

06/27/10

## Showing Concern for Your Brother – 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

### Introduction

#### 1. The importance of carefulness.

- One of the great things about summertime for many of us is the likelihood that we'll be taking some road trips...
- you might be heading off to a family reunion, or to your vacation destination, or a day trip to Indy or Chicago...but you'll be logging some miles in your car, for sure...
- my guess is that you have certain rituals you go through when preparing for those trips...
- when we were growing up, my dad taught us the importance of going to the store and buying a "poke" ...
  - I have no idea where that word originated or what it really meant---his family was from down south...but what it meant to us was that we were to load up on all sorts of snacks and comfort food for the trip...
  - one of his rules was...going on vacation and being hungry (even for 2 seconds in succession) is unacceptable...so we never left without a poke...
- you probably have other traditions too...that might be when you make sure your oil is changed, or your tires have been rotated...but everything that goes into a successful road trip...
- I would also assume that at some point in that process—you think through the importance of being careful...we were coming back from Indianapolis the Friday before last during that storm...and we came upon a car that had somehow gone off the road and landed on its top...thankfully the emergency workers were there...but you're reminded how dangerous a car can be...
- now, why would the concern for carefulness be there?...
  - it might be a matter of personal safety...you recognize that you are a steward of the body that the Lord has entrusted to you, and because of all the potential dangers involved, you want to be as careful as possible...
  - but it wouldn't be long into that thought process at all before you would be thinking about the importance of carefulness because of the potential harm that could come to someone else...
- you look over at your spouse or your friend and think...I want to do everything I can to get that person safely to our destination...
  - and then you look in the back seat...or if you have a mini-van, the back seats...and see your children, and it's the exact same thing...I need to be extremely careful...
- if you're thinking especially clearly, you also look over at the other cars and drivers...and you want to do everything in your power to avoid injuring them...
  - of course, accidents happen, humanly speaking, but I hope all of us would hate it if someone else was harmed because of our lack of caution...

- now let me ask you this – should that same principle carry over to the church, and our relationships with other followers of Christ?...

#### 2. The challenge of showing carefulness in the church.

- and the answer to that is, I hope, of course...
- we're all driving spiritual cars...and we're heading in a particular direction...and life moves along rapidly, like a bunch of people heading down I 65 in a big mass of traffic...

- well, should we care about carefulness on the trip?...is there potential benefit to helping one another reach our spiritual destinations safely and is there potential damage that can be done if we really don't care about this...
- in other words, could the way we drive our spiritual car potentially harm someone else...and should people like you and me even care about that...and are there any principles from Scripture that can guide us on this matter...
- with those questions in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 8...page 134 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...

- we're in the middle of a series entitled **Taking the Next Step...with Joy...**

- this is a verse by verse exposition of the book of 1 Corinthians...

- this morning we are beginning a brand new section in this book...it's still part of the questions that the Corinthians had posed to the apostle Paul in a previous letter they wrote to him...

- **1 Corinthians 7:1 - Now concerning the things about which you wrote...**

- and so all of chapter 7 addressed specific questions they had about human sexuality, and singleness, and various kinds of marital conditions...

- and of course we don't have a copy of the questions they asked him...but we can make fairly strong assumptions on the basis of the answers he gave...

- now, here's some things we know for sure...

- the material beginning in chapter 8 is a rather dramatic shift from what we've been studying...

- now we're turning to the topic of Christian liberty – what principles are there to guide us when we're making decisions about areas that are not especially addressed in the Word of God?...

- that is a huge issue for people who do not want to inadvertently ram their spiritual car into someone else's in a way that might harm that other person or family...

- in fact, it's so important that Paul is going to spend 3 chapters discussing it...this is by far the most extended passage in all of God's Word on this topic...and if you add this to Romans chapter 14, you'll have a solid understanding of how to handle Christian liberty questions...

- now, the passage will not make sense to a number of people here, and the possibility of making any contemporary applications will be lost, unless you know certain things about the background...because the question the Corinthians apparently asked Paul next had to do with meat that had been offered to idols...to false gods...

- and I realize that you might say – you know, I haven't struggled with that all week...

- I get that--but we always start with what the passage meant to the original audience, and then we work out to what it means to us today

- so in order to understand and then practically apply the text, let's think for a minute about...

### **3. The question the Corinthians faced—what should we think about meat that has been offered to idols?**

- here's the quickest way I know of to get this on the table...(no pun intended...)

#### **a. The Corinthian culture was extremely pagan.**

- 1) polytheistic – believed in many gods that had to be pacified by various offerings**

- 2) polydemonistic – believed in many evil spirits that were trying to gain entrance to your body and soul**

- their view was – one of the easiest ways for a demon to gain entrance to you was by attaching itself to a piece of meat...(see, you just thought that was a bad case of heartburn)...we can joke about it now, I guess—but the issue then was real...

- b. **The pagan worshippers in Corinth made multiple meat offerings at their pagan temples that both pacified the gods and purified the meat.**
- c. **The meat went to one of 3 places:**
  - 1) **Burned on the altar to the “gods.”**
  - 2) **Given to the pagan priest, who because he could not possibly use it all, sold the remainder in the marketplace.**
  - 3) **Returned to the worshipper.**
- d. **The Christians in Corinth were therefore faced with at least three questions:**
  - 1) **Can I buy meat that has been offered to idols in the marketplace?**
    - history tells us that often this kind of meat cost less because there was so much of it...so was it OK for a Christian to take advantage of the savings?... (like going to Meijer – straight hamburger – \$1.89 a pound, hamburger offered to idols -- \$1.39 a pound...)
  - 2) **Can I attend a feast where that kind of meat will be served?**
  - 3) **Can I attend a dinner party where I don’t know what kind of meat will be served?**
- e. **The Corinthians were divided into 2 groups in the ways these kinds of questions were answered:**
  - 1) **Those who had a “weak conscience” (a conscience that was triggered by something other than the Word of God.** So they believed it was sinful to be associated with such meat in any way, shape, or form.
  - 2) **Those who had “knowledge.”**
    - we’ll explain what Paul meant by that phrase in a moment – but these kinds of persons saw absolutely nothing wrong with this meat and bought it, ate it, went to parties where it might be served, etc.

- now, here was the issue – that topic had never been clearly addressed in Scripture...anywhere...
- so it falls under the heading of Christian liberty...topics that the Bible does not clearly address...
- and you and I face those kinds of questions all the time...and how we answer them, and subsequently act on our answers, can have dramatic impact on the rest of the church family...
- now, you might say – well, what kind of issues?...
  - here’s some opening salvos before we read the text...
    - 1. Entertainment choices is a big one –
      - is it OK to go to the beach?....
      - is it OK to go to the movies?...
      - is it OK to go to Vegas?...
      - is it OK to go to a dance?...
        - we face those kinds of questions all the time...and we could make that list a lot longer...and we have to figure out what we think about all of that...
    - 2. Questions about dress and fashion...
      - how are you supposed to dress when you come to church?...
      - how are you supposed to dress when you’re out weeding the garden? (cf. churches that use to say that women shouldn’t wear britches...so women are out weeding their gardens in dresses---is that more modest or less?...
- and again – we could talk about this forever....
  - what would you do if I came here next week with an earring?...is that even any of your business?...

- what about a tattoo?...what if one of our pastors came back with his wife from their anniversary trip sporting matching tattoos in celebration of their undying love?...
- 3. What about educational choices?....
  - does the Bible say you can only send your kids to Christian school, home school, public school...
  - what about at the collegiate level...
- 4. Then we could add the music issue on the heap...

- and we're just warming up here – so no, you're probably not going to deal with the meat offered to idols issue...but the underlying principles are of crucial importance to anyone who wants to avoid harming a brother and sister in Christ by the choices he/she makes...
- with all of that in mind, let's read our passage – **read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

- we're talking this morning about **Showing Concern for Your Brother**...and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 principles to help us live carefully with one another**.

### I. Knowledge is Important.

- it is interesting to note the way this chapter is organized...verse 1 is really a good example of a topic sentence...(do you remember those?)...a good topic sentence introduces the material to follow...
- in this case, Paul actually gives us a three-fold outline that he follows through the rest of the chapter...he says...
  - we all have knowledge, knowledge alone puffs up, but love edifies...
  - everything else in this chapter somehow fits into that division, and in so doing, answers the question...what principles do I use when making a decision that the Bible does not specifically address?...
- so where does Paul start his answer...by saying that we all have knowledge...
- many students of Scripture believe Paul was actually quoting one of the groups who wrote the initial letter...who would have disagreed with the weak conscience people...those who were against using this meat...and their point would have been...

#### A. We all have knowledge – v. 1

- Paul doesn't differ with that...in fact he even develops it more fully in verse 4
- so yea...

#### B. An idol is nothing – v. 4.

- and for any of the Corinthians familiar with the OT, they would have known that God's people actually poked fun at idolatry from time to time...
- **Jeremiah 10:3-5 - For the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. "they decorate *it* with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter." "Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, and they cannot speak; They must be carried, because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, for they can do no harm, nor can they do any good."**
- so who cares if the meat was offered to an idol?...they're nothing anyway...
- then he goes on to say...

#### C. There is only one God – v. 4.

- that too, for anyone familiar with the OT...is like Bible truth 101...
  - **Deuteronomy 6:4 - "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!**
- there's not a bunch of little gods running around...and any person who is a true believer in Christ should know that...
- now, verses 5-6 just reemphasize that...

#### D. Names and reality are different – v. 5.

##### - v. 5 – for even if there are so-called gods...

- it doesn't matter if the idols have names – that doesn't make them real...
- most of us at one time believed in the bogie man – just because he had a name doesn't make him real...
- names and reality are different...then, just to be sure we get the point – he states it again...

#### E. There is one God – v. 6.

#### F. There is one lord – v. 6.

- now, that's a lot of content—what's the point?...
- the starting point in making decisions about matters of Christian liberty is knowledge...
- now, that's not the end of the argument, but it is a crucial first step...

#### G. Why is this important?

- several reasons...

##### 1. Some people who love to express their Christian liberty freely do not always take the time to determine whether the Bible says anything at all about that particular issue, either in precept or principle.

- so folks who say – well, I can dress any way I want...the Bible doesn't say how long my shorts should be, or whether sleeveless is OK...blah, blah, blah...
- so I'm going to do whatever I want...
- you might want to slow down there just a bit, pardner – because the Scripture has a bit to say about the issue of modesty...and that kind of general principle might not help you make absolute decisions in a black/white or yes/no manner...it's still a principle that ought to be put in the equation...
- and some men and women don't like to slow up long enough to even determine in a given situation whether the Bible speaks to it in any way or not – they need knowledge...

##### 2. Some people want to be the perpetual weaker brother.

- Have you ever had someone say to you – well, you're causing me to stumble?...
- and in some cases – they want to position themselves as the more godly person...
- well...that's certainly not the point here...
  - the weaker brother is...weaker...he needs to be taught, and in the meantime there may need to be some special sensitivity shown to him while he grows...but to remain in that position for an extended period of time as if that is some kind of badge of honor is completely contrary to what these verses are teaching...

- now, that's enough on the table to at least begin asking a couple of questions....

1. There are two clear ditches emerging here...those who those who tend to flaunt their freedoms without slowing up long enough to determine whether God has spoken in any way, either by principle or precept on that issue...

2. Those who want to elevate their preferences to the level of Scripture even when the Bible is silent, or practically silent...and then hold those ideas out as standards of spirituality for everyone else in the church...

- and if you don't get your way... you play the "Your causing me to stumble card"...

- in each case (though for an entirely different reason), what's needed is additional knowledge...[develop the value of being in an ABF, point man group, ladies Bible study, FCI classes...]

- [also thank those who served so faithfully in VBS]

- question is – toward which ditch do you tend to lean?...[develop—might want to ask for some help in making that analysis...]

## II. Knowledge Alone is Insufficient.

- as important as everything we've said thus far is, it's not even close to the end of the argument of this chapter...Paul goes on to say that knowledge alone is insufficient...

### A. Alone, it puffs up

#### - v. 1 – knowledge makes arrogant

- for example, I heard a seminary professor once tell the story of working on his doctorate in a foreign country where they only had nude beaches...
- and he had to decide if he should take his family, including his pre-teen and teenage sons and daughters...
- and he said the decision he made was “yes”...and the rationale was – we all know that God made all aspects of our bodies, so I just taught my children to learn to praise God for the beauty of His creation...
- and he believed that could be a worship service for his family and that they were strong enough spiritually to handle that experience without lust or other sins...
  - well---in some senses I guess we would say he was right---he had knowledge...
  - but that knowledge alone may have puffed him up and put him a position of believing his family members were much stronger than they really were...
  - and see what's happened – there wasn't the appropriate caution and concern, in this case, for his own children...there may be a pending wreck on their “spiritual I-65”...

### B. It's never complete.

- **1 Corinthians 8:2 - If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;**

#### - “**knowledge is the process of passing from the unconscious state of ignorance to the conscious state of ignorance.**”

- there's a lot of truth in that...
- in addition, it's one thing to know facts—even biblical facts---it's something entirely different to know God...
- so a person can be growing in their knowledge, even their biblical knowledge, and not be growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ...
- so where does all of this take us – we all have knowledge ...and hopefully over time that knowledge of what Scripture says about right from wrong is increasing...
- but Paul is very clear...that knowledge alone is incomplete...insufficient...
- then what?...to recognize that...

## III. Knowledge Must Be Balanced by Edifying Love.

- see, when it comes to all these decisions we have to make about areas that are not specifically outlined in the Bible, we can handle them by either doing whatever we want to do, or by showing the appropriate amount of attention to how those choices might negatively affect someone else spiritually...
- if it has to come down to choices, I would rather err on the side of loving someone instead of harming them...this ought to be our position...
- now please think about the argument of verse 1 again...
  - **v. 1 – Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.**

- how is that true?

**A. Love takes into account the goal for every believer.**

**- Warren Wiersbe – “Knowledge can be a weapon to fight with or a tool to build with, depending on how it’s used.”**

- the key question there is – are the choices I’m making in Christian liberty areas helping others be best positioned to grow in Christ?...

- are my choices edifying – building others up...

- and the real question is – do you even care?...

- and you might say – but what if I don’t know what’s the best choice in a given situation?...

- if your heart is really soft and sensitive to the importance of the potential impact on others – that is a heart that God can really use and direct...

- conversely, if you’re all about flaunting your freedoms regardless of how that affects others...you will probably get those kind of choices wrong 9 times out of 10...

- and remember – the fact that you made the wrong choice may not come out until the next generation...[cf. the seminary professor—was that really the choice that stood the best position to build the faith of his children?...]

**B. Love causes us to be sensitive to the existence of weaker brothers.**

**- 1 Corinthians 8:7 - However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.**

- one of the great joys in a church like this is the presence of so many men and women who are brand new to the faith...that is a huge blessing from the Lord Himself, but it also brings with it tremendous responsibility...

- and you might want to ask yourself – are you on the lookout for those who are weaker?...are you thankful for their [presence, and does that impact the nature of the choices you may make?...

**C. Love causes us to remember that there’s nothing especially spiritual about exercising liberty.**

**- 1 Corinthians 8:8 - But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.**

- some people take the position that, the more spiritual you are...the more you will exercise your freedom in questionable areas...

- that is simply not true, and that will become the focus of the next chapter for sure...

- if you’re going to err, err on the side of caution...there’s always safety there...

**D. Love focuses on the question, “Could this cause a brother or sister to stumble”?**

**- 1 Corinthians 8:9 - But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.**

- [develop the reason we have “no alcohol as a beverage” as one of our leadership standards...]....

**E. Love focuses on all that Jesus has already done for our brothers and sisters.**

**1 Corinthians 8:11 - For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.**

- [could discuss – the issue of not riding with another woman alone without my wife – it would be terrible if the use of that freedom put another person, for whom Christ died, in a position where they were tempted to sin...]

- **Matthew 18:6-7 - but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea...For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!**