

Title: All in the Family pt.2
Text: 1 Corinthians 8.9-13
Theme: Disputable matters in the body of Christ
Series: 1 Corinthians #33
Prop Stmt.

There has been some fascinating progress made in recent years in the medical community in the area of studying a person's blood. Blood tests are increasingly being developed and used to test for the presence of cancer, in some cases, long before the cancer would otherwise be detected. Not only can these tests detect the cancer, they can often detect the type of cancer, which would lead doctors to know where to look. For example: Melanoma can be detected by testing for the presence of tyrosinase RNA. Also, the presence of relatively high levels of DNA in a person's blood may detect lung cancer before other current tests can pick it up. And signs of damage to that DNA may help alert doctors to recurrence in patients who were earlier treated for the disease. Studies are being focused on the development of a blood test for a protein, GP2, which is made only in the pancreas and is released into the bloodstream when pancreatic disease is present. The PSA blood test eliminates many unnecessary biopsies for prostate cancer. In people with liver cancer, levels of alpha-fetoprotein in the blood typically are high. Currently, scientists have developed a blood test that can detect cancer with greater than 90% accuracy. The benefits of the test would be twofold. Not only would it offer a way to detect some cancers earlier, when they're still curable, the test would also allow some patients to avoid unnecessary biopsies and all the anxiety and risks that come with them.

These blood tests are designed to help you know what is really going on in your body. Even though it may look great on the outside, there could be problems on the inside that you need to know about.

There are different types of "blood tests" for believers as we seek to analyze our own spiritual health. These are very important since we tend to be satisfied with how we look on the outside. But, let me ask you a few:

How hungry are you for Christ?

- Do I long to be fed by His Word (reading, preaching)
- Do I engage in prayer? (relationship and intercession)

Do I trust God?

- Do I honor Him with my money?
- Do I follow the counsel of His Word?

Do I love His church?

One of the obvious assumptions of this text is that the people of the church are involved in relationships in the church. If you are fairly new to the church I want you to know up front what I am really after. I want you to understand and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. When you do that, you are connected to Christ and to His family in a relationship

that changes your eternal destiny and changes the way you think and live. Church is not a once-a-week service. The church is your family designed by God and empowered by His Spirit to help you grow as a follower of Christ. God uses the preaching of His Word from the leadership, and the ministry of the Word from others, to help you look more and more like Christ.

The church exists in part to help you change at the heart level. You exist to make Christ famous by helping others change at the heart level. God is not satisfied with anything less. He will not settle for anything less than your complete satisfaction and delight in Him, which will be seen as you live out your position in the body of Christ. Therefore, my responsibility as a pastor is to cooperate with what God is committed to doing. My agenda and message are determined by Him.

How well are you maturing in that area? This text is like a spiritual blood test. It reveals some of what is really going on in my life and in the church. There is a war in my heart over the issue of relationships in the church. Am I going to be a consumer, or am I going to be a helper? Do I simply view the church through the lens of “how can I use others?” or am I learning to see the church through the lens of “how can I be used for others”? A healthy church is going to be seen in a group of people who are more concerned for the spiritual well-being of others, than they are about the exercise of their own rights.

Review:

I need to be aware of my fellow believers. (a message for the strong)

I need to submit my opinions to the Word of God. (a message for the weak)

I have to be careful that I am not the occasion for another’s fall. (a strong message for the strong)

Clearly, God puts a heavy emphasis upon the strong to be responsible in their use of their knowledge. In our world, knowledge is used by people to advance themselves. In the body of Christ, knowledge is used to serve others. But, if I am going to serve others, I have to know them. I need to be aware as much as is possible, how my actions are affecting someone else. Because...

1. **Your freedom could trip someone else up.** – (9-11)

Verse 9 establishes the principle, verses 10 and 11 elaborate on it. Let’s look a little closer. “Be careful” (translated from a verb that means “to see” – Watch out!!) The problem is clear: The exercise of their freedom was the cause or the occasion for the stumbling of another believer. The fact that you have a right does not mean that you have to exercise that right. Let me say that again, because I need to hear it again, and I suspect that you may need to hear it again also. The fact that you have a right does not mean that you have to exercise that right. There are some things and some people who are more important than you exercising your rights.

I saw a magazine the other day with Dr. Phil's picture on the front since the magazine was featuring an article from him on, "How to stand up for yourself and get what you want from your marriage." Now that's the spirit – eh? Think of the husband who picks this up and reads it one day, while his wife comes across the same thing and reads it. They are both ready to go home and put it into practice armed to the teeth because Dr. Phil said so. "I'm not taking your junk anymore! I am standing up for myself and getting what I want from this relationship." The whole spirit of relationships within the body of Christ is one of being concerned for the well being of others, even if that means that I am inconvenienced. Most people do not like being inconvenienced. You may have a right, but the well being of a brother or sister is infinitely more important than you exercising that right.

If another believer stumbles because you exercised your freedom in a reckless manner, then that should really bother you. Clearly, the greatest example of this principle is Christ. He had all of the rights that are inherent with being God and the Creator, but He chose to set aside His exercise of those rights in order that He could live and die for us. As a result, God exalted Him, because God esteems those who humble themselves before Him and care for the weak and helpless. Those are the steps we are to walk in. The stronger you are, the more mature you are, the greater responsibility you have to be careful in how the exercise of your freedom will affect new or vulnerable believers.

a. **The strong can tempt the weak – 10**

Romans 14.19-23

The strong were convinced that idols were nothing but hunks of metal or wood and had no affect whatsoever on the food. They could eat food that had been associated with pagan rituals and it did not bother them at all. The weak were those who still believed that the idols had some sort of power or influence. They were bothered by this, and viewed food that had been associated with these pagan rituals as being contaminated in some way. The strong, because they wanted to eat the meat, apparently tried to convince the weak of the strong's position. These knowledgeable, self-assured-type Christians were putting pressure on the insecure, vulnerable, weaker Christians to get over their hang-ups and go ahead and eat the stuff. The end result was instead of the weak becoming stronger, the weak were being totally confused by what looked like to them to be mixed signals coming out of the leaders or established people in the church.

By the way, this is the only time that Paul mentions an idol's temple. This word, "emboldened" probably does not communicate as clearly as it should what is happening here. The "strong" were apparently on a campaign to build up the weak. Part of the strategy would be to get them to eat some meat to show them that if they do, they will not die. God will not judge them. But, if the weak are not convinced that this is right, then in your attempt to make them strong, you only make matters worse. Do not ask a person to do something that in their conscience they are not convinced is right.

I knew a girl who was visiting some missionaries in another country many time zones away. She was asked, by the missionaries, to speak to a group of adults. She was not comfortable doing that, because she was not convinced that she should speak to a group of men and women in a church setting like that. They sought to convince her that she was not usurping authority, she was not doing anything wrong, but she was not convinced. Instead of letting it go, the missionaries insisted that she do this. The ones who thought they were strong on this issue thought that the weak person needed to do this because it would be good for them. In reality it really, really bothered this girl.

b. The weak could be destroyed – 11

The text goes on to say, that instead of the person being built up, the person could end up being destroyed. What word does Paul use in v.11 that he has not used yet in this chapter? It is the word “brother.” Now Paul really is helping us see how critical this is. Your brother, even if he is “weak” is someone that Christ died for. Christ died for this person to rescue him, and you are trying to get him to do something that he is not convinced that he ought to be doing, and as a result, you are tearing him up. The destruction here is not speaking of eternity, but is speaking of spiritual development. This guy is having a crisis of conscience. This guy’s spiritual life is being shredded because he is being asked to do something that he believes is wrong. He finds himself surrounded by a belief that he is not convinced of yet, and you are trying to force him to do something that he is not prepared to do. Sure, you could say, “Oh I got over that a long time ago.” Maybe you did, but that does not mean that everyone did or will.

2. Your exercise of freedom could be a sin against another believer. (12)

The language that Paul uses here is very, very strong. The word that is translated “wound” has the idea of inflicting blows against another person. When you exercise your freedom and you think that others ought to do the same thing that you do, and you try to get them to do it and they are not ready, you can do incredible damage to that person.

a. Wounding a conscience is a serious offense against a brother.

What is a conscience? Your conscience is your internal sense of what is right and wrong. Granted, your conscience needs to be held captive and governed by the Word of God, but that is a lifelong process. My conscience is not perfect. There are things that bother me that should not bother me and things that do not bother me like they should bother me because my conscience is in the process of being informed by the Scriptures and it is in the process of being submitted to the Scriptures. If I sin against my conscience, even though what I am doing may not technically be a sin, to me it is a sin because I am rebelling against my internal standard. If I try to convince you to rebel against your conscience, and I am encouraging you to rebel.

When you sin against your conscience you are dividing yourself up. You are living according to a double standard. You are not being whole or complete. If you are trying

to get a person to go against what they believe is right, you are asking that person to rip himself in two. That is serious. - **Matthew 18.1-6**

b. Wounding a conscience is a sin against Christ.

Do you remember what Christ said to Paul when Christ hijacked his life on the road to Damascus? “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Paul asked him, who he was, and Jesus said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Whoa!! Saul, who was attacking the followers of Christ, was in reality attacking Christ. Christ obviously took exception to that. Paul is now pointing out that when we destroy another believer, we are attacking Christ.

It is passages like this that overwhelm me. The way that we treat people, especially the weak, is so very, very important. In fact...

3. **The life of my brother is more important than my exercise of freedom.** (13)

Paul is not saying that he will never eat meat again. He is saying that if he is ever in a situation where his actions may be the occasion for a brother to stumble, then Paul will consider the spiritual health of that brother to be infinitely more precious than his desire for some chicken or steak.

Christ did not live to please Himself. He gave up the exercise of his rights in order to die on a cross for you. Christ considered your soul and your eternal destiny more important than Him exercising His rights as God. Christ is the captain of our salvation and the head of the church. The head of the church set the tempo, now we are to keep the pace. What saved us, is what keeps us. We were born again. We live in Him. We walk the way He walked. Cornerstone, this is our mandate. We preach Christ by preaching the gospel. We also preach Christ by living in unity and by considering the well-being of my brother and sister to be more important than my own rights.

Over 50 years ago, on January 8, 1956, five young missionaries made news around the world. Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, and Roger Youderian were seeking to bring the gospel to the Auca Indians, what they received for their efforts was a brutal death at the hands of the people they were seeking to reach. These young missionaries had guns. They could have defended themselves, but they decided beforehand that if they were attacked, they would shoot their guns in the air instead of shooting their attackers. Many of you know that their sacrifice was not the end of the story. The gospel did reach this tribe and this formerly violent tribe was radically changed. These promising young men gave up their lives in order that others might live. As Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Setting aside your own rights for the sake of others is the standard established by the head of this church – Christ. It is the pace that we must keep. This heart beat was used by Christ to reach an entire people group, and must also characterize the way in which we treat each other.