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Sermon Notes

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Love Limits Liberty

1 Corinthians 8:7-13

“No Man Left Behind”

All the branches of the American military hold to a certain doctrine in which they are committed to never leave a wounded fellow soldier to fall into in the hands of the enemy on the battlefield... it's called “No man left behind.”

For the American military tradition, this dates back to before there even was a United States... during the French and Indian war from 1756-1763, a group of American soldiers named “Rogers’ Rangers” fought for the British against the French and their Native American allies. Rogers’ Rangers used a combination of frontier techniques and Indian tactics to defeat the enemy in the wilderness... they were expert trackers and highly skilled marksmen with the long rifle. They also held to an unswerving commitment to leave no comrade behind on a battlefield. They would risk the safety of the whole unit in order to rescue a wounded fellow soldier.

Though many people may question the wisdom of risking a larger group of healthy soldiers to rescue one fallen soldier, the effect on unit loyalty, pride, and morale cannot be measured. After all, it might be YOU that falls in the next battle... knowing that your brother soldiers will not rest until they have rescued you gives you a high level of confidence and boldness. It is not “every man for himself” but everyone is bonded together as a “Band of brothers”

In a healthy local church, this is written into these words: **“We will watch over one another in brotherly love.”** We are committed to getting EVERYONE for whom Christ died safely to heaven...

Though we are continually assaulted by the triple enemy of the WORLD, the FLESH, and the DEVIL... and though we may often be wounded through the flaming arrows of the devil – temptation and accusation – we will not leave anyone spiritual wounded by the side of the road.

“We will watch over one another in brotherly love.”

Jesus has made an absolute commitment to save ALL the elect the Father has entrusted to him:

John 6:39-40 this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

For us as Christians, this becomes OUR commitment as well!

Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

As we come to 1 Corinthians 8, we come for a second week to consider the obligation each of us have to our fellow Christians... to live in a loving way toward them... to limit our liberties and our personal choices to only those things that will BUILD UP our brothers and sisters in their faith

For three chapters, Paul is going to be addressing the issue of "meat sacrificed to idols". Many modern people struggle with whether the ancient Bible is really relevant to our 21st century world. How could this problem of animal sacrifices offered to actual physical idols possibly be relevant to our world of today?

Well, we'll see that it IS relevant, because it has to do with Christian freedoms, and the proper exercise of those freedoms in areas that could cause other Christians to stumble into sin.

Debatable issues!! And how to regulate them in the Christian life

For us, it will more likely relate to matters of personal choice in some controversial areas like drinking alcohol, and watching movies, and what you do with your free time and extra money, what habits you form with your pleasures, how you use your smartphone, etc.

Christians have always struggled with such debatable issues, but the issues change from generation to generation

Some people might say, "What we need is a comprehensive list of "do's and don'ts" in the Christian life... a set of rules for Christian ethics that we all agree to and then follow.

All kinds of problems:

- 1) No group of Christian leaders could ever be found that could hammer out such a list and be in perfect agreement on what should be permitted and what should be forbidden... they'd be arguing about it till Jesus returned
- 2) Even if they did hammer out such a list, all that would happen is a new form of legalism – phariseeism – would emerge. Those that kept the list would feel arrogant and spiritually superior to those who failed at one point on the list
- 3) Worst of all, they would miss the new life of freedom that Christ and the Holy Spirit have come to give us. Not by a written code, but by the dynamic life of the indwelling Spirit do we navigate these debatable issues. Christ's death has set us free from such a written code to serve God in a new way by the Spirit

Christ **has** set us free! But that doesn't fully answer how we make these decisions. We are adopted into a family of God in which we ought to care from the depths of our hearts how our lifestyle choices affect others. We are free... but our freedom must be LIMITED by our love for one another.

I. The Doctrine and Freedom of the “Strong”

A. The “Strong” and the “Weak”

1. The word “weak” appears five times in this passage, but the word “strong” never... only inferred by the existence of the “weak” brothers

1 Corinthians 8:7 ... their conscience is weak

1 Corinthians 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

1 Corinthians 8:10 if anyone with a weak conscience

1 Corinthians 8:11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

1 Corinthians 8:12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

2. Romans 15 mentions openly the “strong”

Romans 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

3. Stronger brothers and sisters have totally accepted Paul's doctrine about idols and meat... they have solid Christian knowledge

B. Corinthian context: paganism and polytheism

1. More gods than could be counted or remembered
2. Gods and goddesses were contrived and worshiped
 - a. Athena, the goddess of wisdom
 - b. Ares, the god of war
 - c. Aphrodite, the goddess of love
 - d. Apollo, the god of the sun
 - e. Poseidon, the god of the sea
3. Each of these gods and goddesses had shrines and rituals associated with them, especially animal sacrifice
4. Paul's experience in nearby Athens

Acts 17:16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

Acts 17:22-23 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

C. Paul's Preaching Ministry

1. Plainly exposing the truth about idols

Acts 17:24-25 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

Acts 19:26 Paul says that man-made gods are no gods at all.

2. Paul's doctrine is clearly reflected right in this passage

1 Corinthians 8:4-6 We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ 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.

3. It is consistent with what was taught again and again in the Old Testament

Isaiah 44:15-17 [Wood] is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. ¹⁶ Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." ¹⁷ From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god."

4. So, the “strong” are those who have accepted Paul’s clear teaching on the “gods” and on “idols”... there is ONLY ONE GOD, and the idols are nothing more than physical statues with no reality

5. Also, the meat is JUST MEAT... it can’t catch a spiritual virus

Romans 14:14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself.

D. The “Strong” Are those who KNOW these things and are FREE to eat meat any time

1. They have this clear true knowledge

2. BUT the problem is, their knowledge was making them PRIDEFUL

1 Corinthians 8:1-2 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

3. The biggest problem was, they were forgetting the impact of their exercise of freedom on their weaker brothers

II. The Danger to the “Weak”

A. Who Are the “Weak?”

1 Corinthians 8:7 But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

1. Not everyone had this knowledge... that idols are nothing and the meat is just meat

2. Some of the weak brothers are those who are perhaps only recently converted out of paganism
3. All their lives their whole world had been colored black by this wicked religion
4. It affected every area of their lives...
5. Imagine a man converted by Paul only months ago

The pagan religion was part of his earliest memories... going to the temple, seeing the pagan priests offer sacrifices to Apollo or to Artemis or to Zeus or to Aphrodite... There were special sacred days for the gods, and that would be woven into the fabric of their years; as this man got older, he had seen the darker, wicked side, what was done behind the curtains with temple prostitutes. He had indulged in the immorality himself; his heart was dark, his mind in the gutter... he was enslaved to this sensual experience; his religion had been dark and evil and corrupt.

One day, this amazing man Paul came to Corinth... he preached a pure gospel of a holy God who has nothing to do with wickedness

He preached Jesus Christ and him crucified... a loving Creator God who alone is God and who sent his only begotten Son into the world; Jesus took all this man's sin and wicked actions on himself... the judgment that this man deserved for his life of sin was completely satisfied

This new Christian man repented of all that corruption; he became a NEW CREATION; he felt clean inside for the first time in his life... his mind was just getting free from all that spiritual filth

He walked by the temple grounds from time to time to get to the marketplace or to visit a family member, and he thanked God for delivering him from all that darkness

But in the course of time, a member of the church took him to the meat market and bought some meat from the vendor... just a minute walk away from the temple where he'd done his most shameful deeds... the older Christian seemed to have NO PROBLEM AT ALL with being there buying meat for dinner... but this fragile new convert is ripped up inside; he wants to scream "NO! WE SHOULDN'T BE HERE! Don't you know that this meat was offered to Aphrodite, the goddess of love? Don't you know what they did while the animal was being slaughtered and offered?" He looks at the older Christian, and says "I shouldn't be here... I don't want to eat that meat... Is this okay? What are we doing?"

The older Christian looks at him quizzically and laughs in his face. "What's your problem??" he asks... "Didn't you listen to Paul teaching about all this? Where's your doctrine?"

But the man is not convinced that this is okay. He is tormented inside by his conscience. He goes home with that man and has dinner, and trusts the older man's words and is shamed by the older man's mockery... but his mind is deeply unsettled. Deeply disturbed.

As he lays in bed that night, his tortured conscience is accusing him of sin. But his mind is telling him "The brother said it was ok. He does it all the time, and isn't troubled by it at all. Maybe I'm just overreacting."

Later that week, this new convert is walking by the temple grounds and smells the meat cooking. He goes to the same meat vendor he and the older brother went to and is in the process of buying some meat for himself to eat at home. But his conscience is still screaming at him. He eats the meat at home, but he feels unclean. But he can't shake it.

He goes back two days later and while he's buying some more meat, he sees a temple prostitute he used to know. Their eyes meet... she smiles at him and gives him a heart wound. Now he feels a pull on his heart that he thought was dead forever.

We'll stop right there... you get the idea.

B. The Danger for the Weaker Brother

1. A conscience not yet trained fully by the right doctrine

1 Corinthians 8:7 But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

2. Simple lesson in the Christian life: DON'T EVER VIOLATE YOUR CONSCIENCE!! The Apostle Paul:

Acts 24:16 I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

- a. If your conscience is accusing you and you do it anyway, you are sinning

Romans 14:23 the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

3. Eventually, in the course of growing in the Lord, the new converts will internalize the doctrine about idols and meat and will be just as free as the most mature believers

4. But until that happens, the mature believers need to WALK IN LOVE toward their weaker brothers and sisters

C. Paul Uses Extreme Language:

1 Corinthians 8:7 since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

1 Corinthians 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

1 Corinthians 8:10-11 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

- a. This doesn't mean "condemned to hell"
- b. But it means that his violating of his conscience has destroyed his sense of peace with God, his free heart, his joy in the Lord, his fruitfulness, his example... everything in terms of day-to-day power and fruit is destroyed because he is violating his conscience

2. Wounded

1 Corinthians 8:12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

3. Fallen into sin

1 Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin...

So the "Weak Brother" is led by the flaunting of the freedoms of the "Strong Brother" to violate and defile his conscience, lead him back into the very place where he had only recently committed his most disgusting sins... and he might well be led quickly to forsaking the new Christian life altogether and going back to paganism

III. The Central Lesson: Love Limits Liberty

1 Corinthians 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

A. See the Value of Your Christian Brother or Sister

1. Paul strongly asserts their value in Christ's eyes

1 Corinthians 8:11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

2. Paul intensifies this

1 Corinthians 8:12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

B. Is Your Freedom Really Worth More Than Your Brother?

1. Paul zeroes in on what we're really talking about... EATING MEAT

1 Corinthians 8:8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

- a. Is meat such a big deal to you?
- b. Is your taste in food worth it to you?
- c. Are you willing to do all this damage to a brother for whom Christ died just to suit your taste for meat??
- d. Food doesn't bring you closer to God! It is just for the tongue and for the stomach
- e. You can live without it

C. Paul's Resolution for the Sake of the Weaker Brothers

1 Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Romans 14:19-21 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

IV. Applications

A. Watch Over One Another in Brotherly Love

1. The basic concept here is we should deeply care about the spiritual health of our brothers and sisters around us
2. Beyond that, we should be willing to make significant sacrifices for their spiritual health
3. Definition of love: "Heart attraction that results in cheerful sacrificial actions"
 - a. The sacrifice here is your LIBERTY to do certain things in the debatable category... eating meat, drinking wine, watching secular movies

- b. Are you willing to SACRIFICE these things for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ?
 - c. If you're not willing to make sacrifices, you don't really love
4. But let's extend that... how much are you willing to sacrifice your personal choices in life to benefit a brother or sister?
- a. Discipleship relationships: willing to set aside some time in your busy schedule to meet weekly with someone for the sake of growth into Christlike maturity... men with men, and women with women?
 - b. That will take a sacrifice of the liberty to spend your time however you want to
 - c. In the next chapter, Paul will speak of what he's willing to sacrifice to be evangelistically fruitful... he's willing to sacrifice his food preferences, his life choices, whatever it takes

1 Corinthians 9:22 I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

- d. But HERE, the focus is on other Christians... what are you willing to sacrifice to be sure other Christians are spiritually healthy?
- e. What about your prayer patterns? How often and in what detail do you pray for other church members? Do you take the church directory and go through it and pray for them?
- f. What about "Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15)? What of yourself are you willing to sacrifice to enter into the life situation of other Christians? Their celebrations—their weddings, their babies, their graduations, their hirings, their new home? What of their needs, sorrows and struggles? Visiting the sick. Cooking meals for those in need.
- g. What about hospitality? I thank God for HOME FELLOWSHIP HOST FAMILIES! Awesome! One of the most strategic ministries in the life of FBC... THANK YOU! But there are many other ways to sacrifice and show hospitality toward other Christians... inviting New Members over for a meal. Or inviting first-time visitors over for a meal after church
- h. There are many ways God is calling on us to sacrifice our liberty for the sake of love

B. Christ Did This For Us

Romans 15:1-3 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself

1. Christ could have stayed in heaven and God would have just judged us all for our sins
2. But Christ loved us and limited his liberty for us; he came to earth to die in the place of sinners

Luke 12:50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

Christ was speaking of his death on the cross... to be IMMERSED in death for us

The word "distressed" = "constrained" ... like in a straightjacket, bound in, hemmed in, by the will of God

Christ was willing to give up all his freedoms to be NAILED TO A CROSS FOR US

Trust in him, and your sins will be forgiven!