

Phileo

By Pastor Greg
April 25, 2010

1 Corinthians 8

Bunkertown COB

Sermon begins with video clip from *Blind side*

“Christian”, the coach said. “We either take that seriously, or paint over it”.

He, of course, is insinuating that our confession of Christ as Lord and Master should be evident in the way we live our lives.

Last week I talked about how a Christian can indeed find grace and forgiveness once they repent of their sins; those times when they act like a person of this world rather than a Child of the Lord (a fit of carnality). And remember the promise Jesus made, that any sin can be forgiven if a person responds to the Holy Spirit’s conviction in their heart. This is Good News to a hurting world. But Paul reminds us that we need to seek forgiveness from someone else as well.

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul continues to answer questions these Christians had about how a Christian should act in this world. Much like today, the Corinthian believers wondered what a Christian was permitted to do. Today we wonder what kind of music a Christian should listen to, whether a Christian should dance or go to movies, or how a Christian should dress. In this chapter we see that they wondered what kind of meat they were permitted to eat. Both sides were turning to Paul hoping he would authenticate their beliefs on this rather grey area. However, his answer, I believe, surprised both groups. (Read **1 Corinthians 8**)

In this pagan culture people were taught that an evil spirit might invade a human being by attaching itself to food before it was eaten. However, if this food was sacrificed to a god, it would be cleansed. So a good citizen would take their meat to a local temple. One portion was burnt on the altar, another portion was given to the priest, and another was kept by the person. Thus, the remaining meat becomes holy.

To you and me this seems absurd (unless you’re thinking of the god of high cholesterol). It’s utter nonsense to think that some evil spirit might overtake you through a nice Black Diamond steak. But the non-Christian living in Corinth would have been taught this since they were a child. No mother, in her right mind, would

feed her child unholy meat. Only that which has been cleansed by the gods was good enough for her children. So she shopped in the market place for this meat that had been cleansed.

Along come Paul and Barnabas teaching that there is only one God. They present the Gospel message to both Jew and Gentile. They teach the truths of scripture. They teach about the power of God. They tell the old, old story of God's plan to redeem humanity through Christ the Son. And they believe. Their lives are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Their new found faith in Jesus, they all have in common, but their cultural background, they do not. The Christian Jew, who never had any attachment to pagan worship, thinks nothing of buying meat that had been offered to some god, like Aphrodite. She's not real anyway. But the Gentile Christian is appalled. No born again believer has any business associating with these pagan rituals. They shudder at the thought of even stepping back into that temple once again. Too clear are the memories; too painful the life spent in hopelessness.

Here's the situation facing this Corinthian Church. On the one hand you had believers who understood the truth. They were mature enough in their faith, and realized that walking into someone's home and eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol meant nothing. Meat is meat. But there were others who struggled with this, and they were concerned about the behavior of their fellow Christians.

I think Paul's answer surprised both groups. To the less mature, he gives the teaching that there is no other god except Jehovah. And you can almost hear the mature group of Christians urging him on. "You tell 'em Paul!". But what he does next I think surprised those on the other side of the issue; those who exercised their spiritual freedom. He says that they had a responsibility to not cause the less mature Christians to stumble or to doubt. He says they need to be thinking about how their actions might be perceived not just by the weak Christians in the church, but the community in general. They were to exercise some *Phileo*; some brotherly love.

This has been a problem for centuries, this struggle to break free of the past. I think part of the reason Paul spoke so often about grace is that for too long he lived without it. Any mention of a works based religion made him shudder. I think about these Gentile Christians living in Corinth who had spent years living in fear of the gods. When they learned that God had done for them what they could not do for themselves, they found a joy the world cannot know. So any time someone even mentioned these gods, or participated in an activity that even remotely resembled the worship of these gods, they were appalled. It made them shudder.

Paul's answer is for sensitivity. He addresses both sides with a call to be sensitive toward others, taking in to consideration the past from which they had been saved. He says that Christian needs to have at their heart not just a love for God but a love for their fellow Christian; a *Phileo* love, a genuine brotherly love (It's where the city of Philadelphia gets its name). A Christian needs to keep in mind how their actions not only affect God, but how they affect those who are watching. Sometimes it's a fellow Christian. Sometimes it's the pagan world. And when we seek forgiveness for those times of carnality (those moments when we act like the world) we not only should turn to God, but to the others we have hurt in the process as well.

This is a very serious part of being a Christian; this idea that we no longer live for ourselves, but for others as well. Oh sure, I can find forgiveness for my fits of anger, but what affect might they have on someone who is young in the faith? I might have the freedom to watch any movie I please, but how might it affect someone who has just been rescued from that life? I may be free to walk in to a bar, for the alcohol is not a temptation. But what of the new Christian who is still shaking from withdraw? How might my freedom affect their faith? This is the lesson Paul is trying to teach these Christian in Corinth. I think it's a lesson we all need to hear even today.

To be a mature believer is to be someone who takes their Christianity seriously. They are someone who works hard to keep those fits of carnality under control, and they are constantly aware that their attitudes or words might shake someone else's faith to the core.