

and if we all behave on the conviction that we are right and others are therefore wrong, it will all fall apart very quickly. That is how the world so often functions and we see the consequences. We have the opportunity to do something different, to be a community that actually represents Christ to the world by the way we treat one another. Because it is not about knowing the right things, but doing the loving things. *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*

And this is a particular challenge in a congregation like ours because as a city centre church meeting in a historic building, there are very many people who will come to see what we are about. It could be that they will discover what they had always suspected, that Christian people are proud and arrogant, full of their own importance. It could be that they will discover people obsessed with correct doctrine and maintaining traditions and doing things in the right way. Or it could be that they will find a community of people who are humble enough to lay aside what is important to them for the sake of others, people who will let go of their power for the sake of those who are weaker, people who will hold tightly to faith in Christ but not to their own opinions, so that there is always a hand free to reach out in help or in welcome. If we are going to proclaim the gospel that is a vital difference, because people will always want to know that we care before they will care what we know. Because it is not about knowing the right things, but doing the loving things. *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*

Knowledge is a fantastic thing and I recommend it. But in the end it is love which will make a difference to the kind of community we are, and love that will set us free.

answer is yes – and I hope it is, we have to be willing to compromise with those who have different views from us. We have to be willing to compromise even when we know we are right. We have to be willing to compromise even when we know the other person is wrong. Because it is not about knowing the right things but doing the loving things. Because knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

Actually we already know how to work that principle. Imagine a man who has a small child coming to visit his house. What would you think of him if his preparation consists of writing a lecture on all the dangers that may lurk within the house, warning the child of the potential consequences of playing with knives or falling out of windows. If he even prepares a spreadsheet for the child on statistics about accidents in the home. The words may be based on good knowledge. They may all be correct and clearly delivered, but we all know that a more appropriate approach is to move sharp objects out of reach and make sure the windows are secure. Because it is not about knowing the right things but doing the loving things. Because knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

I think this presents a particular challenge in a congregation like ours. Firstly because we have a lot of people who have a lot of knowledge. That is a real privilege and a fantastic opportunity. I remember when Rev Peter Nielson joined some of us for a church weekend away a couple of years back. He was astonished and thrilled that he could be in a room discussing some of the big moral issues of the day with Christian people who had so much knowledge and experience, some of whom were global experts in their field. Having that sort of intellectual credibility is a fantastic gift to our Christian witness. No one is going to come here and say that we are all just a bunch of naive dreamers. If you want a congregation with knowledge then we have it. So we need to be reminded that all of that counts for very little if we don't manage to love one another. Because it is not about knowing the right things, but doing the loving things.
Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

This is a particular challenge in a congregation like ours also because we come from so many different backgrounds. We come from different traditions and bring with us different assumptions. Things that are of central importance for some will carry little significance for others. The potential for misunderstanding and disagreement and division is enormous,

it raises difficult issues. There were people in the church who had a good knowledge of the teachings of Jesus Christ, but the church is not made up entirely of people like that. There are others who are now joining in, perhaps less travelled people, perhaps less educated people. These are folk who have spent all their lives in the fear of these false gods, believing they have power and can make a difference. Now that they have become Christians they want to leave all of that behind. They don't want to be associated with it in any way, or risk anything which might interfere with their commitment to follow Christ. Logically we would expect Paul to tell **them** that they are wrong, that they have nothing to fear from local superstitions, that they should stop moaning and focus on more important things.

But that is not what he does, which is why we should sit up and take notice. It is those who are knowledgeable, those who are right, who he calls on to change their ways. They might be right, but Paul is going to insist that doing the right thing is not as important as doing the loving thing. Because knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

This is a shocking conclusion to come to and if we take it seriously it is going to make us look at our Christian faith in a new way. It is going to make us look at our church community in a new way. We discover that after all it is not about what we know, or what we believe, but what we do. What matters is not knowing the right things, but doing the loving things. Because knowledge puffs up but love builds up.

Now we may not have to face difficult questions about eating meat which may have been tainted by contact with idols, but we do face plenty of questions about which we will have different opinions. They might be theological or political or practical, they might be any manner of things. If we are looking for issues that have the potential to cause division and bad feeling in churches we are not going to have to try too hard. But here are the real questions that we should confront.

Do you want to be part of a loving community where our faith and our deeply held convictions are bonds which hold us together rather than poles which drive us apart? Do you want to be part of a Christian church which values every member and which gives the most support to those who are weakest? Do you want to be part of a movement which demonstrates to a broken world that a better way of living together is possible? For if the

1 Corinthians 8 : 1 - 13

Sermon

It is great for a preacher when the bible text summarises its point in a simple and catchy slogan. This doesn't happen often, so today I want to make the most of it.

Paul comes up with the punchy phrase which does a great job of capturing what he saying: "*knowledge puffs up but love builds up*". It is a great phrase for us to memorise and live with for a while, and part of its power is that experience suggests that it is true. *Knowledge puffs up but love builds up*.

Paul wrote that because he could see the damage that knowledge was doing in the church. We don't normally think of knowledge as a problem. We normally think of knowledge as what we need to solve a problem. But in this case, and perhaps in many cases, what was needed was less the appliance of knowledge, and more the appliance of love.

I've said a little about the context of the church in Corinth, where a particular problem had arisen. Those who had a good knowledge of the teachings of Jesus Christ, who had a good understanding of what was going on in the world, were not bothered by the "meat offered to idols" question. And when he writes Paul agrees with those who are willing to eat more or less anything, because they are right that these so called gods have no substance to them.

They are right to believe that food which might have placed on an altar at some time is not going to have any power to harm them or corrupt them. He affirms that there is only *one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist.*" There are no other gods to worry about, so there is no need to get anxious about where your steak might have been before it reaches your plate. Paul agrees with all of that. He affirms that the knowledge which they have is sound knowledge.

Then he comes out with the shock conclusion: nonetheless those people should give up their right to eat that meat, for the sake of others for whom