***1 Corinthians 8; 1–13*** *Contemporary English Version*

### Food Offered to Idols

In your letter you asked me about food offered to idols. All of us know something about this subject. But knowledge makes us proud of ourselves, while love makes us helpful to others. In fact, people who think they know so much don't know anything at all. But God has no doubts about who loves him.

Even though food is offered to idols, we know that none of the idols in this world are alive. After all, there is only one God. Many things in heaven and on earth are called gods and lords, but none of them really are gods or lords. We have only one God, and he is the Father. He created everything, and we live for him. Jesus Christ is our only Lord. Everything was made by him, and by him life was given to us.

Not everyone knows these things. In fact, many people have grown up with the belief that idols have life in them. So when they eat meat offered to idols, they are bothered by a weak conscience. But food doesn't bring us any closer to God. We are no worse off if we don't eat, and we are no better off if we do.

Don't cause problems for someone with a weak conscience, just because you have the right to eat anything. You know all this, and so it doesn't bother you to eat in the temple of an idol. But suppose a person with a weak conscience sees you and decides to eat food that has been offered to idols. Then what you know has destroyed someone Christ died for. When you sin by hurting a follower with a weak conscience, you sin against Christ. So if I hurt one of the Lord's followers by what I eat, I will never eat meat as long as I live.

***Mark 1:21-28 Contemporary English Version***

### A Man with an Evil Spirit

### [Luke 4.31-37](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke.4.31-Luke.4.37&version=CEV)

Jesus and his disciples went to the town of Capernaum. Then on the next Sabbath he went into the synagogue and started teaching. Everyone was amazed at his teaching. He taught with authority, and not like the teachers of the Law of Moses. Suddenly a man with an evil spirit[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A21%E2%80%9328&version=CEV#fen-CEV-22199a)] in him entered the synagogue and yelled, “Jesus from Nazareth, what do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! You are God's Holy One.”

Jesus told the evil spirit, “Be quiet and come out of the man!” The spirit shook him. Then it gave a loud shout and left.

Everyone was completely surprised and kept saying to each other, “What is this? It must be some new kind of powerful teaching! Even the evil spirits obey him.” News about Jesus quickly spread all over Galilee.

**A wiser, kinder voice**

Fiddler on the roof – Reb Teveye ponders life while he talks to God and especially about **tradition.**

As Steve says nostalgia ain’t what it used to be and neither is tradition. Rev Teveye realises that even his Jewish traditions were new once.

Jesus and the Corinthians are facing the same problem. There are rules and there are rules. What do we do with them, which ones do we obey, on whose authority and how much can we stretch them.

Michael said to me recently that story is more powerful than rules.

The Mark passage about Jesus in the temple starts off with

***Jesus and his disciples went to the town of Capernaum. Then on the next Sabbath he went into the synagogue and started teaching. Everyone was amazed at his teaching.***

But what had happened before this. Not really very much in Mark’s gospel. No mention of birth, shepherds, magi or even early life- As in Matthew and Luke. Mark goes straight into ministry. We hear about who John the Baptist is, Jesus’ baptism and temptation and then this is this passage is introduction to Jesus’ ministry.

He preaches in the temple and he exorcises a spirit from a man who approaches him in the temple.

Why is this important? Why put this first and foremost? It’s about his authority

Teaching in the temple was a responsible job. It would have been exclusively men, Jesus is called a ‘Rabbi’ by some but there is no evidence of formal training or of being a Levi by birth which would give him authority. A recent phrase I learnt was ‘ovarian lottery’ from Liz Allen, a demographer, which meant your chances beyond your control- your time and place of birth, your genetics, the society you find yourself in, other chance happenings. Jesus doesn’t seem to have won the ‘ovarian lottery’ by being a Levite.

Teaching was often done by one learned, who could read for a start. The scribes, people who would copy the scriptures carefully by hand, would be the teachers of the gatherers in the synagogues of small places. Their teaching came from elaborating on the rules, many of which came from Deuteronomy or Leviticus in the early books of the Hebrew bible, or more likely quoting other commentators. V22 tells us that he taught *not as the scribes taught.*

How did Jesus teach? The people are amazed not that he teaches, but at the authority with which he teaches. What did they mean? Did he rant and rave? Did he shout? Was he ‘so sincere’? Was he clever with rhetoric, an adept story teller? He may have done all of those things or none of them.

Mark does not bother to tell us methods or content. If you were doing your Cert IV in Training and Assessment these are the things that they look for- content, methods and results. But the passage is sandwiched between the statement that *the people were amazed at his teaching* and ‘that it must be some ‘*new kind of powerful teaching’.*

The clue seems to be the meat in the sandwich – the exorcism of the demon possessed man who recognised Jesus for what he was. He was healed, the spirit left him, seemingly immediately. The meat in the sandwich about authority and teaching is not the fact of Jesus being more powerful than an evil spirit causing madness in the man. The meat is the message of liberation. The demoniac was delivered of his madness. He was liberated.

The rest of the gospel of Mark, and all the Gospels, demonstrate that Jesus was not about determining the fine points of the law but about liberation. Jesus tackled prejudice about gender, illness, social class, master and slave, imperialists or servants. Most of all he had sharp words to say about those who would use the law for their own improvement. He was not willing to debate right or wrong over small points but told stories that illustrated attitudes to God and to those around us. His liberating message was done through story

* Who is your neighbour?
* The kingdom of heaven is like …
* What must I do to achieve eternal life?
* And no one pours new wine into old wineskins.
* A farmer went out to sow …

Michael recently told me that story is more powerful than rules. Maybe Jesus listened to him too. His stories were about local people who could have been themselves or their neighbours, about things that they could see or easily imagine. Maybe the story of the girls who didn’t have their lamps quite prepared was told about the time of a wedding in the community. All the more hard-hitting if it was.

If story is more powerful than rules or laws I have called it **Lore or Law.**

Lore is something learned, or gained from experience.

In Paul’s letter to the Galatians which we did not read

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*** ***gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Gal 5: 22, 23***

Not only is there no law against them but you can’t make a law for them. And yet these are exactly the things that make the world go round. We already knew it was love that make the world go round. But the others, with love, enable family life, commerce, marriage, diplomacy, community life,

Proven 2 days ago when we went to went to the 2024 Australia Day awards to see many of our Eden volunteers receive awards, including Robyn from our own congregation. Our community relies on them for so many functions. It’s not just our church that relies on hours or weeks of volunteer time each week.

Jesus used stories to teach principle. Principles of compassion stay the journey and remain with us long after the rules are not enforced, gone or renewed. Think of what we learned from Heidi, The Snow Goose, The Lord of the Rings, The Lion King, Pocahontas and what society needs to unlearn from Rabbit Proof Fence, The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith, Schindler’s List, 12 Years a Slave.

Pam and I and many others from our congregation went to a celebration of Ossie Cruse’s life and 90th. The stories were not about his MBE, or AM or touring with Gough Whitlam to Africa and Malcom Fraser to the UN. The afternoon didn’t have one mention.

What was important to those speaking and listening, and it came out time and time again, was his compassion, diligence, giving time to people to listen and evidence of his devotion to his Lord.

What does the madness that the world needs liberating from now? I have a few. **Sectarianism** as we see Christians against each other, Muslim fighting Muslim, or Muslim on Hindu, extreme nationalism, racism, **greed** where the world cannot share and we see billionaires making more billions and billions of people are merely getting by or not. Not only the greed that says ‘yours is mine’ but also stealing from our grandchildren the chance to see an environment somewhat like when we grew up 50 or 60 years ago.

The other reading we just heard from Steve.

In the letter that Paul is writing to the new Christians in Corinth (and ancient trading centre in the South of Greece) he is responding to the question which would probably been hotly debated in the church of ***should Christians should eat meat which had been sacrificed to idols***.

Why is this passage linked with other readings today. Because it has the same message. **Lore over Law**.

The correct answer is complex and involves multiple opposing sources and considerations to be held at the same time. It’s what they call a ***wicked problem***.

All meat probably had some sacrificial process applied to it. Just like much meat in Australia is halal for Muslims so therefore we just do it in most abattoirs. Christians would need to become vegan or at least vegetarian but in Corinth some of the non-meat food also was offered to idols.

Eating sacrificed meat was regarded as having communion with the god it was sacrificed to.

Paul mentions that the idols aren’t real so it doesn’t matter. But what if it does matter to some and they think it a sin and copying the person who thinks it doesn’t matter causes them to sin.

Are the people who have a strong view either way acting superior or enforcing their views?

What if you are starving and have to live off temple scraps which may have all been sacrificed to the Greek, Roman or other gods?

The answer is not a simple right or wrong but the answer is simple in a way. It is the relationship that matters. Is what you are doing compassionate, is the view you have considerate of others, is any law you are making liberating individually or at a community level or is it oppressive. That’s how it fits with the Mark passage where Jesus’ teaching was one of liberation and not as the scribes taught. There’s the power in the teaching.

It is not a matter just of being right, but of doing the 'right thing', the caring thing. Paul's assessment is that this will mean abstaining where it would create problems for them. This is generous and sensitive love. Love has to be informed and situational. Paul does not pull out scripture, and there was lots of it, about food and he knew them, to prove one point or counter another.Love is not based on one or two bible verses that make us right and someone else wrong.

So issues need assessing in each new situation. It might mean for some abstention from alcohol in communities where alcohol is a huge problem, or, at least from insensitive use. It might entail issues of sensitivity about dress, food, and a range of other behaviours. But it cannot and should not be used as a weapon by individuals or groups to hold others to ransom (eg. offending others by ordaining women or not, liberating slaves, taking a different approach to sexual orientation, etc). We are better to come at such situations from the centre not from rules. The centre is truth in love, Christ in God. The centre is compassion and understanding. In each new situation we need to decide. The issue is always relationships, seen in the context of God's will for connection with Him and of wholeness for people. It can never just be about being right or about getting people by hook or crook to do things our way.

Both these passages speak of a Wiser, kinder voice