

## **Don't Beat Up Your Brother**

1 Corinthians 8:9-13

Can we use our liberty in the Lord – won by Christ – to wound our brothers and sisters in Christ? Is it possible to use our freedom to foolishly sin against Christ and others?

### **The Good and Bad Stumbling Block**

1 Corinthians 1:23-24: **“23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”**

Is there a “good” stumbling block? Yes! If someone is on the path to destruction, they need the stumbling block of the Gospel of Christ. Our preaching of the crucified Christ is such a stumbling block; it is Christ, the power of God. Sinners stumble and fall before the One who gave Himself for their sin. But to the glory of God, this stumbling block became our foundation stone on which to build. The love of the Lord builds us up. But verse 9 of our text describes a stumbling block that accomplishes the opposite effect. **9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.** None of us would want to work against Christ and the Gospel, so we must carefully consider this text.

### **Principles on the Christian Use of Liberty**

In the earlier message we studied this principle:

**Principle: There is the very real danger that the believer's use of liberty could become a stumbling block to other believers (v.9).**

In this case, the danger is that the glorious liberty of the believers can become a dangerous stumbling stone. How could such a thing happen? Paul explained what could happen in verses 11-12:

**<sup>10</sup> For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; <sup>11</sup> And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?**

- “You who have knowledge” eat in the temple of an idol.
- This encourages the one who is overly conscientious to eat meat offered to idols.
- Through “your knowledge” this brother is destroyed; yes, the brother for whom Christ died.

As you can see, this use of liberty accomplishes the opposite effect of the cross of Christ. So this is a serious matter and not to be taken lightly. This is even more evident in verse 12:

**<sup>12</sup> But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.**

**Principle: You can use your Christian liberty in such a way that it is a sin against your brother. You can wound them and this is a sin against Christ!**

Now here is an amazing fact. In an area of Christian behavior, which may not be wrong in and of itself, you can sin – sin against your neighbor and sin against the Lord. Now this rankles us in our culture of Western individualism. We tend to think of “me” and “mine” rather than about “Jesus” and “others.” But Paul reminded the Romans (in chapter 14:7-8): **7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to**

**himself. 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.**

We must think of our responses in terms of our relationships: our relationship to the Lord and to others.

In my opinion, this note is rarely sounded in “the Christian liberty debate” that rages at present. The discussion tends to end with the action itself (“is it right or wrong?”); but Paul explained the impact of the action to influence relationships. This is where the sin (of the one who has knowledge) was to be found.

Consider the graphic language of verse 12: this sin against the brother “wounds” their conscience. “Wound” translates the Greek word [tupto] meaning, “to inflict a blow, *strike, beat, wound*” . . . applied here as “sharp grief struck him to the depths of his mind”.<sup>i</sup> It is this verse that gives us the title for this message: don't beat up your brother. This is what destroys [apollumi] our brother. Each one of us must be alert to the conscientiousness of his brothers and sisters in Christ so that we do not wickedly wound them. As John MacArthur points out, “Conscience is God's doorkeeper to keep us out of places where we could be harmed.”<sup>ii</sup>

**<sup>13</sup> Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.**

**Principle: You must be willing to live in a self-sacrificial manner for the rest of your life so as not to cause your Christian brother to stumble.**

If Christ died for them, could you live for them?

So as we make our choices about what to do and what not to do, here are some practical questions:

Is it essential or excessive? Is it expedient (meaning does it accomplish my purpose)? Is it exemplary – exalting Christ and leading others to Christ by evangelism and edification (building up)? In the words of Ephesians 5:10, let us be “proving what is acceptable to the Lord.”

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<sup>i</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1020.

<sup>ii</sup> John MacArthur, *Romans*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1984, p. 196