REARING, about CAREER AMBITION, and about all the OTHER AREAS of our lives. We need to KNOW THE TRUTH to LIVE the truth! This is why Paul said to Timothy... *“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). However, as important as these habits are, Paul tells us they are NOT really the END-ALL to spirituality. It’s not enough to accumulate knowledge, or be disciplined, or be committed. There is something MUCH MORE IMPORTANT than any of these. You MUST develop a HEART FULL OF LOVE. He says... *“But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.”* He continues with the statement... *“But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.”* Further in 1 Corinthians, Paul writes more about the subject in what has become known as the “Love Chapter.” In that chapter (13) he says... *“If I have faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing”* (13:2-3). Love is the PRIMARY component of the Christian life. You’ve heard the saying, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The same, in a sense, can be said about God. His primary concern for your spiritual growth is not how much you know, but HOW MUCH YOU LOVE. When you stand before the throne on judgment day, I don’t think He will say, “Wow! You really know the Greek language.” Or... “Wow! You sat in the same pew at Marlowe Assembly for 57 years!” Or... “Wow! You’ve memorized how many Bible verses?” Certainly, it’s important to hide God’s Word in our hearts, BUT... What good is memorizing verses if we aren’t living by them? Those aren’t the things God is looking for. He wants you to develop a heart full of love towards others and towards Him. True spirituality isn’t measured merely by how good you are, but by how good you are to others – especially your brothers and sisters in the Lord – especially the younger or weaker believers. Here’s the second thing this passage shows us about true spirituality.

**2. True spirituality is evidenced by EMPATHY.** What is empathy? According to the dictionary it is: “The capacity to identify with a person or object.” In other words, it is the ability to put yourself in another person’s shoes – to see the world from his or her point of view. In discussing the matter of eating food that has been sacrificed to idols, remember that Paul has already stated that it is NOT A SIN. Then he goes on to say... <sup>9</sup>*“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup>For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup>So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.”* We’ve all heard about trigger warnings, and sometimes they can be quite silly. However, without taking it to an extreme, we can make it a point to empathize with the struggles those around us may have, and to respond accordingly. If someone is trying to develop a healthier lifestyle, don’t chomp on potato chips in front of them. If someone recently lost a loved one, don’t make light of life’s tragedies. If someone is struggling with depression, don’t talk about bad news all the time. If someone still associates a certain type of music with the worst phase of their life, don’t sing those songs in their presence. This attitude takes some time to develop. On the one hand, we want to be able to say, “I refuse to allow some other person to dictate what kind of music I listen to or what kind of food I eat or what I talk about when they’re around, and to a certain extent, we may be justified in this attitude. We don’t live our lives at the whim of others. For example, I’m not going to let someone else prevent me from talking about Jesus, or

praying, or reading Scripture, just because they don't like it. (Granted – a weaker brother or sister shouldn't have a problem with any of those things.) However, this isn't about letting others make our decisions for us. It IS about being sensitive to the needs of those around us ... and if one simple adjustment can help strengthen someone in their walk with Christ, it's an adjustment we must be willing to make. We must learn to see the world through the eyes of others. Being spiritual is not just about how good you are, it's about HOW GOOD YOU ARE TO OTHERS. This idea overlaps with a third principle of true spirituality.

**3. True spirituality is evidenced by SACRIFICE.** Paul says flatly... *“Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.”* What is the sacrifice here? Not eating meat. In the book of Romans, he said... *“It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that will cause your brother to fall”* (Romans 14:21). Paul is saying, “When someone else's spiritual health is at stake, you must be willing to SACRIFICE YOUR FREEDOM FOR THEIR BENEFIT.” In the culture in which Paul lived, eating food sacrificed to idols was an issue. In our culture, it isn't. There are, however, other “freedoms” that we should approach with caution, in order not to cause any of our weaker brothers and sisters in Christ to stumble. You may be convinced that certain things are okay and do not conflict with the Christian life. In fact, there are a few things that we make issues out of, that the Bible never mentions. You may be 100% right when you insist that we are free to do them. However, THAT IS NOT THE POINT. The point is that true spirituality is evidenced by a willingness to sacrifice so-called freedoms for the sake of a fellow Christian. On the OTHER side of the coin, if you take a great deal of pride in all the things you DON'T do, don't make the mistake of thinking your austerity makes you spiritual. If you don't smoke, drink, dance, go to movies, watch TV, listen to secular music, wear facial hair or make-up, that does NOT mean that you are spiritual. Spirituality isn't about surface-level behavior. It's more than just how good you are, it's how good you are to others. Therefore, if anything you do causes someone to stumble in their faith, IT'S BEST NOT TO DO IT AT ALL! It is best to sacrifice so-called freedom for their spiritual good. Some may say, “Does that mean that if anyone disapproves of what I do, I can't do it – no matter how insignificant it is? Does it mean I let other people control my life? What if someone tells me that when I play golf it causes them to stumble? Am I supposed to give up golf? Or what if they say that they think it is wrong for me to consume caffeine? Am I supposed to give up coffee?” Let me make a distinction here. Paul is talking about sacrificing for a WEAKER fellow Christian, right? If anything causes a WEAKER, YOUNGER, SPIRITUALLY IMMATURE BELIEVER to question the validity of his or her faith (as eating sacrificed meat might have done in his day), we should be willing to sacrifice to prevent that person from stumbling. HOWEVER, there are some people who may disapprove of something you do – and it doesn't cause them to question the validity of THEIR faith, it causes them to question the validity of YOUR faith, and so they want to JUDGE YOU because you eat pork or drink coffee or play golf. These people are busybodies, and you probably should just ignore them.

**CONCLUSION.** You would think a sermon of True Spirituality would focus on disciplines such as Prayer, Bible study, Fasting, Worship, Evangelism, and so on. These are ALL absolutely and undeniably essential to living the Christian life, so do NOT make the mistake of thinking that the Bible says, “If you're nice to people, then you're spiritual.” Nice people go to Hell, too. No, no, no! It's much deeper than that. We all know, in living the Christian life, that we strive to become GOOD, we strive to become HOLY, we strive to become LIKE JESUS. However, being like Jesus involves much more than praying and reading your Bible and turning off your TV. It involves letting God's presence in your life bring out the best in you, and it SHOWS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. If you want to be like Jesus, remember that **it's not merely a question of how good you are, but HOW GOOD YOU ARE TO OTHERS – especially other believers – especially weaker brothers and sisters.**

**PRAYER** – Heavenly Father, help us not to be ignorant, especially concerning spiritual gifts. Neither let our knowledge become a hindrance and cause another to stumble. May we never be puffed up in our knowledge. May we walk in love and may our love build up others. May it build up Your church. May our love bring glory to You. May others know we are Christians by our love. AMEN!