

March 4, 2018

Liberty OR Death 1Cor 8

We've all heard the cry, "***Give me liberty or give me death!***" Patrick Henry determined for himself that he would rather die than relinquish our nations liberty from England! But what if your spiritual liberty caused the death of another brother/sister? Paul warns us that loving each other demands that mature believers refuse to exercise any liberty that might cause less mature Christians to stumble into sin by acting contrary to their beliefs. This is Paul's main message in ***1Cor 8 (& Rom 14!)***

READ: 1Cor 8:4-7 (NLT)

Background: *How many of you studied mythology in school?* Do you remember learning about the gods worshipped by the Greeks/Romans? Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Mercury, Pluto, etc.

This was a well-established religion for those who lived in the empire – including the Corinthians before they became Christians. As new believers in the One, True, Living God, some had a hard time thinking differently about the gods they'd worshipped all their lives. The idea of participating in the worship of these gods – like eating meat used in sacrifices to them – created confusion & contention in the church. So, the leaders raised their question to Paul: "*What about eating meat sacrificed to idols?*" Paul's answer to the leaders and mature members of the church was: ***Love is greater than being right!***

(Jesus: "*Food is for the stomach...but from the heart flow...*")

READ: 1Cor 8:8-13 (NLT)

Paul says, "*Practice your beliefs...unless your maturity gives you liberty that would cause other Christians to stumble*" (*tempt them to act contrary to their current convictions!*) In that case, your liberty causes their death; **so let love put liberty away**

ILLUS. REALLY??? Drinks at Houston's restaurant!
Teaching girls to drive: "You must drive for everyone else!"

APPLICATION: While I am confounded to strike any contemporary analogy with this early church issue, the principle is not lost on us! In fact, it has a wide, general application for

our lives today beyond food. The reason is because we're all in the process of learning more about God: and what we learn impacts our current convictions as well as the quality of love we share. As a church, we purposefully orchestrate opportunities to grow in relationship with God & each other: Worship, Large group, Small Groups, Discipleship classes, bible studies, ministries just to name a few. We're organized to experience God in expanding ways and to share our "new" knowledge & experience with each other for the benefit of all. When the Spirit reveals a truth/life-application that's new to us, we share our discoveries with each other. But if these are met with doubt or resistance, or if the liberty they provide is disapproved by others, we must learn to love first, and argue last! "Disagreements" must not be allowed to escalate into disunity! Rather, ***love must disarm our need to be right in favor of our call to be one!*** Love motivates & exalts our collective union in Christ as supreme – and our growing knowledge as secondary to unity!

READ: 1Cor 8:1-3 (NLT)

Finally, Paul's opening comments indicate that we all know/believe something about eating meat used in idol worship. Beliefs that exalt a person's piety develop human pride! But convictions that come from God are different: 1) they lead to humility & gratitude, 2) they produce freedom, not restrictions! ***"Everything is permissible; but not everything is beneficial!"***

We each have to figure out how we are going to keep learning Christ & loving each other in process – even when we think they're wrong! Clearly, this command to love first while learning is unique to the church! It has not been this way in the fields of other disciplines: science, philosophy, education, politics, etc. We're used to how it looks & feels to be a ***"bull in a china shop!"*** forcefully imposing one's beliefs onto others in ways that are less instructional than caustic! The world's way!

But it must be different in the church – the entity that Jesus says will be known by ***"the love we have for each other!"*** Love reigns supreme always because Christ reigns supreme!

INVITATION:

WORSHIP IN MEDITATION: Leviticus 19:14 (NAS)

“You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.”

Of course the deaf man won't hear you curse him...*but everyone else will* – including God who is always present! And placing a stumbling block before a blind man is just plain cruel; none of us would ever conceive of such inhumane treatment. But there are different kinds of stumbling blocks and different kinds of blindness.

Today, God wants us to love each other enough to forgo the rights our beliefs grant us if they violate the beliefs of other Christians. Love does no harm to anyone! As Paul says in **Romans 14:17-23**: ***For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Remember, all foods are acceptable, but it is wrong to eat something if it makes another person stumble...do anything they believe is not right (because) they are sinning if they do it.***

Sermon in a sentence: Liberty OR Death!

WORSHIP WITH CHILDREN:

Today, we're talking about what it means to love people enough to stop doing what you believe is right when you're with others who don't agree.

You'll have to forgive me for eating and talking; I didn't have breakfast this morning! *How many of you ate breakfast? How many ate candy for breakfast? Why not?*

Yes, I know most people don't eat candy for breakfast – or any meal – because it doesn't have any nutrition and is bad for your teeth. But I needed energy from a sugar high – and besides, I brushed my teeth last week!

Do you think it's OK for me to eat candy this morning for breakfast? (Need to get a “NO” response!)

What do you think I should do with my lollipop now that I know you don't think eating candy for breakfast is OK? Should I:

- 1) ignore you all and just keep eating because I want to?
- 2) give you candy & help you do what you believe is wrong?
- 3) put my candy away and never eat it in front of you again?

Which action shows the greatest love FOR YOU?

God agrees! Paul says, ***“If what I eat (say, or do) causes another believer to sin (by doing what they believe is wrong), then I will never eat again – for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble in their faith-walk with Jesus!”***