

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1 Corinthians

“Love’s Limits on Liberty”

TRANSCRIPT

We are back in 1 Corinthians, and we’re in a new subject, a new problem in the church that we must look at this morning in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, and we’re going to look at the entire chapter, verses 1 through 13. So Paul begins, and I remind you that so much of this book is about different issues, different problems that the Corinthians were having, and they’d written him a letter, Paul. He’d heard some things. He addressed those from a word that he had gotten from some Corinthians who had come to him in Ephesus, and he addressed those at the beginning, and now he takes up issues that these individuals had brought him in a letter. And so this is the next question they have for him.

He writes in 1 Corinthians 8:1, “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

“Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, -” and of course, what he means by that is not there’s no such thing as a idol, but there’s no such thing as a reality in the idol. There’s no such thing as a god in the idol. They’re just blocks of stone or wood.

But he says, “we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 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.

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

“However not all men have this 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. 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. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our study in it together. Let’s bow in prayer. Father, we do thank You for your goodness to us and what a privilege it is to be here together this morning together with the saints fellowshiping in your Word, opening it up, reading it as we’ve done, and then for the opportunity to spend some time considering it and what we learn from all of this certainly, among other things, is that love is what’s important. Putting others ahead of ourselves, putting aside what we are legitimately allowed to do, our privileges, for the sake of others. Sometimes we have to do that. It’s not easy to do it, but it’s necessary if we love the brethren.

We’re not all at the same place in our understanding. We’re not all at the same place in our maturity. Some are more mature than others. Some still have much learning before them, and the way to help them is not to abuse our privileges when they’re not yet quite understanding of them, but to put them aside and humble ourselves and make sacrifices for those whom Paul would consider weak who are weak, who are immature in their understanding, but our goal should be to lift them up and help them to grow. And sometimes we have to make sacrifices to do that. And that’s one of Paul’s great lessons here and one of the great lessons of 1 Corinthians. Love for the brethren. So teach us that, Father.

Build us up in the faith this morning. Give us an understanding of his lesson to the Corinthians and to us, and through it all may we come to understand something more about Your grace and be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. So bless us spiritually. We pray that for ourselves in this hour, and we pray for in the hour to come, and the Sunday School hour. Give you thanks, Father, for the teachers you’ve raised up who study your Word in the week and preach it on the weekend. Take time to do that. It’s a sacrifice. It’s one that is a blessing to them. I know

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

they don’t complain about that, but it is work and it takes effort, and I pray you’d bless them and give them a sense of satisfaction from the study that they have made, and bless them in the next hour. And I pray the same for the women’s studies during the week. Bless them and bless those who attend. And Father, you have raised up many good teachers in this assembly and we give you thanks for that and pray you’d bless them, give them fulfillment from it, but give those who attend great blessing from it, as well. Build us up in the faith.

And bless us materially, Lord. We are physical people and You’ve instructed us, Your Son has, that when we pray, we’re to pray for our daily bread. We’re to pray for our material needs and we have many. And I pray that you’d bless us. Bless those who are struggling for one reason or another. I pray for those who are without work, that you’d give them employment. I pray for those who are sick that you would give them health. I pray for those who are grieving, and there are those in our congregation who have lost loved ones in the past few weeks. I pray that you would encourage them and comfort them. And Lord, we pray that you would bless us now. The apostle gives us very encouraging words, and I pray that you would instill them in our hearts and give us strength spiritually, build us up in this hour, and in the hour to come. And we pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

Some months ago I read an interview that the Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Cormac McCarthy gave to the Wall Street Journal. McCarthy is not a Christian. That’s clear from the interview, but he said something that was interesting. In fact, I think is insightful. Actually it was his friends who said it. He spends a lot of time with scientists at an institute in New Mexico. They are very smart people who have said to him, “It’s really more important to be good than to be smart.” McCarthy agreed with that. In fact, he offered that as his good rule for life. I wonder, though, how many people would really agree with that? Knowledge is power and people want that. They want power. Being smart elevates them. Being smart gives people great advantages. So I wonder how many people would agree with that statement that he made that his friends made.

Well, I don't know, but I know this. Paul would agree with the scientists. He says much the same thing. He puts it a little differently, but he says, “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.” That’s how he begins our passage in 1 Corinthians 8. He writes in a similar way later on in chapter 13, a chapter devoted to the subject of love. He calls it the greatest of the virtues. Now it’s never an either-or kind of thing. Paul doesn’t mean that knowledge is essential for growth.

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Never despise knowledge. Never look down upon knowledge. In fact, Hosea tells us that “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” In Ephesians 1:18, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would “be enlightened, so that they would understand their hope.” There’s no real blessing in this life if we have no hope, and so he realizes and recognizes the essential nature of understanding our hope, but to understand it our minds must be enlightened. We must understand. We must know. Paul knew the importance of knowledge. He taught it. But knowledge without love, knowledge without being good is empty and worthless. When knowledge, the knowledge of God, is effective, when it takes root in the mind, it changes lives.

Knowledge is power for the good. But it can be intoxicating. It was to the Corinthians. They became inflated with their own self-importance because of the knowledge they had. And as a result, they lost their concern for others. And this became an issue with eating food that had been dedicated to idols. That’s how Paul begins the chapter. “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols.” This was the next topic that the Corinthians had written about in their letter to him. Is it okay to eat food, or should they avoid it altogether? That’s what they wanted to know from the apostle. That’s an issue that’s completely foreign to us. It’s an alien problem to us, but in apostolic times, it was very common. They lived in a world of pagan temples and idols and society was tied into all of that. It was a common social practice to have meals in a temple for public or private celebration. So a person would cut himself off from a lot of society and from contact with many of his friends and loved ones if he avoided such places. And also the local markets often sold the best cuts from animals that had been sacrificed on a pagan altar and dedicated to a false god. Was it permissible to eat such meat? Was it permissible? Was it right or wrong to go to such places like Jupiter’s temple to dine and socialize? That was the issue that they asked Paul to settle.

There were two groups in the church that were at odds over this subject: those with knowledge who believed that they were free to eat, and those with scruples who believed that they were not. According to Paul, the people with scruples, the people with concerns about food and idols were the weaker of the two, the more immature of the two. They were not comfortable with having any association with idols and with temples, and with all of that. The knowledgeable saw no problem with it. They understood that idols were nothing and that they had freedom as Christians to eat what they wanted to eat, whatever they liked. They understood their freedom. But the weak were very troubled by such things. As a result, there was a debate there in the church in which the weak scolded the strong and the strong scoffed at the weak.

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Paul’s solution is to counsel the people with knowledge, the mature, to be guided in their conduct by love and not let their freedom, as he puts it, become a stumbling block to the weak. That’s really the lesson here. Sacrifice for others. Put the other person’s good ahead of our own privileges and pleasures. Support the weaker brothers and sisters. Now that’s Paul’s lesson, but before he gets to that, before he gives his answer, he prepares the strong. He prepares the knowledgeable for it by giving some perspective, by really deflating their inflated opinion of themselves.

He says in verse 1, “we know that we all have knowledge.” Knowledge is important. In fact, you can’t be a Christian without knowledge. So every saved person has some knowledge, has what we could call or what theologians speak of as “propositional truth,” truth communicated in the form of a statement, in the form of doctrine. Christians believe something. We don’t believe just anything. And that something is very specific about Christ being God and man, about Christ being the savior of the world. There’s no other savior but Him. And that knowledge is very specific about that salvation that He brings, how we have it, how we receive it. So Paul was reminding those who prided themselves on their knowledge that we all have that. We all have knowledge. We must. Faith has a specific well-defined object Otherwise, it’s false. Everyone has faith. I don’t want to get off on this too much, but everyone, regardless of who he or she is, whether he is an agnostic or an atheist, or a Muslim, or a Christian, he or she has faith, faith in something. That’s where we begin. We all begin with faith. But if our faith is in the wrong thing, if the object of our faith is false, then our faith is false. Having knowledge, then, is not unusual is what Paul is saying. What is important, he says, is love. It edifies. It builds up the other person. It builds up the church. It builds up the person who loves. We are actually sanctified, developed as we exercise our love towards others. So love is essential.

Secondly, in verse 2, he tells the knowledgeable, the mature, that whatever knowledge they have it’s only partial. We don’t yet know as we ought to know, so don’t be proud. Paul will even develop that later in chapter 13. We today, now, we see in a glass darkly. Even the apostle Paul could say as much knowledge as he had, “I see things rather vaguely. There is so much more to know. There is an infinite sea of knowledge. We’ll spend all eternity learning. So to the proud, he says, “You know some things, but what you know is only partial.” Again, what’s important is love. That, he says, in verse 3, is the evidence that God knows us. That’s the evidence that we have a relationship with God, that we are in His family, that He knows us. Verse 3, “but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.” And literally that is “he has been known by Him.”

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

In other words, those who love God have already been known by Him. They love because they are known by God. God always takes the initiative in establishing a relationship with us. He’s not waiting for us to establish a relationship with Him. The only reason we have a relationship with Him and the only reason we move toward Him and have faith in Him and walk with Him is because he’s first brought us into that relationship. And Paul’s statement here “have been known by Him,” in other words, those who love Him have already been brought into that relationship, is very similar to the statement that John makes in 1 John 4:19. “We love, because He first loved us.”

Being known by God is the same as being loved by Him or chosen by Him. And I’ll give you an example of what I mean by that and the proof of it. And that’s from the Old Testament in Amos 3:2, where God says of Israel, “You only have I known among all the families of the earth.” That’s how I believe the King James version translates it and that’s a very literal translation from the Hebrew text. “You only have I known among all the families of the earth.” Now, does that mean that God had no knowledge of Egypt or Assyria or the Germanic tribes of the far north, that he only knew about this one nation? No. Of course not. God knows everything. He’s omniscient. He knows all of the nations. He set them apart from the very beginning. What that means here is “you only have I chosen among all the families of the earth.” You only have I set my love upon of all the families of the earth. So when God knows a person, chooses a person and brings him or her into a personal relationship, that person knows God as a result of God knowing Him and as a result of God knowing Him, he or she loves God.

And all of this, Paul was gently putting the knowledgeable in their place. He was deflating their pride. We all have knowledge. Don’t think you’re something special because you have a little more knowledge than someone else. We all have knowledge. We must. But even the knowledge that we have is only partial. What is of first importance is love, but even that is God’s gift. You love because He knew you beforehand. He brought you into that relationship. He gave you that relationship and the love that accompanies it. And the faith that brought you into union with Him, it’s all a gift of Him. So there’s no place for pride, no place for a sense of entitlement or being better than others.

But if we do love God, then we understand the great sacrifice that He made for us, the great price that He paid for us and our gratitude to Him will be seen in our life. It will be seen specifically in our love for His people. Love is to be our guide, especially with the weak brothers and sisters. Now, with that established, the important of love, Paul is ready to apply that principle.

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

So he returns to their question in verse 4 and to the subject of meat that’s offered to idols. He says, “we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.” In other words, the men who had knowledge, this mature group within the church, and whose consciences were free to eat idol food could do that because they knew that idols were nothing. They were just blocks of stone and wood. There was no reality to them. And they’re right. There is no reality to idols. There’s no god in the idols. There’s only one God, Yahweh, Jehovah, the God of the Bible. That excludes all others. Monotheism eliminates the pagan pantheons. You can’t believe in one god and then all of the other gods. If there’s one god, then there’s one god. Paul recognized that people worshiped idols. He wasn’t denying that. And he recognized the gods that they believed in, that they had these beliefs, but he describes them as “so-called gods,” meaning they don’t really exist. There’s only one God who exists, and in verse 6, he defines Him in a Trinitarian way, as “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.”

F.F. Bruce wrote that Paul was Christianizing the Shema, and that’s the great confession of Judaism found in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” Meaning there is only one God, and it’s the God of the Bible. Paul calls Him the Father. But for anyone to be a father, he must have a son. That’s what makes a person a father: a son, a daughter, a child. And that’s Paul’s meaning here. He indicated God’s relationship to Christ in that way. Christ is God’s Son. Now Paul doesn’t explicitly state here in this verse that Christ is the Son of God, but that’s the implication of calling God “the Father,” and he does identify Christ as Lord, which is a word for deity. The Greek word that’s used here is a word that’s used of Yahweh or Jehovah. It’s a designation of deity. So that’s also indicated by His activity, by the Lord’s activity.

Paul writes since all things are by and through Him, that indicates that He’s God. All things are by and through Him, and that separates Him from everything. That separates Him from the creation. That separates Him from the angels and the stars, and the planets and people. It separates Him from the universe. All things are created by Him. Everything is through Him. He created it all. He’s not a creature. He is the creator. We live by Christ. We live through Christ. He gives us daily life. In fact, every breath we take is a gift from Him. He sustains us. That’s God’s work. So Christ with the Father is God. That’s the implication of all of this.

And Paul says it directly in other places. He says it, for example, in Titus 2:13, where he calls Christ, “our great God and Savior.” Everything is by Christ and everything is for the Father.

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

And that’s an important point. We don’t want to skip over that. Think about that for a moment. Everything is for the Father. Did you know that? Do you think like that? That’s your reason for living, my reason for living. God doesn’t exist for us. We exist for Him. Your life is to be lived for Him.

Now that’s an important point in Paul’s answer and he will apply it later in his lesson here. We are here for God, not ourselves. We’re not here to live for our pleasures. We’re not here to satisfy ourselves. We’re not here to simply reach our goals in life and gain some kind of fulfillment for ourselves. We’re here to glorify Him. Those in Corinth with knowledge, for all of their knowledge, they had neglected that truth. What they knew, though, was true. There is one God, the Triune God, idols are nothing. So they can go to a banquet. That’s permissible. They can go to a temple. They can go to the temple of Mars without offending their consciences. But it’s not that simple for others.

The weaker brothers aren’t able to apply their theology to life as skillfully as some of the more mature or knowledgeable can. So those who have knowledge need to make accommodations for those who don’t have knowledge, for those who have scruples, for those who have these concerns about idols and temples. That’s what Paul says in the rest of the chapter, beginning with verse 7. “However not all men have this knowledge.” They don’t have the same knowledge that you do. They’re not as advanced in their understanding as you are. “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.” Many of these people were young believers, the weak, those who lack knowledge. They were saved. They had been saved out of paganism. They had in the past in their earlier days they’d gone to the temple of Apollo or the temple of Jupiter. They had dined there. They had participated in worship and some of it could be pretty rough, bawdy kind of worship.

And all of that continued to have an influence on them, even after they were saved. It was a common practice in the world and maybe they still felt there was some power in the idols. People all around them believed that there was, and they had not yet reached that stage of maturity where they could see it fully and completely as they should. So they were still under something of the influence of this. It troubled them. And so if they were offered idol meat at dinner by a mature believer, they would violate their conscience by dining on it because in their minds, they were still, they would be committing idolatry. So for them, it would be sin. Not because they actually served an idol, not because they actually worshiped an idol, because idols are nothing. But because it would be going against their conscience by eating.



“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

What was needed was some perspective on the subject. And Paul gives that in verse 8 by telling the mature those with knowledge, that food is not important. It “will not commend us to God; - ” he says “ - we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.” In other words, food is a matter of indifference. It’s enjoyable and it has physical value. It’s important in that sense, but it has no spiritual value. It won’t nourish the soul. We don’t grow spiritually and feed our soul on physical material food. And we don’t earn praise from God by the food we eat. Food is a temporal material thing. So Paul is saying, “Don’t make an important issue out of it. It’s not that important.” Now that’s the counsel that he gives in verse 9, where he tells them not to let the use of their freedom “become a stumbling block to the weak.”

Then he gives an example of how that could happen when they are invited to dinner by some unbelieving friends. That would certainly have been a very common experience in Corinth. By the first century, many Greeks had given up belief in the gods and goddesses of mythology. They were following more philosophy than that kind of thing. But for social reasons, they still participated in the rights and dinners at local temples. I suppose you could make a comparison between people today who really give no thought to Christianity, give no thought to God, but every Easter they’ll show up at church. That’s because they believe in what is going to be preached in church on Sunday or what resurrection Sunday represents, but because it’s a tradition, and so they follow it, and I suppose it’s the same with many of the Jewish people next door. They show up on Yom Kippur, that’s about it. Well, in the first century there was this sort of acknowledgment of things. They would come to these ceremonies without any real conviction of the truth of them, a belief in them, and they would participate in the rights and the dinners at the local temple.

So Paul envisions an occasion in which a pagan might invite his friend to dinner at such a place or such an occasion. The meal would be associated with the idol at the shrine, not because people believed in it, but it was just associated with that. A Christian man might attend knowing that the deity meant nothing to him and it meant nothing to his pagan host. And that he could come there and was free to do so and free to enjoy himself. But Paul was asking him to stop and think for a minute and, in so doing, stop thinking only of himself and his rights and privileges, but consider other people. What will it do to a weaker brother who sees him at a pagan shrine participating in these things? Will it affect that weaker brother? Yes, it will. Paul says that his conscience will be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols, which is not good because in doing that he’ll violate his conscience. So Paul was asking is the enjoyment of your freedom

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

worth that? Is it worth setting an example that would lead a weaker brother to sin? Is your pleasure that important? And the answer to that is of course it’s not.

And in verse 11 and 12, Paul explains how serious it is to do that, to do something or set an example that will lead another person to violate his or her conscience. Verse 11, “For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.” And Paul uses a strong word here for the consequence to the young believer, “ruined” or “destroyed.” J.B. Phillips back in I think it was the ‘50s did a very nice paraphrase of the New Testament and I had a copy, used to read it back in the ‘60s. But in his paraphrase, he puts that this way. “Being as brings spiritual disaster to.” Now Paul doesn’t mean by “spiritual disaster” or “ruined” or “destroyed” that this young believer perishes eternally. He means he suffers a serious setback in his spiritual life, that if he saw this and he participated against his conscience that he would stunt himself, stunt his spiritual growth, so that he struggles to get out of that for years. It can have a long term effect upon him.

But what really shows the gravity and the callousness of this act by the mature believer if he does it in disregard of this younger, weaker brother is that he’s doing it, first of all, in disregard of a brother or a sister, which means the brother, as Paul puts it, for whom Christ died, “for whose sake Christ died.” Christ loves the weak as much as He loves the strong. His sacrifice was as much for the weak as it was for the strong. So should we not them be willing to make a relatively small sacrifice for the weak? Christ made a great sacrifice for the weak. We’re to be willing to make a small sacrifice for them. That, at least is the implication. And it brings us back to the earlier part of the chapter where Paul said that the person who loves God has been known or chosen by God. Those who have been brought into God’s family and have a personal relationship with Him love Him and live for Him. He said in verse 6, “we *exist* for Him;” not for ourselves.

But what does it mean to love Him and exist for Him? Well, it certainly means to love what He loves and do what pleases Him, and that is certainly loving the people that He loves, caring for them, caring for His people, caring for our brethren. It shouldn’t be hard to do. Think of all that Christ has done for us. This is where knowledge is important. This is where knowledge sanctifies. Think of what Christ has done for us. The great sacrifices that He made for us and all that He has gained for us. He has gained for us eternal life. We could never earn it ourselves. We could never achieve it in any way. It’s a free gift. We receive it through faith alone. He gained it all at the cross at the cost of His life. He suffered hell in our place so that we could have His life. Even when we were His enemies, He did all of that for us. Can’t we make a small sacrifice for those

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

who are weak, those who are loved by Him? We should. If we can’t, Paul says we not only sin against the weak, but it says in verse 12, we “sin against Christ.”

So Paul gives us his policy in verse 13. Here’s the answer to the question. “Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.” Paul agreed with Jesus, who taught in Mark 7:19 that all foods are clean. But he also knew that if someone considered something unclean or wrong and their conscience opposed it, it is sin for them. And he would do nothing to cause them harm. Paul was completely on the side of the weak, on the side of helping them to grow and become strong. It’s no different from loving parents, Paul’s attitude toward the weak, no different from loving parents who are wise enough not to allow their children to do tasks like mow the lawn or drive the car until they’re mature enough physically and mentally to do it. And likewise, Paul would not let his freedom or allow his example to become a spiritual burden on the weaker members of the body, that through his example they would then have this burden or sense this burden to do things that they’re not spiritually capable of bearing and doing. So he avoided that.

Now that’s the principle that he is teaching here in 1 Corinthians 8, to be good to one another, to put it very simply. But specifically you are to be good to the weak, to be good to the point of sacrificing for the weak. But, of course, the principle has different applications in different ages and areas. Today we don’t fret about pagan temples and idol food, though there are people in parts of the world who certainly do that. But not here. Generally, in our culture it’s a concern about things like drinking alcoholic beverages, or it’s a concern about forms of entertainment. In other places, those things are not a problem for Christians.

I’ll give you an example. In Holland, I have on good authority that it was common for Calvinist ministers to visit people in their homes and when they visited they would have a glass of jenever, which is basically Dutch gin. It’s the national drink. And they would have that and they’d even smoke. But they would never take the train or travel on Sunday. That was forbidden. So there are different issues in different places and at different times. But there are always issues and we need to be sensitive to them and we need to be willing to limit our freedom for the sake of another person’s spiritual welfare. That’s Paul’s instruction.

Now he’s not yielding to legalism or to a legalistic way of life, of not being led by the Spirit, but living by rules, many of which are cultural taboos and not even biblical. Paul opposes that in a number of places, notably in the book of Galatians. And I don’t think he is counseling the strong or knowledgeable to yield to the tyranny of the minority, to let those with little knowledge

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

lead the congregation. This is a different matter. This is about caring for the weak, those whose consciences have not matured enough to process their knowledge and it’s about nurturing them in their faith, helping them along. This is about the obligations of love. It’s the greatest of the virtues. Even the world recognizes that. Novelists and scientists, that love, kindness, being good is the greatest of the virtues. It’s more important than being smart. And the world can see when that love is being exercised or is a reality in our lives and the lives of Christians and when it’s lacking.

H.A. Ironside tells a story in his commentary that illustrates well, I think, what Paul’s concern was here. And it’s a story that Dr. Johnson has told more than once. Dr. Ironside was a popular Bible teacher in the first half of the 20th century and he tells of an incident that occurred when he was speaking at a conference in Detroit. He spoke all over the country, had an amazing speaking ministry. And he was in Detroit giving a conference, and a man was there who was a former Muslim from India. He owned a tea business and he had been brought to Christ. His name was Muhammed Ali. Not the one who stings like a bee, but the one who sold tea. Well, during a break in the meetings, the two were visiting, Dr. Ironside and Mr. Ali, and while they were visiting a girl came by passing out sandwiches. Dr. Ironside took one, but Mr. Ali asked what kinds of sandwiches she was offering. She said, “Fresh pork and and ham.” “Well, do you have any beef?” “No.” “Any lamb?” “No.” “Any fish?” “No.” “Thank you, my dear young lady,” he said. “I won’t take any.” Well, the girl was amused by that and she said, “Why, Mr. Ali, you surprise me. Are you so under the law that you cannot eat pork? Do you not know that a Christian is at liberty to eat any kind of meat?” “I am at liberty, my dear young lady, to eat,” he said, “but I am also at liberty to let it alone.”

Then he explained. You know that I was raised a strict Muslim. My old father is still a Muslim. Every three years, I go back to India to render an account of the business of which my father is really the head. And to have a visit with the folks at home. Always when I get home I know how I will be greeted. When the servant announces that I am there, he will say, “Muhammed, have those infidels taught you to eat the filthy hog meat yet?” “No, father,” I will say. “Pork has never passed my lips.” And then I can go in and have the opportunity to preach Christ to them. If I took one of your sandwiches, I could not preach Christ to my father then next time I go home. And Mr. Ironside said that the young lady understood. He was acting just the way Paul acted.

“ Love’ s Limits on Liberty” by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believer’ s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Love has obligations. Sometimes we have to limit our liberty for the sake of the weak and for the sake of the gospel. It’s not always easy to do that. But that’s what we’re to do. So may God enlighten the eyes of our heart that we understand these things, and may God give us a love and wisdom to make those kinds of sacrifice when they’re needed. Just as Christ paid the greatest sacrifice for us by dying in our place, He bore our sin and took our penalty and punishment so that we could have his life. Do you have that life? If not, you can receive it through faith alone. It’s just that simple. The moment you believe in Him, and again here’s where knowledge is important, because you must believe in Him as He’s revealed in Scripture. He is the eternal Son of God who became a man, lived a perfect life so that He could offer Himself up as a sacrifice for sinners, and everyone who believes in Him and trusts in His work in our place is saved forever at the moment of faith. We do nothing more because He’s done it all. We simply receive what He’s done for us on the cross. So if you’ve not done that, look to Him, trust in Him. And then live with true freedom, real liberty and love for the brother. May God help us to do that. Let’s pray.

Father, we do thank You for your goodness to us, and we’re reminded of our responsibilities that if anyone loves God he is known by Him , which is simply to say that we’ve been known by You from the beginning, that you’re the one that brought us into that relationship. You’ve known us and know us personally and as a result of that we love You. That’s the fruit of your grace and what you’ve produced in us. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. Love for you, love for the brethren. Help us to love the brethren. Help us to grow in our love for You and love for them, and living a life that’s pleasing to You and helpful to others. We pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.