

**LOVE BUILDS UP**

**1 Corinthians 8**

**INTRO:** Todd Rundgren says the “*Oops! Wrong Planet*” album with his band Utopia was “bummer” album. It was the mid-70s and people were discouraged and his album reflected it. So he wrote a song to lift it up. The song was LOVE IS THE ANSWER. I think it’s an appropriate song for the bummer days we’re living in now 40+ years later. Listen to the first verse:

*Name your price  
A ticket to paradise  
I can't stay here any more  
And I've looked high and low  
I've been from shore to shore to shore  
If there's a short cut I'd have found it  
But there's no easy way around it*

He then moves into the solution which reflects his Christian faith in his simple yet soaring chorus:

*Light of the world, shine on me  
Love is the answer  
Shine on us all, set us free  
Love is the answer*

But then Todd slips back into his sad reflection with:

*Who knows why  
Someday we all must die  
We're all homeless boys and girls  
And we are never heard  
It's such a lonely, lonely, lonely, lonely world  
People turn their heads and walk on by  
Tell me, is it worth just another try?*

And the answer is:

*Light of the world, shine on me  
Love is the answer (let it shine)  
Shine on us all, set us free  
Love is the answer (you know the answer is love)*

But wait, he questions:

*Tell me, are we alive, or just a dying planet?  
What are the chances?*

Well, here it is:

*Ask the man in your heart for the answers  
And when you feel afraid, love one another  
When you've lost your way, love one another  
When you're all alone, love one another  
When you're far from home, love one another  
When you're down and out, love one another  
All your hope's run out, love one another  
When you need a friend, love one another  
When you're near the end, love  
We got to love, we got to love one another*

And then he concludes with the only way that can happen:

*Light of the world, you got to shine on me  
Love is the answer  
Shine on us all (know that love can save the day)  
Set us free  
Love is the answer*

*(Just give it, just one more chance)*  
*Light of the world, shine on me*  
*Love is the answer (love, love, love)*  
*Shine on us all, set us free*  
*Love is the answer*  
*(Lord, you just can't let it stop, Lord)*  
*Light of the world, shine on me*  
*Love is the answer*  
*Shine on us all, set us free*

Well, it's still true. Love is STILL the answer. And the Lord will NEVER let it stop. God is love, love is his very nature. Love is the answer, because love builds up. That's the message for us today, and it was Paul's message to the Corinthians. Listen,

(Read 1 Corinthians 8)

As we've looked at 1 Corinthians since the beginning of July we know that Paul focused extensively on certain topics. For the first 4 chapters he discussed the disintegrating evil of factions and disunity. For the next 3 chapters, which we finished last week, he confronted illicit relationships, even as he explained healthy relationships, as he talks about sexuality, marriage, and even lawsuits. Now, starting with chapter 8 and going through chapter 10, Paul addresses another huge issue that the Corinthian Church was struggling with. We've seen before they were an island of Christ Followers in a cesspool of Greco-Roman paganism and they needed Paul's guidance. The issue was whether or not to eat food offered to idols. While it might seem silly and foreign to us, it was a major distraction and even division in Corinth. The truth is, however, similar issues confront us as we strive to be the Church in challenging times. Let's look at it.

We know from the Old Testament that animal sacrifice was part of the Jewish worship of God. We also know that Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice that made any further sacrifice unnecessary for those who were his followers. This was good news for the Corinthian Christians, of course, but sacrifice to pagan gods remained an integral part of the pagan culture they lived in. It also was a nearly constant reminder of their old lives which were full of emptiness and fear.

Only a rich person could afford to buy an animal and have it prepared thereby assuring it was not used in pagan ritual. But I think I've pointed out a time or two that the Corinthian church consisted largely of people from the poorer classes and because of that they probably ate very little meat because of the expense. In the end a reasonable way to purchase meat was to buy that which had been offered in temple ritual. When the animal was sacrificed, actually very little of it was consumed by the fire and the remainder was used to pay off the pagan priest, and the city tax and the rest was often sold at market.

The issue Paul is dealing with here is, whether or not that meat offered to pagan gods compromised the faith of the one eating it. The short answer is "No – it does not." The long answer is, while that is very true it's more complicated than that and Paul launches into a teaching on it that covers several chapters. The answer for today from Chapter 8 that we must address the issue is from the direction of love for one another. Ignoring the struggles of a weaker brother or sister is the response of one who loves self more than they love God. Love builds up. Selfishness tears down. So, while it does no harm to the one who eats it and therefore one can freely eat meat offered to idols, Paul warns the Corinthians *You must take care to see to it that your very liberty does not become a stumbling-block to those who are weak.* 1 Corinthians 8:9 (Barclay).

This is another place where Paul's words, written in 52 AD, are as relevant as when he dictated them . . .

**Even if something is harmless for you, when it hurts someone else, it must be avoided or even given up**

- Christ Followers must never do anything which causes another Christ Follower to stumble. Paul says take care of the weaker brother. Have sensitivity for him or her. And lest you get arrogant and look down your nose at their weakness, remember your so-called *knowledge puffs up while love builds up.* (v. 1b). That which puffs up sooner or later bursts.
- Remember. . .

**What is safe for one person may be quite unsafe for another**

- For the Corinthians it was food offered to idols that threatened to pull them back into their old pagan ways, or even simply the trauma of remembering it. Or it might cause them to go against their conscience and such compromise could cause them to relapse into sin and or despair. So to chomp into a beef brisket might have been mouthwatering for the one who was free, but it might cause great distress for a weaker person.
- Let's bring up to a modern application. You may believe its fine to sip a cold beer on a hot summer afternoon or have a nice wine with your favorite meal, and you'd be right. But some people do not feel the same way. For some, drinking is unchristian and it makes them very uncomfortable and for you drink it in front of them, or worse, offer it to them is unkind. It's better for you to not drink than to wound your brother or sister with your insensitivity. It may also be tremendously unsafe. Perhaps that person struggles with addiction, and seeing you with a drink in your hand draws them into harmful behavior. Barclay writes, "*No man has any right to indulge in a pleasure or to demand a liberty which may be the ruination of someone else. An indulgence which may be the ruin of someone else is not a pleasure but a sin.*"
- This is what Paul rightly calls a stumbling block. Don't be a stumbling block. Instead. . .

**Judge everything from the point of view of love**

- Love builds up. During these days when we are sick of the incessant bad news about COVID and the divisive issue of masking or not masking, and gathering or not gathering, we can put this teaching into practice on a daily basis. Wear the mask! My heart goes out to the poor kid who works at Hawkins who drew the short straw and got assigned the very unwelcome task of making sure incoming customers are wearing a mask. Don't make him or her have to tell you. As a Christ Follower, love comes first even when it's inconvenient or steams your glasses.
- Love builds up. People might only see your eyes over your mask, but those eyes can project hateful daggers at the person who is not wearing a mask. Yes – it goes both ways. That's why we judge everything from the point of view of love.

**Conclusion:** Well, as I said, Paul continues with this discussion and so will we. For today, and for living these days, remember Todd Rundgren's words, Love is the answer. It is. The love of God lived out in the lives of his people. In a crumbling world, they show that love builds up. Amen.