

Title: All in the Family pt.1  
Text: 1 Corinthians 8.7-8  
Theme: Taking God at His Word  
Series: 1 Corinthians #32

“Dear God, give me the humility to listen to what I need to hear and the grace to accept what I need to embrace in order to become a deeper part of your family that you are making to look just like Jesus.”

We struggle with relationships because we struggle with transparency. We struggle with transparency because usually we do not want to admit what we really are, and we don't want you to know what we are. We like to cover it up. If you get too close to me, you will probably find out that I look better from a distance. Your perception of me would probably change if you lived with me. If I only want you to think well of me, then I will keep you at a distance. But is that church? No! Granted, many people see relationships in the church like the relationship between porcupines. Too close hurts everyone involved. But, what is wrong with that analogy? We are not porcupines!

The closer a person is to you the deeper that person can affect you. When you are crushed by your disappointment in someone who was close to you and let you down, you instinctively recoil. Relationships affect us. The deeper the relationship (is), the deeper the affect. But there is another edge to that sword. Deep relationships not only possess a deep capacity to hurt us, they also possess a deep capacity to help us. The truth is; we need help from each other. So, how can we live in a relationship with other people where we are giving and receiving help that is affecting people at the heart level? Some of you have no idea what that looks like.

I am aware that after talking with many of you through the years that some of you are from families that never talked about issues. In some cases families just did not talk and in other cases they talked about everything expect certain issues. Family life functioned in a quasi-reality called “pretend.” It is like the 3,000 pound gorilla sitting in the middle of the living room floor. Everyone knows it is there, but no one wants to talk about it. Welcome to the world of pretend.

Let's pretend that Uncle Bob does not get drunk every night, or that Shari is not pregnant, or that our cousin who we haven't seen in a few years is not in prison, or...whatever. In your attempt to put the pieces together of your family, you were squelched or stomped on. Some of you were deeply sinned against and you were not allowed to talk about it. You learned early on, that “we don't talk about things like that.” That may be how your family operated, but that is not how relationships are supposed to work.

Sometimes as I am preaching through a book I preach on subjects that are straight out of the Scriptures and some of you think that we should not talk about such things. Why not? Is it because church is supposed to function in a quasi-reality called pretend? NO! God wants truth and love; authenticity and compassion.

The church is, among other things – a family, a web of people who are eternally bound together because of our union in Christ. We are called to relationship. We are called to community. We are called to sing together, hear the Word together, worship together, and we are called to help each other grow at the heart level. We are called to speak the truth to each other in love and we are called to listen to each other. The way in which we relate to each other is where and when we find out how much of this theology stuff, we really get. Relationships reveal the weaknesses in my own life because in a relationship there are competing values. You want something and I want something. Sometimes what you want or what I want is wrong. Other times, what you want or what I want is not wrong, its just that we both want different things at the same time. For example:

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Solution</u>	<u>Problem</u>
Can't agree on what to watch on TV	Everyone gets own TV	No relation
Not ready for church together	Everyone gets own car	No relation
Can't agree on where to sit (church or home)	Everyone gets own place	No relation
Can't agree on what or where to eat	Everyone eats alone	No relation
Can't agree on what songs to sing in church	Everyone gets own church	No relation

We trade relationship for independence, thinking and believing that independence is what we really want. But God did not make you to be satisfied with independence, (that is the lie that your heart and Satan would have you believe), God made you in need of relationship. After God made Adam, He said, (I can do better), this is not good that you are alone. This was not a surprise to God. This was a statement of fact based upon His intentional design of human beings for relationship with Him and each other. Our affluence has enabled us to be incredibly independent. We squander so many resources because we want to travel by ourselves to work instead of carpooling or using mass transit. Owning and driving a car is our right, our independence. Everyone has their own bedroom, their own i-pod, their own TV, their own computer, their own space. You can visit, but don't mess with my space (dot com). Independence is our idol, our god, and we pursue it with the deluded notion that it will give us joy. If you are one of the few who pursues that independence at the expense of relationships, you find out that something else comes with it, loneliness.

We want something, which is fine as long as everyone else wants the same thing. But, what happens when someone else doesn't want that? That is where your theology shows. This text helps us understand some things that are critical to having God-honoring, healthy relationships in the church. This text is establishing a foundation or a structure upon which to build and in which to house relationships. We looked at the setting last week, so I will not belabor the point. But one of the problems that was eating up the church of Corinth (pardon the pun) was this issue of whether or not it was okay to eat meat that had been associated with idols. Eating meat was more of a privilege than a daily habit. It was considered to be a treat and could not be afforded by most. But, when meat was available in the market, it was often because it had been firsts offered to idols in the temples during times of pagan festivals. Other times meat was served in the actual temples themselves, which had banquet halls. Some of the believers in the church

thought that meat associated in any way with idols was wrong to eat. Others had no problem with it at all. In this passage...

The Weak – Those whose consciences are bothered by eating any meat that may be associated with idols.

The Strong – Those who are not bothered by eating meat associated with idols.

You can see the arguments for both sides. The weak could actually appear to be strong because they live according to rules that keep them away from any question of paganism. They may even look down their noses at the strong. The strong on the other hand, could argue that it would be wrong to make a rule to not eat the meat, because it would reinforce the immature thinking of the weak that idols could in some way contaminate the meat. Each side of the debate obviously wants Paul to say who is right and who is wrong. However, instead of issuing a rule on a debatable issue he goes after the hearts of the people and establishes some principles that are critical for our church to understand and to function with. This morning we are only looking at two principles. They are found in verses 7 and 8. The first is a word to the strong and the second is a word to the weak.

1. **I need to be aware of my fellow believers.** (7) (A word to the strong)

**A. Some of them view things differently. (7a)**

*“But not everyone knows this”*

What is the “this”? The “this” is the referring back to 4b, “We know that than an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.” Not everyone in the church has worked this out like others have. We are all theologians but we are not all consistent theologians. Most of us have some flaws in our systems of belief and we need the help of others in pointing that out. Paul is saying to be sensitive to the fact that there are believers who have not arrived at this conclusion yet. They are placing more importance on these idols than what they are worth. They are intimidated and influenced by them. They do not need to or should not think this way, but they do. They will probably figure it out at some point, but since our sanctification is a process, give them some time. Don’t expect everyone to be where you are, if you do, then you are not as far down the road as you thought you were. In fact, you need to be more worried about their growth than you need to worry about your desire to eat what you want.

I need to be aware that I am not the only person in the church and that there are other people who think differently about things because they may know more than me or they may know less than me. Either way, I need to be sensitive to them because if they know more than me, I need to let the Lord use them in my life to teach me, and if they know less than I do, I need to earn the right to help them learn by being a friend who cares about their well being. On matters like this, both sides often assume that they know more than the other.

Let's say that within our church there arises this big debate on whether or not men should be allowed to wear neck ties. Does the Bible say anything about neckties? The anti necktie group says that neckties were originally developed as a superstitious symbol in order to keep evil spirits away and since their origin was associated with a pagan and superstitious view of warding off demons, we ought to ban them from the church. That way no one would ever be tempted to think that neckties have any value whatsoever in dealing with supernatural powers. Nor would anyone ever associate us with pagan rituals.

On the other hand, there is a group of men who say, politely of course – that is absurd! No one actually believes that neckties have any power inherent within themselves. They are fashionable – pure and simple. They may be too expensive, choking, uncomfortable, origins of headaches and brain disorders, (sorry, I am inserting some personal opinion here). Now, let's say that one Sunday I decide to address this issue, and recommend that men stop wearing neckties because I just don't want to deal with it. Does that solve the problem? NO! Why not? Because not everyone was in church last Sunday. Not only that, but new people come every Sunday. Not only that, the next generation will grow up and absolutely have no idea where that rule came from. Not only that, some of the guys who were here were sleeping during the sermon and they still didn't hear. My point is, the church is not a static group that can be summarized with one label. The church is a web of relationships with some who are stronger than others in certain areas, but each part matters and each part is important to the whole. You have to keep that in mind. Not everyone knows what you know.

#### **B. Some of them come from different backgrounds. (7b)**

*“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.”*

You see the point – don't you? Because their background was so steeped in idolatry and it had such a profound grip upon their life (and probably continues to influence their family in many ways), be sensitive to the fact that their background plays a powerful part in their lives. You may not think like them, because you were not raised like them. You may not be tempted to associate only with those who agree with you on these debatable issues. But, not only does that not force you to grow, it also does something worse.

We present a distorted view of the body of Christ to the world, when we will only associate with people who think exactly like us on debatable issues or if we develop churches based upon a particular demographic or upon a matter of pure personal opinion, like neck ties, or musical styles.

#### **2. I need to submit my opinions to God's Word. (8) (A word to the weak)**

Being spiritual is not determined by what you eat or what you drink. This same issue is addressed in Romans 14. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking,

but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (v.17) And by the way, lest you think the drinking here is referring to bottled water, it is clear from Romans 14.21 that wine is in view. In the text we are studying Paul puts it like this:“Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” (v.8)

This is a bit frustrating for us. We like to have objective standards by which we can measure our spirituality. So, if we could come up with some diet or some list of foods that were forbidden then we could comply and pat ourselves or look aghast at those who didn't. It seems that every 5 years or so, there is another “spiritual” diet that comes along that goes back to the OT in an effort to prove that you shouldn't eat pork or squirrels and that vegetarians are just a little more spiritual than the Rally burger crowd. Listen, you are a steward of your body and finding a diet that works well for you is wise. Just do not make it a standard of being spiritual, because it isn't and do not let anyone sell you that. Brussels sprouts and peas may be linked to healthier toe nails but that does not determine spiritual growth. At Corinth, the weak needed to realize that they had established a policy based on a faulty view and they needed to learn to submit their opinions to the Word of God, not to what they were personally comfortable with.

I grew up in a home where we never drank any form of alcoholic beverages. As a child, I assumed that it was wrong and even told my neighbor one day that his dad was not going to heaven because he drank beer. I did my parents no favor on that one. Through the years, there have been two things that I have learned. 1) The Bible does not teach that it is wrong to drink wine. In fact, due to the regular habits of daily living, drinking wine is assumed. 2) The Bible does clearly condemn getting drunk. I established a position for myself and my family, that we do not drink alcoholic beverages. I used to think that if someone served wine at a wedding that it was in some way a compromise, a concession to the pressures of the world. But how could I reconcile that with the fact that Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding? I couldn't. I said to myself, I never want to be accused of abusing it, so I will stay away from it. But that line of reasoning doesn't hold up. Some people abuse food and do harm to themselves and others, that does not mean that I stay away from food. Some people drive like maniacs and do harm to themselves and others. But that does not mean that I don't drive. Through the years, I have had to submit my personal opinion and preference about this matter to the Word of God. I would be classified in the “weak” column on this. But, my conclusion is; it really is okay. In fact, I am learning to see that wine is a part of the good gifts of God that He gives to us to be enjoyed, if used properly. There is a part of me that can hardly believe that I just said that.

You know what? I still do not drink wine, but not because I am more spiritual. But because I know that I am not the only person who is affected by this. Like it or not, much of my life is a fishbowl. It's the way that it is. Since that is the case, I want you to see a life that is honestly seeking to learn and submit to what the Bible says about everything. The truth is, you are part of the stuff too. That is whole point of this chapter. The unity of the body is more important than what you eat or drink. In fact, the unity of the body is more important than anything other than truth. Without truth, we do not have true unity, just pretend.