

Christian Ethics - Paris Readhead

by From the Pulpit & Classic Sermons

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love in the Christian life, particularly in relation to knowledge and liberty.

Duration: 39:07

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8:1

Topics: "Radio", "Christian Ethics", "Love and Responsibility"

Description

Paris Readhead emphasizes the importance of Christian ethics in navigating a culture filled with idolatry, as seen in Corinth. He explains that knowledge alone can lead to pride and cruelty, while true understanding must be accompanied by love for God and others. Readhead challenges Christians to view their liberty responsibly, ensuring that their actions do not become a stumbling block for weaker believers. He highlights that true Christian conduct is not merely about what is permissible, but about what builds up the community of faith. Ultimately, he calls for a life that reflects the love of Christ in every aspect, urging believers to consider the impact of their freedom on others.

Transcript

Portion by portion as we encounter it, but may I just give you this brief word of introduction. In the city of Corinth, every kind of idolatry was known. The idolatry of Rome, of Greece, of Africa, all had its expression and its manifestation in Corinth.

It is very possible that most of the meat that would be sold in the shambles or the butcher section of the market would have been brought from the temples where the beast had been slain as a sacrifice. It would be likewise true that much of the meat in the family home, in the home use, would have come from that portion returned to the one who brought the sacrifice. This is very likely the case in most of the pagan homes.

It would therefore be almost impossible for a Christian to go with relatives or friends without eating meat that had been sold, offered to the idols. Now Paul was vitally concerned about this matter of the Christians relating themselves to the culture of their day. You see, Christianity is practical.

It's not simply a bundle of doctrines and a box full of ideas, but it is a life related to the sovereignty of Christ and the extension of Christ's sovereignty, therefore, must reach into every area and every department. How thrilling it is to realize that there is no part of your life that is so mundane and

commonplace and insignificant that God has overlooked it. He has expressed himself concerning you.

He knows you. He knows the problems you're going to meet, the difficulties that you'll encounter. In fact, he has gone so far as to say, there's no temptation overtaking you, but such as is common to man.

Just as in the Old Testament, he gave specific instruction, detailed instruction for almost every part of the life of his people Israel. So in the New Testament, he's made provision for the life on equally detailed basis but in a different manner. Here it's not prescriptions for the minutiae of your daily life, but principles, glorious principles which are applicable to every situation into which you'll come.

You see, he said in the New Testament that he would take away the heart of stone that rebellious heart that refused to have its life ordered. He'd take away the heart of stone, and he'd give a heart of flesh, and he'd put his spirit within us and cause us to walk in his statutes. The difference is that he instructed and commanded Israel, but in the New Testament, he causes us to walk in his statutes.

The statutes haven't changed, but the difference is that instead of your trying to hold out or hold up, as many often offer as an excuse for not becoming Christian, you know, I can't hold out, I can't hold up, I can't carry it through. Well, you see, the principle is entirely different now. It isn't you holding out, it's he holding you up.

He said he would come in and do for you and through you what it was that his people Israel had not done for him. Now we would consider this under the branch of Christian ethics. Perhaps we could just say this, that ethics is that branch of moral government which is concerned with human character and conduct.

But it seeks to determine the principles by which his conduct is to be regulated, having to do not merely with what is, but what ought to be. And thus Paul is endeavoring to give to this people a Christian ethic in relation to the pagan world in which they were living. Now we're going to see this in the form of three challenges that are presented by Paul.

First, the challenge to the Christian to rightly view his superior knowledge, verses 1 to 3. Now, as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifyeth, love edifyeth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

But if any man love God, the same is known of him. Undoubtedly, the church at Corinth had written to Paul saying, now, what about our relationship to our pagan relatives, and friends, and neighbors, and family reunions, and all the things that we'd like to take part in? Now, Paul, you don't need to bother about writing to us concerning idols and meat offered to idols. We know about that, is the word that they give to Paul.

Well, Paul answers in terms of what they've written, and he says, now, as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. We know that we all have knowledge. But you see, you could almost read it this way.

We know that we all have knowledge. You know, he is implying that there's something beyond knowledge, something that's needed in addition to knowledge. He concurs with them, but there's a bit of irony here.

These were the people, you know, who were so wise that they had fallen into the snare of the devil. These were the people that served as a homiletical judging society. They would judge Apollos, and Peter, and Paul, and they said, well, we're for Paul, and we're for Apollos, and we're for Peter.

They judged genealogies, and they judged business success, all of the things which were there. They were the wise people in the wise church, and Paul, bearing in mind all that's been said, says, we know that you have knowledge, all right, you have knowledge. But Paul then makes a statement, begins his correction by this rather, shall we say, unsubtle statement, knowledge puffeth up.

Knowledge puffeth up. Well, there's not much that we can say about it. You know, when a thing is puffed up, it just means that it's bigger and really less, the density is less, it's full of nothing but air.

And so said he, knowledge inflates, knowledge causes one to become proud of what he has learned and what he knows. Having said this, let me hasten to say that Paul here, nowhere else either, makes any slur upon knowledge. Obviously, ignorance is a great handicap, and Paul isn't praising it.

It cannot be praised or used. We must have knowledge, and we must dispense knowledge to dispel ignorance. He is not putting his approval upon ignorance and stupidity in any sense at all.

He's simply saying that knowledge alone can prove exceedingly dangerous. He says it tends to inflate the mind with conceit. It puffs up.

He proceeds to say that, by implication at least, that having caused one to become inflated in his own evaluation of his knowledge, they proceed almost immediately to become intolerant and cruel. Some of the cruelest people I have ever met have been people that have had a great deal of knowledge. There's one man that I recall from the South and to whose home I came by no choice of mine in the city for meetings with the company of believers.

And I was asked to stay there in this particular home. Well, the man was well taught in the things of the Lord, and many of the things which he said he assumed I disagreed with, but actually I held to be very dear and self-evident from the Scripture. But, you know, after two days of his sarcasm, his intolerant cruelty, his vituperative accusations against all who didn't agree with him, I simply told him and his good wife, I said, I can't stay with you.

I can't stay with you. I'm not going to stay in your home. You have opened it to me, but I'm sure the one who invited me here had no idea that you were going to react as you have.

And so I said, in spite of the fact that I do agree with much you say, the intolerance and the cruelty, that the acid expressions that you've made are of such a nature that I am not going to stay with you any longer. Now there was a clear case of someone having knowledge, but you see the knowledge had become an infection in his spirit. It had caused this particular man to become conceited and cruel.

Now this can happen. Actually, of course, you understand that when one is conceited over his knowledge, it's mere proof of the immensity of his ignorance. He doesn't understand the greatness of the object about which he has some knowledge.

And of course, it proves that he has never had really a clear glimpse of God or of himself. For if he had ever clearly seen God, by which view alone he can rightly see himself, he would have understood that in him, in his flesh, there is no good thing. There is nothing so humbling as a revelation of God to the human heart.

There is nothing that so strips of conceit and of pride as to see what you are in the light of what God is. There is nothing that so causes you to rejoice in the fact that all that you have is a gift of his grace, as

much as to get a clear vision of how much more there is in Christ than you've ever seen before. And so Paul here uses great directness of speech in correcting this mistake.

Look at verse 2. If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet, as he ought to know. Perhaps I could give you a more literal translation and bring out the verb tense, as we have it from Lenski, who's done such an excellent work on 1 Corinthians. If one thinks he has come to know, and then still feels that he knows anything, not yet did he get to know actually as he ought to know.

If one has come to know something, really come to know something, and still feel that he knows anything, well, he didn't really come to know it as he ought to know it. Because when you once have found that the truth that you hold before you is a part of the whole, and you see it in relation to the whole, then you feel, as I believe it was Pascal who said at the close of a lifetime, I have been as a child picking up the pebbles of truth along the ocean shore of God's omniscience. And this is all that can ever characterize the true child.

So said Paul, if any of you think you know anything, if you do know anything, and you still think you do, you've missed the point. What you have actually known ought to have been revealed as part of a whole so immense that you can't grasp it. In this matter of spiritual progress, you know the only place that anyone can feel superior to another is when he looks down.

It's like as though we were all climbing ladders of a thousand rungs against the wall of eternity. And some are a little more sprightly and able than others, and quickly climb up to rung 50, and they see the weary down there laboriously getting up over rung 5 and rung 6. And looking down, they say, oh, these sluggards, how slow, how indolent. But you see, the only way that anyone can ever have any consolation in how far he's come in the things of Christ is because he looks down.

For if he ever looks up and sees the 950 rungs before him, he's going to be so humble that he'll say it is but as a child that's run a step or two ahead of his fellows and never reached the goal that's before him. This is what Paul wants them to see. Yes, said he, you do have knowledge, but do you have it properly? Do you know anything as you really ought to know it? You have knowledge.

I can't dispute with the facts, they're there. But you lack in the proper manner of knowing. You are unable to use the knowledge that you have rightly.

This is what is implied in that second verse. Then in the third verse, you will see Paul establishes once and for all that something is needed in addition to knowledge. But if any man love God, if any man love God, the same is known of him.

You see, it isn't what you know about God alone, said Paul, it's what he knows about you. He knows about you. And the little crumbs that you've gathered like the greedy squirrel that's taken them and put them into the nest is so inconsequential in terms of all that God has, all that he has, all that he wants to teach, all that he wants to show.

And so Paul makes it clear that in addition to knowledge, all that you can accumulate, all that you can gather, all that'll ever come to you, there must be love. The only one that can rightly employ his knowledge, therefore, is the one in whose heart the love of Christ has been shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. When you have that, when his love fills you, then your knowledge is not ever going to be used to hurt or to injure, but it's going to be that in your heart is a deep desire to secure the greatest blessedness

and good of others, and your knowledge is going to be that which you'll use wisely.

Thus, the fruit of the Spirit, love, is indispensably the control of knowledge. Though I have the gift of knowledge and fathom all mysteries and understand all secret lore, said Paul, and I have not love. It's just a banging gong and a clanging cymbal.

It's just words. It's just noise. It's imperative, therefore, that we should understand that knowledge is only rightly used by that person that is filled with the fullness of God.

It is only that one that is walking in the fullness of the Spirit. Only when you are filled with the Spirit of God are you going to be able to value the knowledge properly and use that knowledge in solving the perplexing problems of others. It's indispensable, therefore, dear heart, that you should recognize that with all of your getting of theological truth, all of your getting of eschatological facts, with all that you've learned, the indispensable ingredient to make the whole meaningful is the fruit of the Spirit.

How many times some have come into a company of people such as this that have had through the years, perhaps, can I say without overemphasis, deeper teaching than certain congregations. I do not know whether that would be true or not, but I have known since coming of some that were babes in Christ, and someone in the congregation with superior knowledge would go to them and with a tongue sharp and cutting would criticize something they had or did or said or wore, criticize and hurt the same way you know that a person seeing a fly on a baby's forehead would come over with a stick and kill the fly but permanently injure the baby. This is knowledge gone amok.

This is knowledge wrongly used. God didn't intend that. He didn't intend that.

You know, perhaps, that what someone is doing isn't right, but I also assure you that when the Spirit of God has penetrated you and saturated you and filled you, you'll be so careful how you use that knowledge because you will understand that it hurts and it injures and it grieves and it wounds. Paul saw that. There was a division.

Someone said it's all right to eat and someone said it's wrong, and so using their knowledge, each injuring the other. Paul said, now wait a moment, wait a moment. Knowledge is only meaningful when it's saturated with the love of the Holy Ghost.

Now, the next thing we see is the challenge to the Christian to rightly view his liberty. Verses 4 to 8. As concerning, therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other god but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there be gods many and lords many, but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by him.

Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge, for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worst. You see, the Christian is called to liberty, not to legalism.

I remember some years ago being in a young people's conference down south, and the speaker announced his subject for that particular day from Colossians to this group of maybe 150 young people. And the text was, Touch not, taste not, handle not. Here he was giving biblical instruction to a group of

young people.

Well, if you'd bother to read the text later, you'll discover that Paul says just following that, which all are to perish with the using, all are to perish. In other words, this legalism that binds in the strictures of touch not, taste not, handle not, is a Judaistic principle that comes in. We're called to liberty, not to legalism.

Why? Because of what regeneration is. It is the impartation of the divine nature. It is God communicating new life to that which was dead.

It is one partaking of the divine nature in such a sense that he is said to be a new creation, a new creation. Something happened when he said to me, we sing in the little chorus. Indeed it did.

God gave you a new heart and a new nature and a new life and a new spirit, and he made you a new creation. Now we understand from 1 John that when God gives you this new nature, he gives you a new attitude toward the law. The attitude of the sinner is, I want to please me, but the attitude of the regenerated heart is, I want to please thee.

It's a change from, I delight to do my will, to, I delight to do thy will, O God. And John went so far as to say, if we say that we have, he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Now he didn't say you keep the commandments to be saved.

He simply said that because of what salvation is, when you've been born of God you have a desire to please God. Now this is presupposed whenever you mention liberty. I am of the opinion that for the last fifty years in America, evangelicals have had to erect a fence, about a five-barred fence of separation from the world.

You can put your names on your own bars if you wish, and maybe it'll be higher than five. But they've preached an easy-believe-ism salvation, a tip-your-hat-to-Jesus, sign-a-card salvation. And then they put up this high-board fence and put their unconverted converts inside, trying to get the devil's children to behave somewhat like Christians, in order that they won't be discovered for the poor workmen that they are.

And we pastors and evangelists have been guilty of creating a Judaistic system which has all of the earmarks of Phariseeism. Now do you say, what do you mean by that? I say we're called to liberty, we're called to freedom, we're called to a relationship with the living God that transforms the old. Now, when we've said that, what else do we say? Go out and do as you want to, yes.

Because my friend, if you want to do certain things that God's Word forbid and you've professed to be a Christian, the want-to is the proof that you aren't the Christian you profess to be. A man is what he wants, not what he does. I can put a man in prison and he won't do anything, but he is what he wants to do, not what he's forced to do, by social pressure, emotional pressure, religious pressure.

You are what you want. You are what you want. And though you may be a nicer neighbor to live with, because you conform to certain outward patterns that are set for you by people such as myself, the fact that you conform is not proof that you've been born of God.

The proof that you've been born of God lies in what you want to be, in what you want to do. You are what you want. You are what you want.

And perhaps if you were to do what you want to do, you'd discover what you will ultimately discover if you pretend to be a Christian and play act the Christian life, and come to that hour when you hear him say, away with you, I never know you, I never know you. Better that you find out what's in your heart and that you do what needs to be done about it. Now, having said that, I pre hasten to say that the Christian views, idolatry, and idols, and the world in all that it is, for the foolishness that they are.

Paul said, we know about idols. There aren't any gods, Venus and Jupiter, they're not gods. They're not gods at all.

We know that. We understand that. And to us it means nothing, the world and what's in it, it has no hold on the child of God.

The true child of God can walk through the world the same way that a diver enclosed in a diving suit can walk through the sea, and he's in it but not of it, and he's in it and not part of it, and he uses it but he doesn't love it. He has his own atmosphere, he's been born of God, he's been born of God. However, said Paul, the true child of God recognizes that Satan is the god of this world, and whereas there's no Jupiter or Venus, there is Satan, and he uses idolatry, and there are demons who associate with idols and idolatry, he recognizes that.

And he recognizes that there are multitudes of people who are under the control of Satan and know not that it is Satan whom they serve, but worship the idols. And were he thus to do anything that would incline someone who is weak toward idolatry, he would be guilty of their blood upon his heart. So Paul introduces an entirely new thing here, an entirely new thing.

He says the Christian must realize that whereas he can eat or not, he's not the better for eating or for refraining, as you see in verse 8. The kingdom of God is not in meat or in drink, it is in righteousness and in peace and in joy in the Holy Ghost. Ah yes, said Paul, idols are nothing, these things are nothing. The child of God can walk through the midst of them and be there, and it has no meaning, has nothing to touch him at all.

He's above them, he's apart from them, and the meat is nothing, the idol is nothing, but ah, wait a moment, there are others, there are others, there are others. And so, whereas the child of God is called to liberty, he is also challenged to a Christian view of responsibility. We see that in verses 9 to 13.

But take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hath knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols? And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make thy brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

The Christian view of knowledge, the Christian view of liberty, now the Christian view of responsibility. If you refrain from certain things because I tell you when you meet something I haven't told you about, then you'll have to come running back and say, now should I do this? But then I become your conscience. I become the means by which your life is governed, and you have added into a legal system of which I am the lawgiver.

You do that for your children, you do that for others in the same way, and it becomes equally damaging. But my friend, when you can bring someone into a relationship with Christ so that they've been born of God and are indwelt by God and have partaken of the divine nature, then they have an unction from the Holy One. The teacher is in them.

The teacher is in them. It's much better that you should have in you the one who can give you discernment at the time such discernment is needed. It's much better, I say, than that you should have a list of fifteen things that I have proscribed for you and said you mustn't do this or this or this.

For if you have been born of the Spirit and are indwelt by the Spirit and have partaken of the divine life, when you do that which grieves him whose name is holy, you will sense it. You will sense it. But, you see, it's a terrible alternative.

It seems as though, said Paul, that people here in Corinth were eating. They said, this doesn't mean anything to us, we're not bound by idols. But in the eating, they were causing pagans to say Christianity has no significance, and they were causing the Christians to say, these people do not love Christ.

In other words, their good was being evil-spoken of. Paul said, you have to recognize that you have a responsibility, a responsibility not only to act in the liberty which is yours, but to act in such a way that you share with God his concern for those he loved and for those for whom he died. Let me illustrate what I mean by this.

Your liberty can become a stumbling block to the lost in a very real way. I recall hearing some years ago now about a young man that was in court being tried for murder. Hearing about it, an old friend of the family and of the lad came into the courtroom and sat in one of the back seats where the spectators were.

And after a while, when the young man was called upon to give his witness, and the question was asked by the prosecuting attorney, he said, now I want to tell you what happened. He said, back there is my former Sunday school teacher. She took us, a group of youngsters, to her home and she taught us to play cards.

She said she'd played for years and it hadn't hurt her. And then she took us one time and she gave us something to drink. She had had it in her home and it hadn't hurt her.

But she didn't know what it was doing to me. That first game of cards I played under the tutelage of my Sunday school teacher and that first drink that I had sent me on a course that ended with this murder. And she's the one that started it.

You see, to her, apparently it had no significance, had no meaning. It was something that didn't bother. But to this one, this lad that came, it had been the means of his destruction.

This is what you must understand that Paul's talking about. This is the kind of thing you must see. Therefore, the person that's been born of God does not seek things that are his own.

He looketh and seeketh the things of others, and he's concerned about others. And it isn't a question, can a Christian do this and be saved? Can a Christian do that and be saved? The question is, what about others? What about others? What about others? This is the rule. This is the touchstone.

This is the principle that's established for us once and for all. How many there are that have been emboldened by the example of the strong to do something that even the strong could do without hurt, but being weaker, have been plunged to ruin. Charles Spurgeon, during his latter years of ministry, illness would go at times to Monaco in France, the south of France on the Mediterranean for rest.

And occasionally, he said that he enjoyed walking through the gardens there at the casino, the most beautiful gardens then in the world, they were said to be. But one day, the one that was in charge of the casino saw him and said, I haven't seen you in the gardens of late. Well, he said, I don't patronize your casino.

I don't ever go in. I feel that it isn't right for me to use your gardens. You put them there for those that do patronize your casino.

Oh, said the man, that's all right. Feel perfectly free to use them anytime. You see, you really bring great advantage to me.

For when people see such as you walking in the gardens, they feel that there really must not be anything too bad about it. And they will come in and walk in the gardens, and then they'll make bold to go into the casino. And we profit greatly from having people such as you use our gardens.

Oh, that somehow it could be understood, somehow it could be understood that an example may cause others to go far beyond it and to bring destruction to them. Liberty that becomes a snare to another becomes a sin to you, and their blood thus falls upon you. Mr. Ellis, a missionary from the South Seas, gave an illustration from the chief, a former cannibal, offering human sacrifice that had been won to Christ.

One day he came and said to the missionary, last Sabbath afternoon, when I was walking through my gardens, I saw some ripe plantains hanging from the branch over the path. Being hungry, I thought to reach them and to have eaten them. Would it have been all right? And the missionary said, well, I don't see why there would have been any particular harm in it.

But let me ask you, did you? And the chief said, no. You see, I had some of my attendants with me, and I knew that home in my house I had fruit that had been prepared the day before. And even though I felt then that I might have eaten it with no harm to me, my attendants might have seen it and felt that it was all right to gather fruit on the Sabbath day, on the Lord's day, and thus would have been established something that would have broken the deep meaning of this holy day.

So he said, for their sakes, I didn't eat. This we must understand. It's love which seeketh not its own.

It isn't a question, can you do it? That's not the issue at all. It's what of the weaker one. It's what of the one that sees you.

It's not a question, do I have liberty to do this? But it's a question, what of those little children in the father's family? What of those outside of Christ? It is that I am not concerned primarily about what pleases me now that I've been born again. It's what pleases him who saved me and who called me. Dr. Ironsides illustrates it in one of his lovely books.

He tells of being with a group of Christians on an outing in Michigan. They had just a lovely time of fellowship together. He was talking with one that had been one from Islam, from Mohammedanism, Mohammed Ali.

And this dear man from Pakistan, incidentally, had really a glowing testimony and a wonderful ministry there. He said that they were talking together, Ironsides and Mr. Mohammed Ali, when one of the girls that was serving came up with a platter of sandwiches. And he, she offered them and said, now I have ham here, two kinds, we have minced ham and then we have sliced ham.

He said, is there any beef? No. Any chicken? No. Any cheese? No.

Just the two kinds of ham sandwich. Said, well, thank you, I won't have any. And the girl looked at him and said, but Mr. Mohammed Ali, you've been a Christian surely this prohibition against eating ham doesn't have any continuing effect on you, does it? Oh, no, no.

It doesn't mean anything to me now, either to eat or not to eat. I'm not the better for eating or the worse for not eating. Said, it doesn't mean anything.

But you see, back home in Pakistan, I have an unsaved father. And every year I go to see him. And the first thing that he will say to me when I come into his room, he will say, Mohammed, have those Gentiles, have those pagans that you've been with, those people in America, those heathen, have they gotten you to eat the filthy flesh of a swine? And I can look at him and say, no, father, no, swine flesh has never passed my lips.

And then I can preach Christ to him. Or as if I were to eat, he'd never hear another word I have to say. Better that I never eat, that in eating, I close the door to witness to my needy father.

Here it is, the challenge to rightly view knowledge, the challenge to rightly view liberty, the challenge to rightly view responsibility. Not only to those for whom the Savior died that know him not, but the wee babes in Christ that need to know him better. This, I believe, answers so many questions that arise in the Christian's life.

May the spirit of God plant his answer deep in your heart today. Shall we stand for prayer? Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/27/SID27413.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/from-the-pulpit-&-classic-sermons/christian-ethics-paris-readhead/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net