

Speaking of things which ought not to be divorced and must maintain oneness: knowledge and love cannot be separated in Christian ethic. "Now concerning" - another matter which the Corinthian church wrote about: Who is right, do the feasts of idol holidays have power?

1. Knowledge and Love are Not Rivals

a. Knowledge is Good:

- i. Without knowledge, men are stupid, like sleeping dogs with no bark or bite (Is 56), wandering after their mute and worthless idols (Jer 10:14) to their own destruction, loving worthless things.
 - ii. Eph 4:25 – "Let each of you speak the truth to his neighbor, for you are members of one another..."
 1. "members" – body parts, limbs, we belong to one another, unified under the Christ, brought together and interdependent upon one another, GET RID OF INDIVIDUALITY and "rights" within the Body
 - iii. Chrysostom writes: "If the eye sees a serpent does it lie to the foot? Or if the nose smells a deadly drug will it lie to the mouth? Or if the tongue tastes something bitter will it lie to the stomach?"
 1. Because we are all members of one another, every lie among us, every falsehood, every deception, harms us all
 2. Systemic interdependence
 - a. Every doctrine, attitude, and behavior that detracts from the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ is detrimental to the entire Body
 3. We need to bring the medicine of Truth (Jesus) to the the danger of the Lie
 - iv. "Idols are nothings." They have no power, for there is only one God and one Lord.
 1. *Knowing* this is vital to walking in gospel humility and freedom from false guilt and shame.
 2. This *knowledge* keeps us from living in fear and anxiety, when we can walk in hope and peace and joy "in believing" *the Truth* (Rom 15:13)
- ### b. So, Paul is not making rivals of knowledge and love
- i. The goal is not merely to find balance, but that neither is complete without the other
 1. In fact, *true* knowledge is proved by its love.
 2. Real knowledge cannot lack love, for the knower "is known" by its love (v3)
 - ii. To have knowledge without love merely puffs up the knower, making him hollow and inflated, a high flying lightweight without grounding or substance.
 - iii. But love without knowledge is naive, foolish, prone to being deceived and deceiving.
- ### c. Thus, both knowledge of Truth and love for God and others are necessary.
- i. It appears that the Corinthians had detached knowledge (*gnosis*) from love as a preeminent virtue. Hence, they attributed knowledge to power and power as virtue. Knowledge is power, they would say.
 1. So the apostle has been dealing with these categories of knowledge, word, wisdom, speech, and power throughout the letter. These things, apart from love for God and brother, are empty and even harmful.
 - ii. Jesus deals with the same thing to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7. Knowledge of Truth without love for God and brother will result in a lampstand removal if we do not return to love with knowledge.

2. Case Study: Loving a Brother Who Doesn't Get Gospel Implications

- a. Idols & Meat: To Paul a "weak conscience" is a conscience that is not gosselly robust enough to keep a person from feeling "defiled" *by consuming unclean things (made for idols)*

- i. In a sense, it is a "false guilt" or "false shame" which comes from a lack of a deep orientation to the gospel, the depth of God's grace in Christ Jesus, and the sufficiency of His provision to freedom from all other powers.
- ii. The "conscientiously weak" person is always evaluating every action, wound extremely tight in guilt and shame categories, they hate gray areas and want to know exactly what is right and wrong, with no tolerance for ambiguity.
- b. The "strong" are people with knowledge *of God and the gospel*.
 - i. They know certain truths from God which frees them from slavery to constant evaluation, and they have a temperamental flexibility to gray areas.
 - ii. They are more well-informed theologically and deeply oriented to the gospel
 - iii. In spite of the fact that Paul includes himself in the "strong" and calls the conscientious brothers "weak", this passage is actually a reprimand of the strong brothers, not the weak.
- c. The strong, knowledgeable brothers were not loving well.
 - i. They were not patient, not bearing up, not looking to edify their brothers, but were using their knowledge *not* to build up their brothers in knowledge and deep orientation to the gospel, but rather in such a way that they were excluding the weaker brothers until they acted against their consciences, doing that which they believed to be harmful, sinful, or dangerous to the soul.
 - ii. Thus, the weaker brothers' consciences are hardened towards right/wrong, good/evil, obedience/disobedience, and thus "cheap grace" encourages him to pursue sinful things indirectly
 - iii. Paul calls this "destroying" your brother, "smiting" his conscience, and a "sin against Christ."
- d. *Unconcern* towards a brother whose faith is weak (*ignorant*) is "sinning against Christ"
 - i. Not merely unconcerned, but unconcerned to the point where you proclaim your strength of faith *by doing things which encourage him to act against his conscience*
 - ii. Knowledge with love goes "underneath" to "build up" a brother
 - 1. Thus, "everybody think sanctification looks like strength. It really looks like weakness." (Ed Welch)
 - 2. In fact, Paul says that knowledge without love isn't really knowledge at all

3. Two Kinds of Knowledge: Exclusion and Love

- a. Loveless knowledge *excludes* the ignorant in two ways: naked rejection and assimilation
 - i. These may look different, but really they are the same thing: loveless knowledge
 - ii. Naked rejection is simply put as "You are out because you are wrong. Get away. We don't want anything to do with you...ever"
 - 1. This is the more obvious type of exclusion that our society absolutely rejects
 - iii. Assimilation, however, is just as exclusive, but masks itself as inclusion.
 - 1. This, in fact, is the ironic intolerance of today's new "tolerance."
 - a. "I will accept you, as long as you become like me, in absolutely morally denying any moral absolutes."
 - b. This leads to various types of coercion, some active (aggressive) and some passive (less aggressive).
 - 2. The old, rejection, intolerance basically used naked power to isolate or exclude, "If you don't believe like me, then you're despicable."
 - 3. Now, the moral relativist says, "As long as we're all relativists and don't make moral or faith-based judgments, then we can all live together."
 - 4. Do you see this? It is basically the same thing, where the "believe" in the old intolerance is now replaced by "relativists" in the new tolerance. Thus, the new tolerance is, in fact the old rejection in new clothes.

- iv. In fact, the New Tolerance claims to be about acceptance. Now what this means, however, is that *we don't evaluate anything negatively (as wrong)*, we just “accept” it.
 - 1. We don't call anything wrong, or negative, we just need to be positive and happy and smiling and inclusive of all views. In fact, to call some view wrong, is to be unaccepting of the one who holds it, and that is intolerable. Knowledge itself is evil.
 - 2. Ironically, of course, when we tell people that Jesus is the exclusive way to the Father, people will nod and say, 'yes, all views are right', *yet at the same time not want anything to do with us*. You see, they don't want to evaluate anything or call anything bad, yet they don't want a relationship, either.
 - 3. This is the unloving tolerance, which does not care to enter in, to walk with, to come alongside, to love well while at the same time claiming to be loving and accepting and knowledgeable
- v. This was the problem of the "knowledgeable" in Corinth. It wasn't that they approved of eating whatever foods were offered on theologically solid ground that was the problem (rather, in the apostle's estimation, it was maturity, strength), but the problem was that they were neglecting the relationship of the weaker brother as insignificant and his immaturity was reason for abrupt dissolution.
- b. Love, however, takes the weak one's place
 - i. It doesn't belittle, even while speaking negatively
 - ii. It speaks truth, but its purpose is growth, maturity, and strengthening the other rather than proving one's knowledge or superiority or standing on its own rights

4. Loveless Knowledge Coerces Weaker Brothers to Harden Their Consciences

- a. Weaker brothers were believing something to be defiling, *but were doing them anyway*, because they did not want to feel excluded by the strong!
 - i. It is this dissolution that leads the weaker brother to succumb to the pressure of the stronger brother and act against his conscience, for fear of exclusion.
 - ii. Thus, this is what it means to “destroy” a brother: to harden him towards the concept of sin, the hatred of it, the fleeing from it by searing his conscience towards defilement on grounds of “grace” and “liberty” and “freedom” and “knowledge”, etc.
- b. To “offend” a brother, or to “cause him to stumble” was not to make him feel offended at your perceived evil, but rather was not to encourage him to act against his conscience
 - i. Thus, eating meat did not merely make the weaker think lowly of the stronger brothers
 - 1. Rather, eating such meat *and looking up to the strong*, they ate meat, too, still believing it to be sin, and “whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” (Rom 14:23)
 - 2. So let us not encourage a doubter to eat, but rather let us love him, walking patiently with him *while ourselves not eating* for his sake, until he is convinced in his soul that eating is right.
- c. This is loving knowledge: “I believe that you are wrong. Come, let us reason together. I draw near to walk with you, to live with you, seeking to strengthen you and see you grow in the knowledge of God.”

5. Jesus is the Fullness of Knowledge and Love

- a. Again, these practical ways of living are rooted in the gospel *truth* of Christ Jesus:
 - i. To know Jesus is to know God (John 14:9; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).
 - ii. He is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:30), the word of God (John 1:1-14; Rev 19:13), and He has used such extravagant power to build you up in the knowledge of God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20; 2 Cor 4:6).

- iii. He laid down His power to build you up (Phil 2:4-11).
- iv. He laid aside His riches and became poor so that you could be made rich in such gospel blessings of redemption, justification, sanctification, and the promise to dwell in the presence of God forever unhindered by sin or its curse.
- b. The way that you increase your love is not by demeaning knowledge or by avoiding truth claims, but by seeing Jesus, the very expression of God's great love, who did not use His knowledge to separate, but to create, nurture, provide, covenant, redeem, and patiently mature us.

Romans 15:1-7

Paul says in Romans 15:7 that we are to welcome one another *just as* God in Christ welcomed us, for the glory of God. "Just as" - spend time there. Soak that in. It is not enough for me to simply tell you these things, or for you to know the Scripture intellectually. It must *rule* you until you love well.

You must experience what it means that God *so loved you* that He gave His unique only-begotten Son so that you would not perish. You must see with the eyes of the heart, the "just as" of the Cross. Then, you, too, can enter in to your brother's weaknesses to love him, knowing that he is wrong, so that you might build him up, to strengthen him, to inform his ignorance with the gospel of grace and the sufficiency of the Son of God.

But you must walk with him, slowly, patiently, dying to your rights, laying down your freedoms so that his conscience is not steeled, but softened; not seared, but strengthened by the knowledge of the incomparable sufficiency of Christ Jesus for his every need and His glorious rule over every power.

Jesus is the Stronger Brother who evaluated our weakness, moralism, arrogance, fear, unbelief, and found us wanting and weak and foolish and ignorant. He evaluated us negatively on the cross. How do we know that? The Son of God had to die because of our evaluation. So, it wasn't that God was being tolerant, accepting us *without* evaluation, when he offered up His Son to wrath. In fact, it was the opposite. It was much more than mere empty acceptance, it was love. He found us enemies, wanting in weakness, ignorant fools, and He entered into our weakness to redeem us out of it. He carried our burdens, he bore our shame, and he atoned for our guilt. He became the negative evaluation of the weak all the way to the darkness of the grave. It doesn't get any more loving than that, and this is knowledge.