

"I Will Not Cause My Brother To Stumble"

1 Cor. 8:7-13

Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly

Chapter eight is a part of the larger section that runs from chapter eight through chapter ten. The entire passage is dealing with issues of liberty.

The people of God are an intense, intimate, and extended family. Relationships exist on multiple levels. There are personality conflicts and maturity issues, therefore clashes exist. The opportunity for division and quarrels in any family, but especially in this one, are exaggerated and pronounced. In the midst of this tremendous diversity of up-bringing, culture, experience, and knowledge how do we have body unity?

The Bible produces unity out of diversity. The cross creates harmony by celebrating the differences. Differences are not to be swept under the rug or ignored, they are to be embraced and appreciated.

It is difficult for us in our culture to understand the issues that existed in the church of Corinth. Perhaps the closest we can come to this would be someone who has a Roman Catholic upbringing being invited for a cookout on a Friday where only red meat is being served. The issue is personal not corporate. I was raised a Roman Catholic and we would never had considered eating red meat on a Friday. We always ate fish-sticks.

The passage deals with issues of conscience and what our response should be to it. Because of this we need to ask and answer several questions.

I. What is a person's conscience?

The conscience of man is part of his immaterial aspect. The conscience is a witness with man that tells him he ought to do what he believes to be right and not to do what he believes to be wrong. There are two thoughts about the conscience that need to be stated. **First**, it is innate. Humanity is created with conscience; everyone has one. **Second**, it is fallible. The conscience of man can lead him astray. Conscience works from the information it receives. The conscience of man is highly subjective. It is wrong to formulate and make objective absolutes from one's conscience.

II. What is a weak conscience (v. 7b)

The issue is not one of essential sin, but assumed sin. The sin does not lie in the object but in the attitude toward the object. In our passage the issue is not about "real" sin, but assumed sin. It is only sin because we think it is sin. We are not speaking of issues that are sin like the items listed in Colossians 3:5-7 or Galatians 5:19-21.

The issues here are ones of cultural taboos.

III. What is a defiled conscience (v. 7b)

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When a conscience is weak and is strengthened (v. 10) to participate in the activity that is, for it, inappropriate, then the weak conscience stumbles (vv. 9, 13), is wounded (v. 12), and coming to ruin (v. 11) is defiled (v. 7b).

When the weak conscience is strengthened to violate itself by someone else's liberty, then engaging in that liberty is actually a sin against the cross-work of Christ (vv. 11b, 12b).

IV. Indulgence or abstinence cannot alter our position before God (v. 8)

Most people struggle with this idea, but it must be consistently and regularly taught and understood. Nothing you do is going to change God's opinion of you. He sees you in His Son and there is nothing you can do to add to or subtract from this glorious truth.

This verse allows us to see issues that are neutral in their proper context. Regardless as to what side of the fence you are falling on, it really does not matter to God. What does matter is your attitude toward one another and how you are lovingly and graciously dealing with members within the body of Christ.

V. The strong must consider and thus protect the weak in the exercising of their liberties (vv. 9-13).

The principles being discussed concern the non-corporate guidelines for the body of Christ. It is inappropriate to place rules on the corporate fellowship in matters that are neutral. If this were true, then the entire local body would be dictated to by the most immature and least informed believer.

So based on what we are reading what should be the principles of accommodation for both within the same fellowship?

1. If you do not have liberty to partake in neutral items, then do not partake.
2. If you do not have liberty to partake in neutral items, do not judge those who do.
3. If you do have liberty to partake in neutral items, then enjoy it as a gift from God.
4. If you do have liberty to partake in neutral items, do not insist on the right to do so.
5. If you do have liberty to partake in neutral items, do not encourage the weak to participate in it with you.

The issue cannot be one of who is right or who is wrong, but of love. How can we best serve our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? That is the question needing to be asked and the answer is to be one of love. As a fellowship do we truly love? Is our love reflecting what we read in 1 Corinthians 13:1-4? Oh friend, when we love nothing matters and without love everything becomes an irritant. May God truly make us loving.