

Lake Cities Community Church
January 9, 2010
Pastor Craig Schill
Series: Growing Up. Building Up. (1 Cor)

“Is Eating Out?”
1 Corinthians 8

The following warning labels were submitted for the annual “Wacky Warning Label” contest, run by a consumer advocacy group to bring attention to frivolous lawsuits. First, a Razor motorized go-cart warns: “This product moves when used.” A baby stroller: “Warning - Remove child before folding. A fishing lure with sharp hooks: “Warning: Harmful if swallowed!” A can of self-defense pepper spray: “Warning: May irritate eyes.” A smoke detector: “Warning: Do not use the Silence Feature in emergency situations. It will not extinguish a fire.” The 2010 Grand Prize Winner: The Jabra “Drive ‘N’ Talk” which is a speakerphone to allow for hands-free use of cell phones in cars: “Warning: Never operate your speakerphone while driving” Yes... that from the “Drive “N” Talk.”

On a serious note, organizers of the “Wacky Label Contest” argue that there are now so many unnecessary warnings, that the legitimate ones get lost in the mix and (ironically) consumer safety suffers as a result.

And I think that is true for the church – there are so many voices out there speaking about the church’s problems – on radio, TV, Internet, etc, that the most basic and necessary warnings are lost to us. Let me ask you: “If the church were a product – what would you write on its warning label? “Warning – don’t use the church this way – it was not designed

for that. Be careful to not break this fragile part, it is not easily fixed.” This morning, in our text, we are going to read the Apostle Paul’s warning label to the church.

Turn with me to the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter eight. We are in the second major section of the letter where Paul is responding to various questions the Corinthians had previously written to him about. The first question regarded the topic of marriage (chapter 7) and now we have the second question: “Is it OK to eat meat that may have been previously sacrificed to idols?” Now this is an irrelevant question to us, as we have very little animal sacrifice left in America – but in other cultures it is still a hot issue. But the key is that Paul in answering their question, gives his warning, a warning that may have more relevancy to our church, than any other topic we have looked at so far in this book.

We will look at our text in four sections, verses 1-3, 4-7, 8 and 9-13. Each section will be marked with a word starting with the letter “L” if you are following along in your notes.

LOVE should be our controlling issue (1-3)

In verses 1-3 Paul set out clearly that the controlling issue or value for the church is Love. **1Cor. 8:1** Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have **knowledge**. Please note that though love is the controlling issue - the key word in chapter eight is knowledge. The Greek word for knowledge is “gnosis,” from which we get words like “agnostic.” Probably the phrase, “We all have Knowledge” was a Corinthian slogan common use in Corinth. You will recall Corinth was a city very proud of their wisdom, knowledge and philosophies. And so the associations of knowledge were negative and

prideful, yet Paul is going to argue, very subtly, beginning here, that they actually DO have some good knowledge...

But in the Christian life, knowledge is never the controlling issue, love is:

Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. Knowledge has a down side, but love has no down side. Paul is not anti-intellectual, but is emphasizing the importance of love by showing the limitations of knowledge. The NLT translates verse one: “While knowledge may make us feel important, it is love that really builds up the church.”

Paul continues: **1Cor. 8:2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; 1Cor. 8:3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.**

Knowledge – again - even correct knowledge, is not what it is all about in the church. Knowledge has limitations – it leads to arrogance and self-deception (v2). The thing that should control those of us who care about the church is LOVE. Love first of God and then of others.

LIMITATION of Knowledge 4-7

Having emphasized the controlling issue of love Paul now turns his attention, in verses 4-7, in which he explains that knowledge has limitations. We have already seen the limitations of knowledge in that it leads to arrogance and self-deception, but here Paul argues even more strongly.

But first, remember, not all knowledge is bad: **Cor. 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. 1Cor. 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 1Cor. 8:6**

yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.

In other words, idols are not real. The “so called” gods that were in the 26 different temples and shrines in Corinth were known to be frauds – they were only carved pieces of wood and shaped plaster. The Corinthians for all their faults have scored an A+ on this theology test – there is only ONE God, and ONE Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all things exist.

But there is a major problem: 1Cor. 8:7 *However not all men have this knowledge;* Note this and underline in your Bible. “Not all men (or women) have this knowledge.” The benefit of knowledge is limited because we have different levels of knowledge. We come from different places. We have different knowledge about basic doctrine, the promises of God, the church, and discipleship based on different experiences, different backgrounds, different education and different levels of maturity.

And so I imagine at a congregational meeting, a young believer asking with all sincerity: “Is it OK to eat meat that has been previously sacrificed to idols.” Some people with certain knowledge said, “YES – praise God! Dig in. We know idols are not real. A steak, is a steak, is a steak. I’ve got a \$50 gift card to the temple of Isis cafeteria – let’s go.” Others were shocked and said: “Don’t listen to those liberals! Of course it is not OK! Are you crazy? How could you even think of supporting anything to do with the temple system and all that sin? False Gods, maybe but haven’t you heard of demons? This meat is unclean.”

Some had 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.”* 1 Cor 8:7.

LEGITIMACY of Gray Issues (8:8)

The most serious challenge to unity in the early church was not false doctrine, it was not persecution, but it was how to handle gray issues. What is a gray issue? In verse 8 we have the legitimacy of gray issues. They are legitimate, in that they are real and cause much damage Here is my definition: **“A gray issue is one that is either not directly addressed in the Bible, and/or an issue that leaves room for legitimate differences of interpretation based on a sound biblical interpretation.”** Paul says: **1Cor. 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 eat, others don't eat – one decision is not better than the other – eating or not eating does not commend or recommend a person more highly spiritually.

Gray issues were there most serious challenge to church unity that the early church faced – because both sides of good Christians judged the other as being wrong, rather than allowing freedom in Christ. And how we handle gray issue is still a challenge. Let me give you an example:

JoHannah Reardon at ChristianBibleStudies.com shares the following testimony: “When our children were young, my husband and I decided we wouldn't watch R-rated movies. We wouldn't allow our children to watch them, so we decided that to watch them ourselves would be confusing to them. We made this decision in good conscience and never regretted it. I found, however, that it made me feel judgmental toward other parents who watched R-rated movies. I began to feel they weren't fully committed to Christ because they watched things I'd decided not to watch. Even as I write this, I realize how ridiculous it is to judge someone's relationship with God by what rating of movies he or she watches,

but it was so subtle at the time. Since it was a sacrificial commitment for me, I instinctively evaluated other people's spiritual dedication when they talked about the latest movie they'd watched.

Now this is not to say that we don't need discernment in our movie watching. We certainly do. But on the other hand not everyone who enjoys Mel Gibson's Braveheart is living in sin. There is freedom in Christ with these types of gray issues.

You might recall, my master's thesis in seminary was on the topic of gray issue and church unity: here are some other gray issues at play in churches today: Worship music preferences, role of women in church leadership, opinions about divorce and remarriage, Halloween, gambling, use of alcohol, political party affiliation, parenting philosophies, school choices, doctrine of end times, age of the earth and keeping the Sabbath... just to name a few.

Now there are black and white issues - it is always wrong to lie, steal, commit adultery and be jealous. But gray issues are legitimate too; they not only exist in abundance, but were and are the things that if not handled carefully destroy church unity.

Be very, very, very, very careful with your LIBERTY (9-13)

Now, here comes the warning label, we move into verses 9-13, starting with verse nine: **1Cor. 8:9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.** WARNING: "Be very, very, very careful with your Liberty!! OR to put it another way, "Be careful how you handle "gray issues in church." Paul is arguing here that if you feel the freedom to do a certain thing - to eat meat, or drink a beer, to attend a movie, to read a certain book - do not let your liberty cause someone else to

stumble in their faith:

1Cor. 8:10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 1Cor. 8:11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 1Cor. 8:12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 1Cor. 8:13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. Warning!!! Be very, very careful about gray areas in the church – especially those of you who are mature, you have knowledge. Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should do something.

The Pittsburgh Steelers play their first playoff game next Saturday. And the star of the team is quarterback Ben Roethlisberger who has already won two Superbowls. Ben learned an important lesson a few years ago that just because you can do something doesn't mean you should. Some of you will remember that in 2005 Big Ben bought a motorcycle and a controversy arose because Roethlisberger didn't wear a helmet. What a bad example to kids! How dangerous! But Pennsylvania doesn't have a helmet law – you have the freedom to wear one or not wear one.

In 2005 ESPN reporter Andrea Kremer asked Roethlisberger to explain his decision to ride his motorcycle without a helmet: **ESPN:** It's not the law in Pennsylvania to wear a helmet. Why don't you wear a helmet? **Roethlisberger:** Because you don't have to. It's not the law. If it was the law, I'd definitely have one on... But it's not the law and I know I don't have to. You're just more free when you're out there with no helmet on.

Roethlisberger was involved in a serious motorcycle accident in June of 2006, less than one year later. When a 62-year-old woman failed to yield at a Pittsburgh intersection. His bike was totaled, and emergency surgeons spent over seven hours repairing a broken jaw, a fractured skull, missing teeth, and several other facial injuries.

After being released from the hospital, Roethlisberger apologized to the fans, his family, and his team. He said: "In the past few days, I've gained a new perspective on life. By the grace of God, I'm fortunate to be alive." He also added that: "If I ever ride a motorcycle again it will certainly be with a helmet." *ESPN.com*.

Just because you can do something as a Christian doesn't mean you should.

Remember, what is the controlling issue? Love. The popular phrase in our culture: "Well, I don't care what other people think" is not biblical when it comes to gray issues. We let love guide us in what we do or don't do. Let me give you two examples, to show you how this works:

I was on my way to preach at a church once that only used the King James Version of the Bible. As you know, I certainly feel that the freedom to use and preach many different translations. But for the sake of love, I used the King James that day. I could have argued "superior knowledge" to them, but that would have, at that time torn down the church and people's faith. Now if I had an on-going relationship with them, I would have addressed the issue with pastoral discernment as relationships were developed.

Second, a friend of mine's father went to pastor a small church in a rural setting. Their church came from a legalistic background, and they taught it was sinful not just to see a movie with an "R" rating, to see any movie, and they were forbidden from stepping foot in the local movie theatre. The pastor, who had a much greater amount of freedom and

liberty, out of love for his new congregation, chose to not attend movies for the first two years of his ministry, until such time as he could set a foundation of biblical teaching and address the issue without destroying their faith.

Conclusion & Application

Let me leave you with one question to think about as we close: **(1) What are some gray-area issues for which people at our church have differences of opinion?** Think about cultural issues (books, movies, educational choices), theological issues (our decision to adopt women deacons, debates about the age of the earth, end times issues) and directional issues (decisions about location, bylaws, church budget). See if you perhaps could list at least 10 gray issues and pray over those for unity and love for us in 2011.

Paul's warning label to the church, again, is "Be very, very, very careful with your liberty." Be careful with how you handle gray issues where people have so many different opinions and different knowledge. The best way to put this into practice is to follow Paul's instruction manual for the church which is "love one another." Love is the controlling issues and love edifies, builds up the church.