

A photograph of a snowy forest path. The path is covered in snow and has tracks from a sled or skis. The trees are tall and thin, with snow on their branches. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting a low sun or fire in the distance. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

1 CORINTHIANS 8: 1-13

**KNOWLEDGE
AND LOVE**

REV. IN KEE KIM

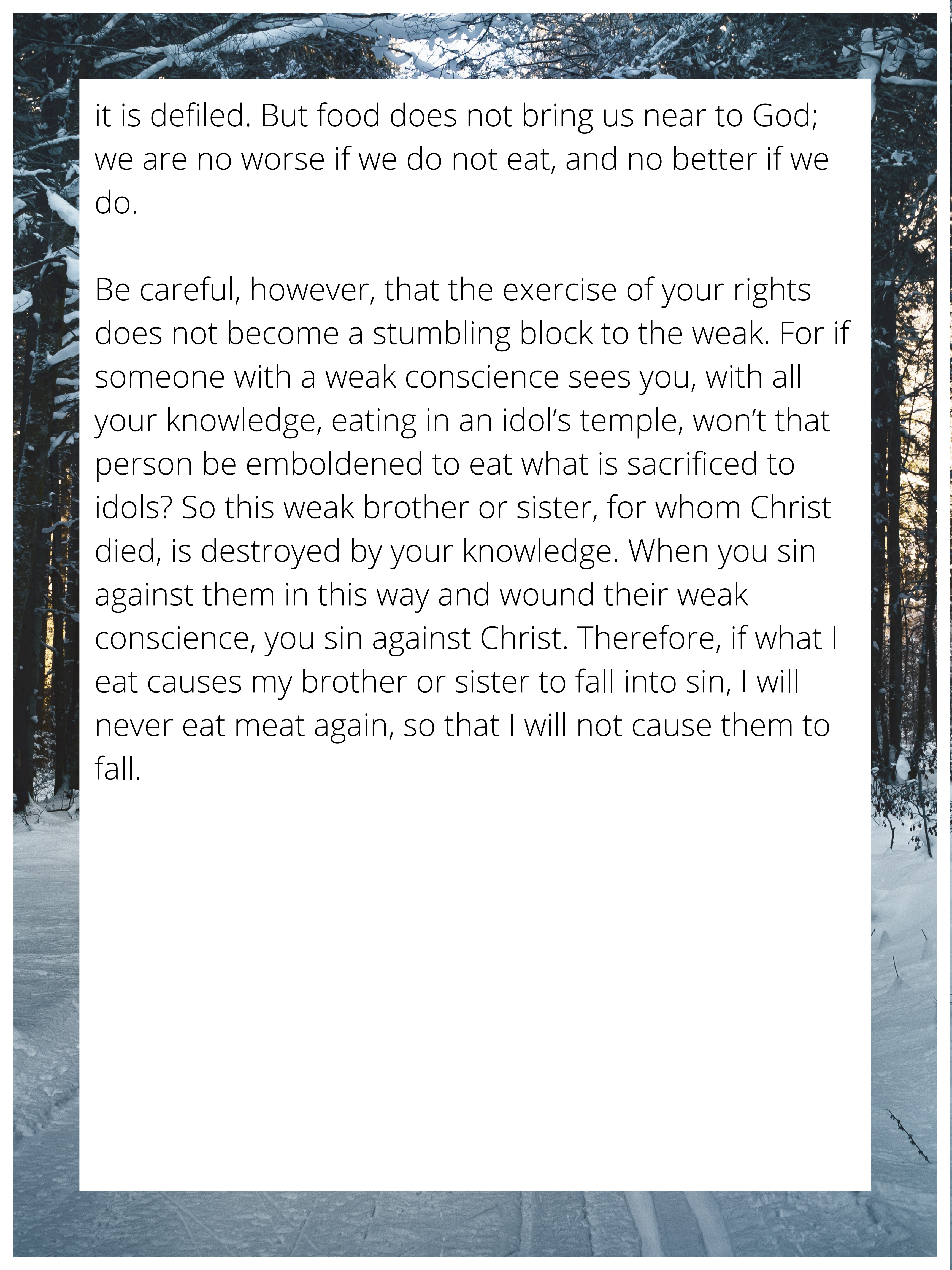
Scripture Passage

1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known by God.

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 God but one.” For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

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,

A photograph of a winter forest with snow-covered trees and a white text box. The text box is centered and contains two paragraphs of text. The background shows a dense forest of evergreen trees covered in snow, with a path leading through them. The lighting is soft, suggesting a winter day.

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.

Sermon

Knowledge and Love

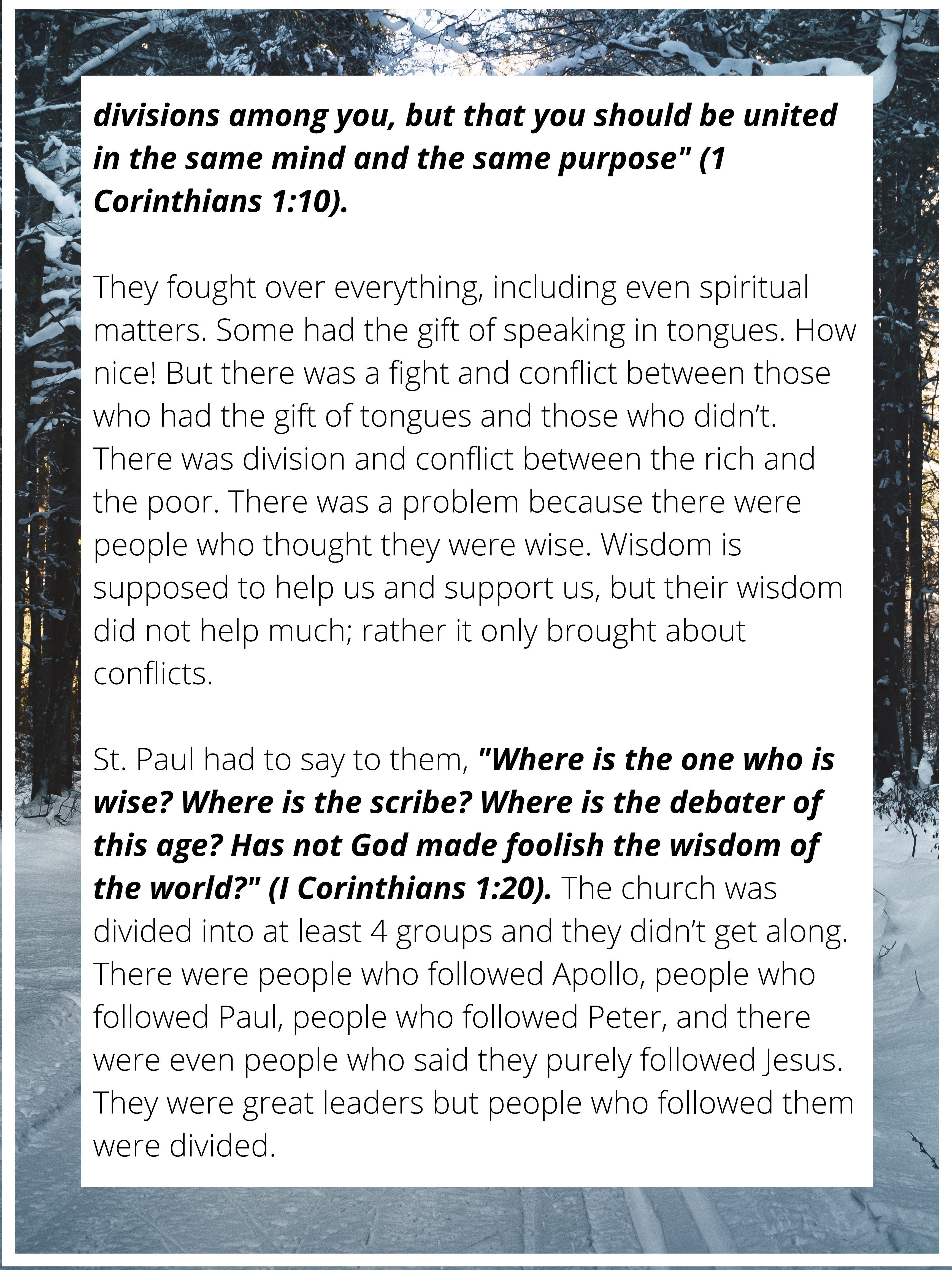
Conflicts and struggles are part of our lives. That is our reality. Wherever we look, we see conflicts and struggles. We see them in politics, in our family, among friends, and also, unfortunately, in the church. Because of conflicts and struggles, people get hurt, our relationships become sour, and we even become divided and hostile to each other. It is our reality and yet it is sad. It is the opposite of living in peace and harmony.

Division in Corinth

The church in Corinth was infamous for their conflicts and struggles. They fought over everything. They were deeply divided. Everything, every issue, became the source of conflicts to them.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the first thing St. Paul said to them after his greeting was not to fight.

"Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no

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divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

They fought over everything, including even spiritual matters. Some had the gift of speaking in tongues. How nice! But there was a fight and conflict between those who had the gift of tongues and those who didn't. There was division and conflict between the rich and the poor. There was a problem because there were people who thought they were wise. Wisdom is supposed to help us and support us, but their wisdom did not help much; rather it only brought about conflicts.

St. Paul had to say to them, ***"Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20).*** The church was divided into at least 4 groups and they didn't get along. There were people who followed Apollo, people who followed Paul, people who followed Peter, and there were even people who said they purely followed Jesus. They were great leaders but people who followed them were divided.

A Vision of Love and Unity

It is sad to see God's church be torn apart like this because of conflicts. It was very painful for Paul. He was the founder of this church and yet he saw and witnessed this deep division. He was even kicked out by them and beaten up by them. He felt pain in his body. But every cloud has a silver lining. We can find something good even in the worst situation. From St. Paul's pain and suffering, came beautiful words about love. You see that in the famous passage of 1 Corinthians 13: ***Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5).***

The new president of the United States, Joe Biden, said, in his inauguration speech: "I know speaking of unity can sound to some like a foolish fantasy these days, I know the forces that divide are deep and they are real". He said, "Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we're all created equal and the harsh ugly reality of racism, nativism, fear, demonization. This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward."

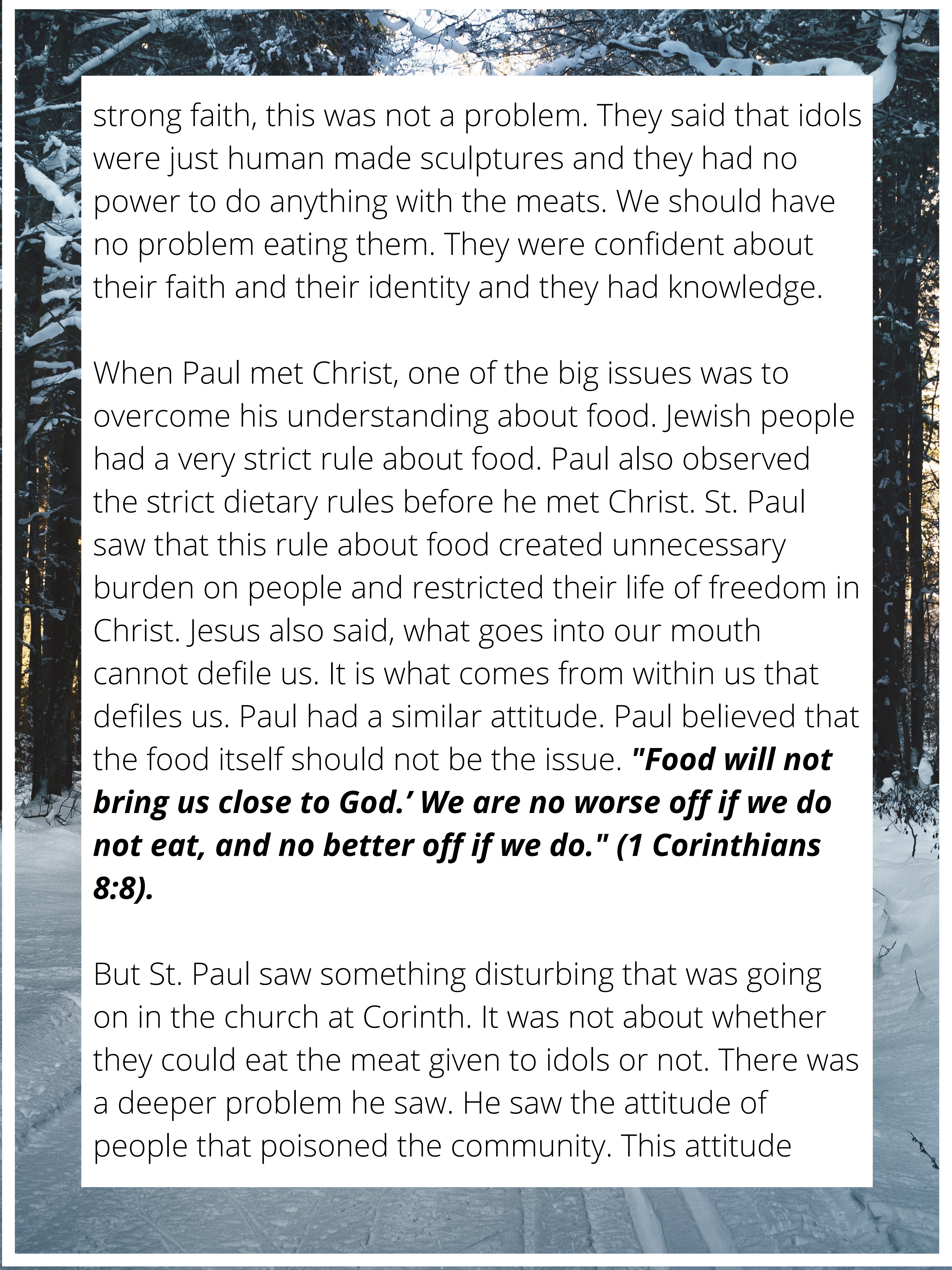
The Issue

Today's story is about whether they could eat certain meats or not. To us, it is a kind of silly argument. It is not even an issue to us. To us the issue is if we will have tenderloin or sirloin, but to them the issue was if they should have meat or not. You may think it is a silly argument, but are we any better? We are divided about whether we should wear masks or not. I didn't know we could be divided on that.

In those days, eating certain meats became a huge issue. Most of meats in the market were first used for the idol worship. Idol worship was a part of the culture at that time. It was everywhere. The ancient people lived in fear. They were scared of making their gods angry. So they gave sacrifices to gods to appease them. And they used meats for their sacrifice. After the idol worship, the meats came out in the market. Also, at parties, they served these meats too. Some new Christians who were just converted from the pagan religion were scared and wondered, "Can we eat meats that were used for idol worship?".

The Right Knowledge

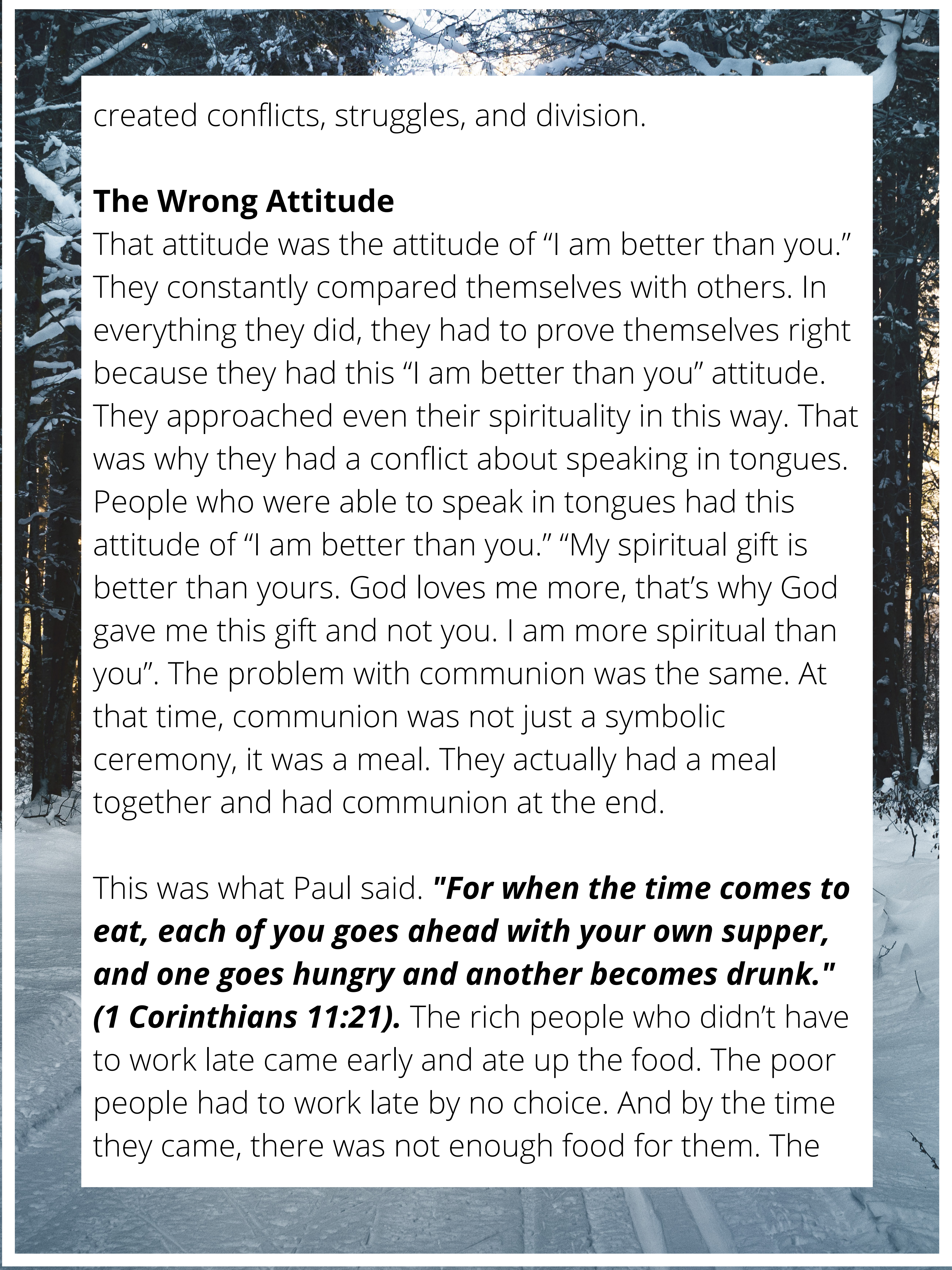
For those who had enough theological knowledge and

A winter forest scene with snow-covered trees and a white text box. The background shows a dense forest of evergreen trees covered in a thick layer of snow. The ground is also covered in snow, and the overall atmosphere is serene and quiet. The text box is a large white rectangle with rounded corners, centered on the page, containing the main text.

strong faith, this was not a problem. They said that idols were just human made sculptures and they had no power to do anything with the meats. We should have no problem eating them. They were confident about their faith and their identity and they had knowledge.

When Paul met Christ, one of the big issues was to overcome his understanding about food. Jewish people had a very strict rule about food. Paul also observed the strict dietary rules before he met Christ. St. Paul saw that this rule about food created unnecessary burden on people and restricted their life of freedom in Christ. Jesus also said, what goes into our mouth cannot defile us. It is what comes from within us that defiles us. Paul had a similar attitude. Paul believed that the food itself should not be the issue. **"Food will not bring us close to God.' We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do." (1 Corinthians 8:8).**

But St. Paul saw something disturbing that was going on in the church at Corinth. It was not about whether they could eat the meat given to idols or not. There was a deeper problem he saw. He saw the attitude of people that poisoned the community. This attitude

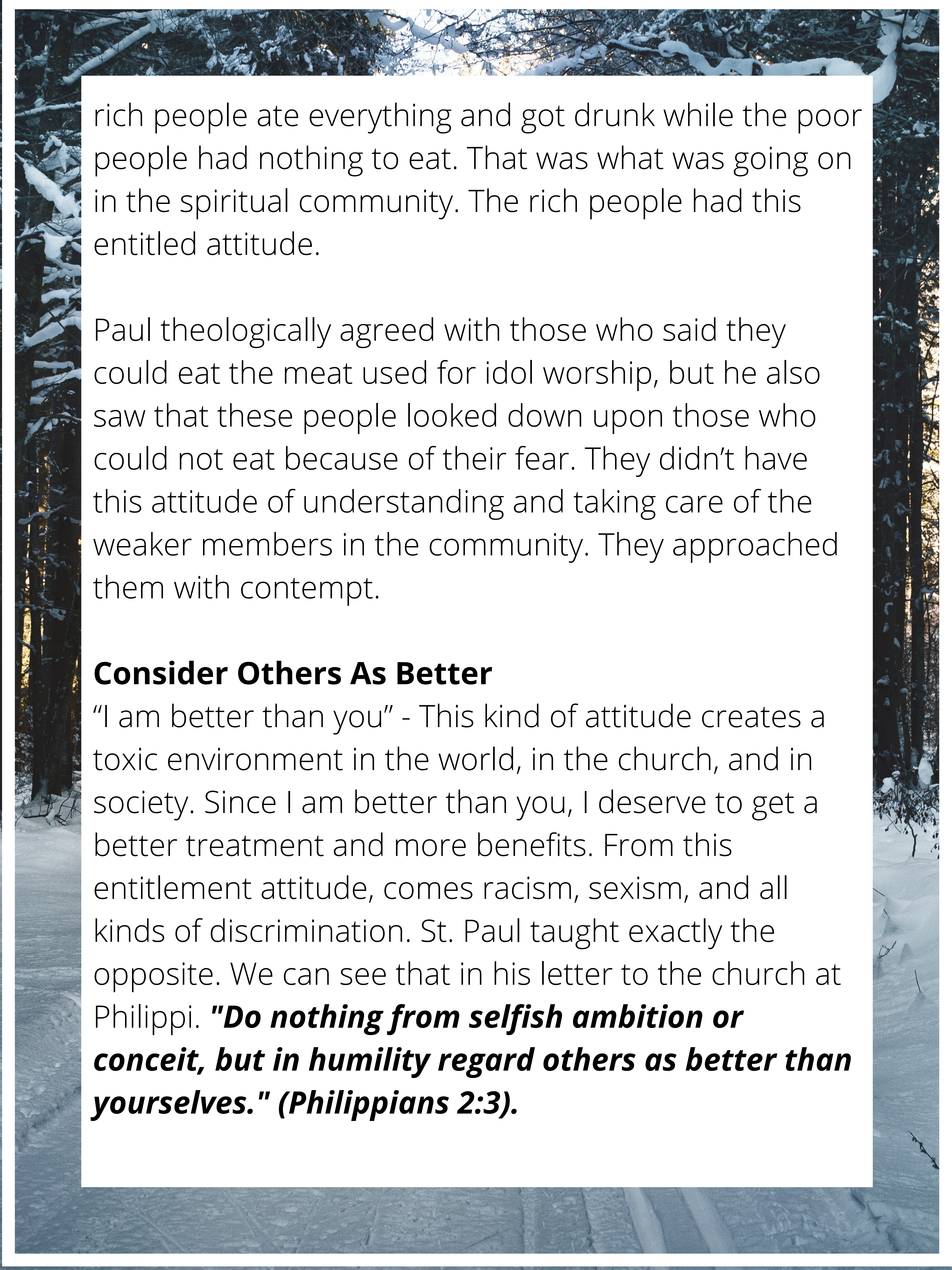


created conflicts, struggles, and division.

The Wrong Attitude

That attitude was the attitude of “I am better than you.” They constantly compared themselves with others. In everything they did, they had to prove themselves right because they had this “I am better than you” attitude. They approached even their spirituality in this way. That was why they had a conflict about speaking in tongues. People who were able to speak in tongues had this attitude of “I am better than you.” “My spiritual gift is better than yours. God loves me more, that’s why God gave me this gift and not you. I am more spiritual than you”. The problem with communion was the same. At that time, communion was not just a symbolic ceremony, it was a meal. They actually had a meal together and had communion at the end.

This was what Paul said. ***“For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.” (1 Corinthians 11:21).*** The rich people who didn’t have to work late came early and ate up the food. The poor people had to work late by no choice. And by the time they came, there was not enough food for them. The

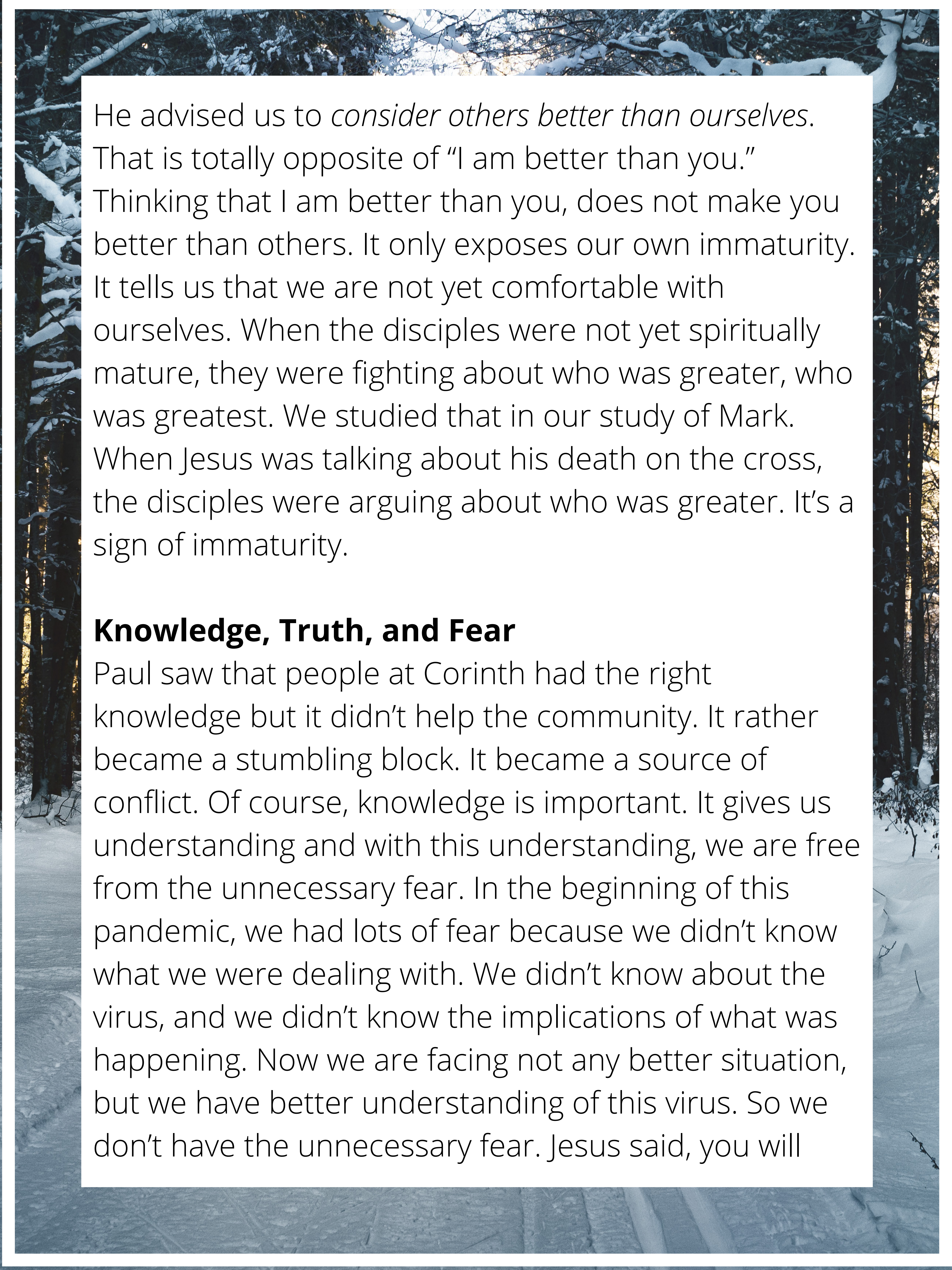
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rich people ate everything and got drunk while the poor people had nothing to eat. That was what was going on in the spiritual community. The rich people had this entitled attitude.

Paul theologically agreed with those who said they could eat the meat used for idol worship, but he also saw that these people looked down upon those who could not eat because of their fear. They didn't have this attitude of understanding and taking care of the weaker members in the community. They approached them with contempt.

Consider Others As Better

"I am better than you" - This kind of attitude creates a toxic environment in the world, in the church, and in society. Since I am better than you, I deserve to get a better treatment and more benefits. From this entitlement attitude, comes racism, sexism, and all kinds of discrimination. St. Paul taught exactly the opposite. We can see that in his letter to the church at Philippi. ***"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3).***

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He advised us to *consider others better than ourselves*. That is totally opposite of "I am better than you." Thinking that I am better than you, does not make you better than others. It only exposes our own immaturity. It tells us that we are not yet comfortable with ourselves. When the disciples were not yet spiritually mature, they were fighting about who was greater, who was greatest. We studied that in our study of Mark. When Jesus was talking about his death on the cross, the disciples were arguing about who was greater. It's a sign of immaturity.

Knowledge, Truth, and Fear

Paul saw that people at Corinth had the right knowledge but it didn't help the community. It rather became a stumbling block. It became a source of conflict. Of course, knowledge is important. It gives us understanding and with this understanding, we are free from the unnecessary fear. In the beginning of this pandemic, we had lots of fear because we didn't know what we were dealing with. We didn't know about the virus, and we didn't know the implications of what was happening. Now we are facing not any better situation, but we have better understanding of this virus. So we don't have the unnecessary fear. Jesus said, you will



know the truth and the truth will set you free.

But, my friends, knowledge is not necessarily the truth. And it is the truth, not knowledge that sets us free. Knowledge by itself cannot set us free. Knowledge without love has no power to set us free.

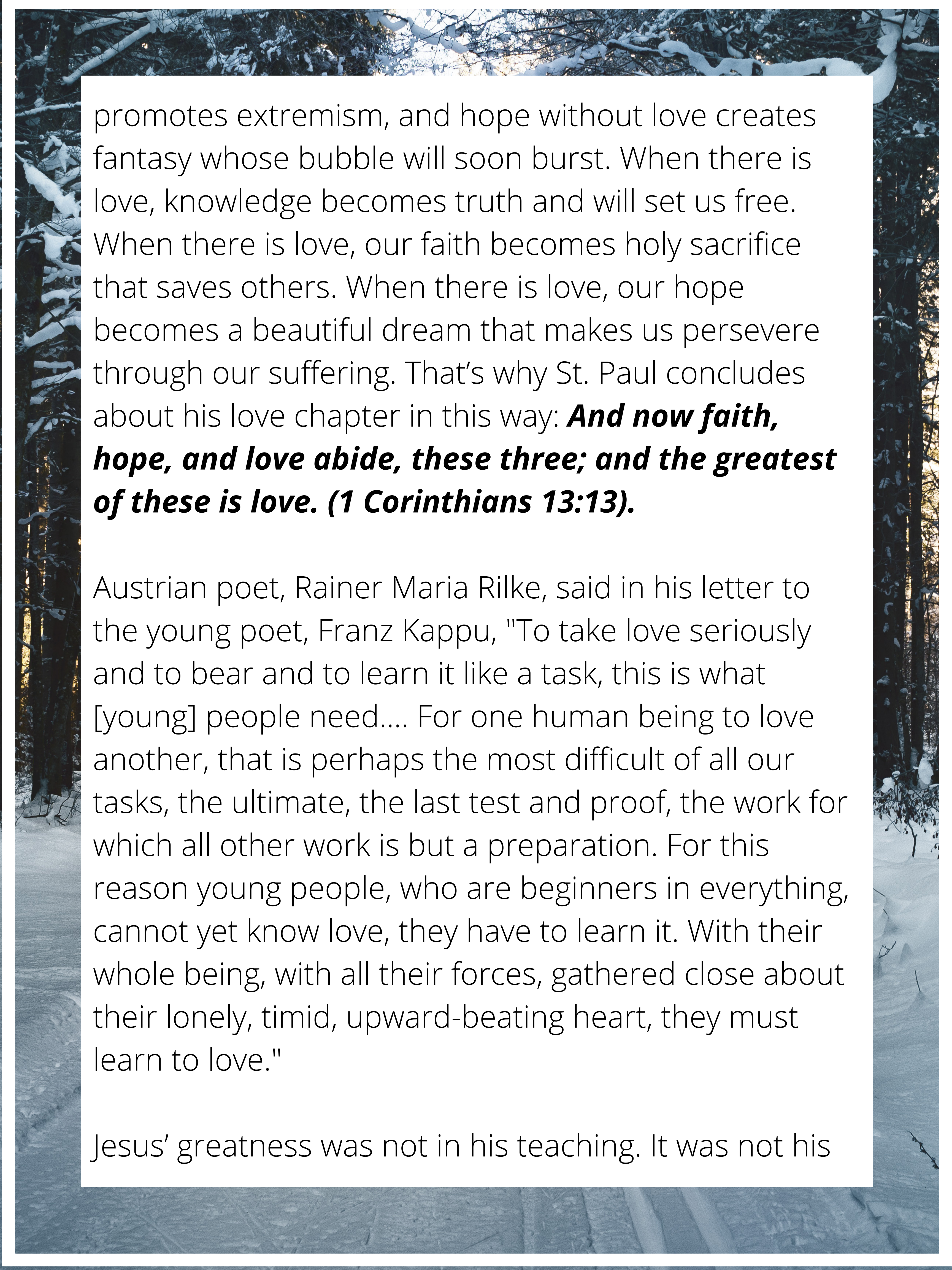
Knowledge and Love

Knowledge without love cannot bring us unity. St. Paul started his advice with these words in today's passage.

"Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." (1 Corinthians 8:1). *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.* How true this is! When knowledge is not combined with love, it creates only vanity. This vanity creates arrogance. Knowledge exalts one who has it but love does not exalt the one who has it but others.

St. Paul said, ***"And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2).***

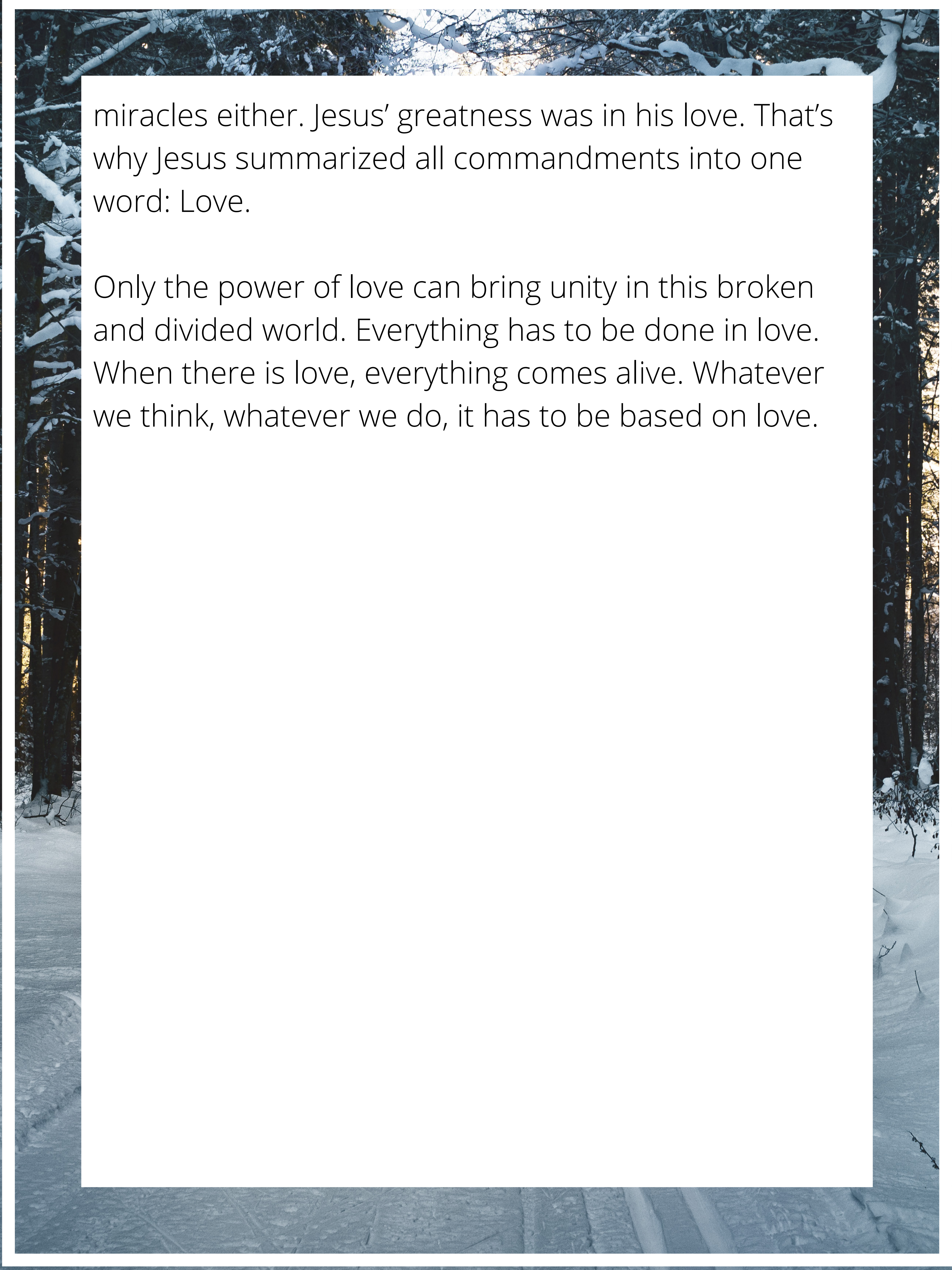
Knowledge without love creates arrogance that exalts only oneself, faith without love creates fanaticism that

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promotes extremism, and hope without love creates fantasy whose bubble will soon burst. When there is love, knowledge becomes truth and will set us free. When there is love, our faith becomes holy sacrifice that saves others. When there is love, our hope becomes a beautiful dream that makes us persevere through our suffering. That's why St. Paul concludes about his love chapter in this way: ***And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13).***

Austrian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, said in his letter to the young poet, Franz Kappu, "To take love seriously and to bear and to learn it like a task, this is what [young] people need.... For one human being to love another, that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but a preparation. For this reason young people, who are beginners in everything, cannot yet know love, they have to learn it. With their whole being, with all their forces, gathered close about their lonely, timid, upward-beating heart, they must learn to love."

Jesus' greatness was not in his teaching. It was not his



miracles either. Jesus' greatness was in his love. That's why Jesus summarized all commandments into one word: Love.

Only the power of love can bring unity in this broken and divided world. Everything has to be done in love. When there is love, everything comes alive. Whatever we think, whatever we do, it has to be based on love.