

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **You've Heard It Said**

### **1 Corinthians 8, Philippians 2:1-18**

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Well, thank you for being here, those of you who are joining us online, and those of you who are in the room. Well done in the room, throwing back those covers very bravely this morning and braving the cold to get here. It's great to have you online and here in the room. Scripture this morning comes from First Corinthians chapter eight. We all possess knowledge, but knowledge puffs up while love builds up. So then about eating food sacrificed to idols. We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no one, no God but one, but not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to a God. And since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God.

We are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you with all your knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again so that I will not cause them to fall. So if you came today bothered by the pressing question of whether or not you could eat a Dick's hamburger, if the cow had been sacrificed to Zeus, this is your lucky day because that's what this text is about, but it's also about something a little bit deeper.

Let me ask you this question. Have you ever been in a store and seen someone yelling at a clerk because they didn't get the service they thought they deserved? Or have you been in an airport and seeing someone get really mad at the person behind the counter

because their flight was delayed? Have you ever seen someone do that? Was that person me? Because it has been known to happen. That's called entitlement. The feeling that I am owed something. I'm owed an on-time flight. I deserve, I should have, it's my right. A great picture of this is... We all just got through Christmas, right? The Charlie Brown Christmas show, that scene where Sally is writing a letter to Santa Claus and she says, "Please note the size and color of each item," and then she says, if it's easier to send money, tens and twenties. And then Charlie Brown walks off in disgust, and she says, "What? All I want is my fair share. All I want is what I have coming to me."

That is a great encapsulation of an entitlement mentality. It's when we think, why did that person get that promotion or get into that college? I worked harder. Why is that person married already and I'm still single? I would be a better spouse. You see it in advertising, especially for luxury items, hotel, or luxury car, right? Treat yourself. You deserve it. You hear it in the phrases like on-demand TV. What a phrase, on-demand TV, or you've got to fight for your right to party. You guys got that way better than they did over there.

Now, there are rights we should fight for. We should fight for civil rights, we should fight for human rights, but I'm not talking about that. A lot of times though we think we have rights that we don't actually really have, that entitlement mentality, which is rampant in our culture of every generation, by the way. I often hear generations accuse each other. Oh, those boomers. Oh, those millennials are so on. It's every generation. Entitlement mentality is a big part of our culture right now. And we're in a sermon series comparing what our culture says to what Jesus says. And in our culture, you've heard it said you deserve it, but Jesus says deserves got nothing to do with it. And I have a better way because see, entitlement is a joy-stealer. Because when we get what we think we are owed, what we want, when we get it, we go, well, I deserve it. I worked hard for it. And when we don't get what we want, we get bitter and envious and resentful.

Entitlement is a joy-stealer. And that's what's going on in this weird passage that I just read from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. And one of the things that was going on there, there's this big old church fight about whether or not it was okay to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols in pagan rituals, and then sold at the market. And some people said, "Idols don't really exist, therefore this meat is like every other kind of meat, and we have a right to eat it. It's our right. We are entitled to eat it." And then there was another group who said, "No, no, no. To do that is to engage in idolatry, and we shouldn't let people in our church be doing this."

It's a food fight, basically, and each side feels entitled to what they want. And this shows that just entitlement, poisons relationships, right? It is tearing this church apart with everyone demanding what they want, not caring about what anyone else in the church wants, just what they want, entitlement mentality, poisons, marriages, and it poisons friendships because we have all these expectations of what that person should do for us. And of course, they have expectations about what we should do for them. And so relationships become transactional. And pretty soon people get hurt, and people get

mad. Plus, people with an entitlement mentality, have you ever noticed they're not very much fun to be around, right? They're the kind of people who had a party, after talking nonstop about themselves, will say things like, "But enough about me. Let's talk about what you think about me."

Entitlement mentality poisons relationships. It also poisons our relationship with God because we think that God's job is to make our life easy and give us what we want rather than make us like Jesus. And that turns God into a vending machine, not someone we're in relationship with. Entitlement mentality leads to stress as we keep grasping for what we think we deserve, envy, bitterness, resentment. That's what's going on in Corinth. And so the Corinthians say to Paul, "Which one is right? Pick aside, Paul. Who's right on this?" And Paul says, "You're both wrong. You're both wrong, because see, the real issue is what are your actions doing to each other? Are you building each other up or are you tearing each other down? Are you creating community or are you destroying community?"

So he says to the meat eaters, "Look, there's nothing in scripture that says you can't eat meat sacrificed to idols, so biblically, you are free to eat it. But if you do that in front of someone who's just come out of idolatry, that may tempt them back into it. And so you'll have been right, biblically, theologically, you'll have been within your rights, but you will be relationally wrong." A contemporary example of this might be around alcohol. So I think biblically, it is okay to have a glass of wine with dinner or things like that as long as you don't get drunk. I think biblically, that's okay, but I'm not going to do that around someone who is a recovering alcoholic because that might tempt them, and that would not be loving to do. Paul's point is, as Christians, we are not called to be my rights people. We are called to be your rights people. We don't fight for our rights. We fight for other people's rights. Now, that doesn't always happen in churches. Sometimes it does, but that's what we are called to.

Paul says, "Be careful that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak." And by weak, he means people who might be tempted back into idolatry when you sin against them in this way, you sin against Christ. Whoa. When we start demanding what we think we're entitled to, we're sinning against Jesus. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again. I will let go of what I think I'm entitled to in order to love other people. It's not about being right, it's about love, which is why he says knowledge puffs up. Love builds up. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible, maybe because I spent so much time in universities in my former life where there's just a lot of puffed up, pompous people with a lot of stuff that they think they know, way more concerned about being right than they are about being loving.

And that is kind of a feature of Western culture. We're called to lay down our rights to be loving. Now, whenever you talk about this, the question always arises, well then am I just

supposed to be a doormat and let everyone else get what they want, and I don't get what I want? Am I just supposed to be a doormat? Okay, first, it is convicting to me how quickly my mind goes to that question when I'm confronted with a text like this. I don't even take it in. I don't even struggle with it. I just dismiss it with the, well, am I supposed to be a doormat argument? No. Jesus is not out to turn you into a wimp. Jesus is out to make you loving. And love is always strong. But here's the thing, weak people fight for themselves. Strong people fight for others.

Weak people fight for themselves. Strong people fight for others. And the Bible says the way it is supposed to work amongst Christians is I'm looking out for your rights and your needs and you're looking out for mine, and that means everyone's interests are being looked out for. And sure, it's okay to ask for what we want. And yeah, there may be times you have to say to someone, "Hey, man, you're doing a lot of taking. You're not doing any giving." You may have to do that. But still, the challenge of this passage is to lay down what we think we deserve for the sake of others. This is a hard teaching. It's similar to what Paul says in the book of Philippians.

"In humility, value others above yourselves," whoa, above "not looking to your own interest, but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, not an entitlement mindset, who being in the very nature, God did not consider equality with God, something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing. By taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." And this is probably an early Christian hymn, most scholars think it was a song and it would've been sung. So I think Jake and maybe you and your music people, you could write a tune to this so we could sing this song because that's going to be everyone's favorite song, right? Oh, let's sing the one about laying down our rights for other people. That's my favorite. "That's my favorite hymn ever," said nobody. Right? So why does God ask us to do this? Is he out to just make us miserable martyrs?

No. No, look at how this thing ends, right? He became obedient even to death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. It is a spiritual truth that we go down to go up. We set aside entitlement for something bigger and better. Entitlement is a joy stealer. Generosity and gratitude are joy makers. And these two passages together, Philippians, Corinthians, they show us a little bit about how we can begin to let go of an entitlement mentality. And the first is this. Remember what we actually deserve, since we're talking about deserves, right? What do I deserve? Well, Romans three says this, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

That means everyone, all, all of us, right? Few chapters later, it says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord." Wages, that's a deserves word. That's a what am I owed word. And death means separation from God who is the life giver. That's what we deserve. And this is in every religion. Karma, the bad things we do, they're going to come back and haunt us. We get what we deserve. We deserve death. Not eternal life. Because here's the thing, if God lets unrepentant us into his heaven with just our little sins, we all think I just do little sins, right? I just do little sins. What's the big deal? Some gossip here, some bitterness there, here, lust there lie everywhere, sin, sin. What's the big deal? Right? Well, here's the big deal. God is not going for a world that is 51% set right? He wants 100% set. And to get there, we have to admit our sin that makes that 100% not right, not heaven anymore. If I go with my little sins, and ask Jesus to forgive us.

The Philippians passage points to Jesus being willing to die on a cross to pay the price for our sins that ruin God's perfect heaven so that we could be reconciled to him. We deserve death. We are given eternal life. Justice is getting what we deserve. Mercy is not getting the punishment we do deserve for the things we've done. And grace is getting blessings that we do not deserve. And Jesus gives us both mercy and grace. And the more I understand that, I feel less entitled, more grateful, happier. Second, remember, we're all on different journeys. The Corinthians, were all in different places, and God was working with them all in different ways.

And it's the same with us. Comparison fuels entitlement. Why does that person have that thing? And I don't have that thing, and I deserve it more, and blah, blah, blah, right? But God says to us, "Look, I've got you on your journey. I've got them on theirs. You do you, and I'll give you what you need." As I said a while back, if Jesus is blessing your neighbor, that means he's in the neighborhood, and he's going to get around to blessing you too. No need to be envious. He'll bless you too. Maybe differently, but he'll bless you. Third, remember what we have. I am so good. I am really good at looking at what I don't have that I miss what I do have. I'm so good at looking at what I've lost that I forget what remains. I remember one time when my kids were little and my parents came to visit and my mom brought cookies.

Well, the next time my parents visited, my son said, "Where are the cookies?" which is exactly what I was thinking. Where are the stinking cookies? Grandma. Come on, man. I just knew not to say it out loud. That is so us, right? We get something once, and suddenly it turns into an entitlement, a thing that I deserve, not a gift to be thankful for. One of the things I respect about Sergio Chavez on our staff is when he prays, he usually begins saying, "Thank you, God, that we have air in our lungs, food in our tables, and people that we love."

He was born in Mexico. His family came here when he was two. And as immigrants, they didn't have a lot, and he learned to be grateful for things that I take for granted.

Now, I want to be clear, and I want to be careful here because we do face some seriously painful things, loss of a loved one, health crises, and those should not be dismissed with some trite saying, "Just count your blessings and you'll feel better." No, no, no. Those things are real. Those things need to be grieved. We need to ask God to help us through those things. But what makes those things even worse is an entitlement mentality. Because now, not only has the bad thing happened, but I feel like I've been robbed of something that I deserved, when the reality is everyone faces suffering and focusing on what we do have helps us weather the hard times, and not focused on what we have in a guilt-inducing way.

Oh, you have so much. You should be so thankful. And if you're not, you should feel guilty. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. But just to enjoy what we do have, which helps us out of envy and bitterness. Back in November, my oldest daughter texted us her Christmas wish list. It was a very long list, and it had some very expensive items on it. And she even quoted Sally from the Charlie Brown Christmas special, unintentionally, I think, but she actually said, "Please note the size and color of each items." Right? So I texted back, "All I want is my fair share. All I want is what I have coming to me." She didn't miss a beat. She texted me right back and said, "Yes, I've been a very brave little girl this year, and I want a treat smiley face." Where did she get that from? Obviously, it's her mother. So not true. That is so the opposite. That is all me. That is all me.

But when I remember what I do have, it feels better than anger and bitterness and resentment about what I don't have. Remember what we actually deserve. Remember we're all on different journeys. Remember what we do have. And finally, remember, we need a supernaturally changed heart. We can't do this one on our own. We need the Holy Spirit to change our hearts through prayer where we're honest with God. If you're feeling upset because you didn't get something you think you should deserve, take that to God, right? He can handle it. He loves us no matter what. Be honest with God in prayer when we're disappointed. I whine to God all the time. It is one of my spiritual gifts. We can be honest with God in prayer where our entitlements aren't being met.

And then over time, he begins to shift our hearts. It's also helpful to be in community where we see what other people are struggling with. The bigger my world gets, the smaller my sense of entitlement becomes. So this week, let's practice non-entitlement. Three ways to practice non-entitlement. First, let entitlement trigger you to gratitude. When you start complaining or comparing, oh, why does that person have this thing and I don't have this thing, and I should have, and I deserve, and all that, let that trigger you to immediately think of five things that you do have for which you are grateful. Second, because entitlement ends by the way, where gratitude begins. Second, serve somebody. The Philippians passage says that Jesus was a servant. And when we serve, it gets us out of ourselves, out of our sense of entitlement into God's bigger world. So volunteer for something, help a fellow student or a coworker. Or here's an idea, here's an idea.

Maybe the way you'll serve is to practice the spiritual discipline of not having to be right in an argument, or have the last word in an argument.

It might be something to start practicing as we sail into an election year. And then third, practice non-entitlement. Text someone today to thank them for something they've done that has blessed you. Not tomorrow, not right now because I'm still preaching, but today maybe in the parking lot, text someone and just say thank you for a way that they have blessed you. And if everyone who does this who's who's here today and online, if everyone does that today, today, several thousand people will be blessed and encouraged if every single one of us did that today, and you'll feel better. I heard a pastor talk about how a while back, he was super discouraged. He led a small church and he didn't make a lot of money. And most of the people in his church were coming out of addiction or prison, and they didn't have a lot of money. And some of his friends had gone on to bigger, fancier, flashier churches, so he was kind of discouraged. He was kind of like, God, why them not me? I'm being obedient to you in this hard situation, these hard circumstances.

Isn't it time for me to get some good things? Maybe you felt similarly about neighbors or coworkers or other students or friends. So he had some entitlement stuff going on, and one day, his wife had kind of heard enough about it, and so she said, "Why don't you go for a drive? Why don't you go for a very long drive and think things through? That usually helps you when you're like this. And while you're out, be a sweetheart and get me a burrito. Okay? Bye bye bye." So he drove around for an hour or more complaining to God, which is what we should do, be honest with God. Finally, he went to a fast-food drive-thru to pick up his wife's burrito, and he just sensed God talking to him in thoughts that he knew weren't his thoughts. And God said, if you open the door, I'll give you a gift. So even though he felt a little silly, he figured he had nothing to lose, so he opened the car door and saw a tarnished penny embedded in the asphalt.

And he said, I reached down to pry out the coin and held it in my hand, feeling less than thankful for this "gift." Right? Ha ha ha God, very funny, a penny. Yeah, way to remind me that I don't make much money and my church doesn't have any money. Very nice God. And then he said he heard God speak again. And God said, a lot of people in this city feel about as valuable as a discarded penny, and I've given you the gift of gathering just those kinds of people who seem valueless to this culture, the people that the world just casts aside, but are precious to me. And if you will open your heart, I will give you more pennies than you know what to do with. And he started to think of the miracles he'd seen in his church.

Because see, when you're dealing with people coming out of prison and coming out of addiction, those people tend to rely on Jesus in a much deeper way than more comfortable people do. So as a result, there was a lot more miracles in life change happening in his church than in his friend's, bigger, fancier churches. And he realized

God had those other pastors on their journey and he was on his. And he didn't even really deserve the blessings. He did have his wife and family who loved him, even though sometimes he behaved very badly. He remembered what he did have. He was honest with God in prayer. He even served his wife by bringing her a burrito.

And the Holy Spirit shifted his heart just a little bit, and he felt peace and joy and generosity because he let go of entitlement. It just feels better. It just feels better. And it's more like Jesus, Jesus who had every right to say, "I'm not going to die for someone's sin that I didn't commit. I'm not going to do that. I'm entitled to my own life." Jesus, who when we had rebelled against him and run away, would've been right, would've been within his rights to argue with us and condemn us for our rebellion, but who instead laid aside every right he ever had and died for us so that we could know him and become like him. Jesus looked at the cross, and then he looked at you and he said, "You're worth it."

And we find more joy when we live like him because it is a spiritual truth that the way up is down. And when we lose our life, that's when we find it. So Jesus, help us to do that. This is not something we can do on our own. So Holy Spirit, fill us and shift our hearts. I know I am filled with entitlements, lack of gratitude. So Lord, help me, help us to see all that you have given us and be grateful that we have you. And Lord move us away from entitlement and toward gratitude and generosity so that we can show the world how it's done with you. In your name, Jesus, amen.

### **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures):

- What do you feel when you read this scripture (excited, angry, worried, etc....)? Why do you think that is? (Explain in your group and then take that response to Jesus in prayer this week.)
- As you read this scripture, where does it challenge your current cultural context?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:



- What do these two texts tell you about the churches in Corinth and Philippi? Do we see similarities in our culture and in our church today?
- What solutions does Paul propose?
- What has helped you get past an entitlement mentality?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.