

# Leavening Church

## Thought for Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January (Steve Langton)

Today's new testament lesson is from [1 Corinthians 8](#) and concerns whether a Christian should eat food that has been sacrificed to idols. I am guessing that this issue probably doesn't cause you many sleepless nights, and you may be thinking now is the time to stop reading! Bear with me because there are some important lessons that we can learn from this passage.

The passage is too lengthy to fit here, so here is a quick summary for those who don't have time to look it up. In cities like Corinth food that had been sacrificed to idols would be offered for sale and so a contentious issue was whether Christians should buy and eat it. Paul is clear on the answer to that; there is only one true God, so it doesn't matter if food has been sacrificed to other false 'gods'. Christians can eat it with a clear conscience.

Now you might think that this would be the end of the argument, but it is not. Paul goes on to point out that there may be others with a 'weak conscience' who struggle with this idea and if they see stronger sisters and brothers eating such food, they may be led into what they regard as sin. Paul says: 'Be careful that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling-block to the weak' (verse 9). Paul is completely confident about the correct position, but still says that the Corinthians might need to refrain from exercising their right to buy such food in order to protect those weaker than themselves.

William Barclay's commentary draws three truths from this story:

- What is right for one person in a given situation may not be the same as what is right for another. Obvious examples spring to mind; for example, the odd glass of wine is something many of us enjoy, but it would not be right for a recovering alcoholic. One person may be happy to have a small bet on a sporting fixture, whereas for another this might be the route to gambling addiction and financial ruin. It follows from this that we ought to respect others' decisions, even if we don't agree with them.
- Every moral decision should be judged from the perspective of love as well as knowledge. It is easy to become arrogant if we are too confident in the rightness of our judgement. This can lead to a lack of love for those who take a different view, even hatred towards them. Our conduct should be guided by love for others, and we should consider the impact it might have on them.
- None of us has the right to insist on any right or liberty if the exercise of that right causes harm to another. This is a difficult truth in today's society where rights are seen as absolute. Confusingly, just because we have a right to do something doesn't mean that it is always right to do it! An obvious example is the right to bear arms, so beloved of many Americans, where that right inevitably increases the risk to others. In our own society at present, there are various activities that we are legally entitled to do, but which might risk infecting others, or might just risk our own health, and hence harm others who might need that hospital bed that we end up occupying. Indeed, this is why we are not risking holding services in Leavening Church at present.

So let us try not to be too arrogant about our moral views. In Paul's words 'knowledge puffs up while love builds up' (verse 1).