



## June and July Sermon Series: Messy Church

### Sermon #3: Messy Convictions

#### Getting the Nod:

Start with Video: **No Tripping Allowed**

The Stanley Cup is over! (Go Blues!!!) Autumn is approaching and College football in Ohio begins in just 69 days. **Would you agree with me that one of the objectives of both hockey and football is to knock the other guy down? These are rough contact sports and knocking your opponent down is fundamental to the game.** In almost every sport in the world... **TRIPPING IS NOT ALLOWED.**

My focus this morning is this simple thought -- **IF TRIPPING IS NOT ALLOWED IN HOCKEY, SOCCER, BASKETBALL, FOOTBALL, and MOST OTHER SPORTS... games where people are either supposed to knock each other down... or gain some sort of athletic advantage... it CERTAINLY SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED IN CHURCH.**

Church is a place where people should be helping and holding one another other up. Some of you are thinking, "What in the world are you talking about, Pastor? I don't see anyone tripping people in church." Today we are not talking about physically tripping someone... morning our focus will be placed upon Spiritually Tripping another person. Or as Paul says - Being a Stumbling Block to another Christian.

**Transition: Just as tripping is a form of cheating and a penalty is assessed... being a stumbling block is a penalty against the Church family!**

#### Connecting Us:

**1 Corinthians is a letter written by Paul to a messy church.** How messy?

- Contentions were going on among the diversity of Jews and Greeks and Gentiles; those who were puffed up with knowledge verses those new in the faith. They were divided.
- You have a church member intimately involved with his dad's wife... incest.
- There were Christians in the church family who couldn't work out their problems so they were suing each other. Can you imagine the quenching of the Holy Spirit and the worship in such a volatile environment?
- Chaos and confusion in their worship services.
- Communion was a complete fiasco. Some just using it as another meal... no sacred connection to Christ and His death.
- Then there were those who felt their spiritual gift was greater than everybody else!
- Marriage was all messed up. Easy divorce... easy remarriage... when should it end... how should it be?
- They were just self-centered people seeking recreation more than the resurrection.
- **Man... this church family was a mess!!!**

**Transition: But so is being a church family today!!! We're a family... good, bad, and the ugly... some of us are weak. Some of us are strong. Some of us have been foolish. Some of us are passionate and determined!**

Let's be honest, families don't come in neat and tidy shrink-wrapped packages. We're not Norman Rockwell paintings of inviting fireplaces and beautifully adorned dinner tables.

Real families are filled with grit and grime, sunshine and storm, whining and times of wonder. Families are filled with stories of tragedy and triumph... fun and foolishness... grace and some gunk.

But it is in the context of family that we learn how to fight fair... share intentionally... work willingly side by side... and we learn how to survive in the rough times.

The family analogy is the best picture of what a healthy and vibrant church community is supposed to look like! This is God's design!!! **The scriptures are full of family dynamics:**

- Adam and Eve in the first marriage with poor judgment.
- Noah and his family riding out the first rainstorm.
- God chooses the family line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- Esau and Jacob and brotherly fights.

The good news for us is that each of these families were deeply flawed and messy! Violence... forgiveness... betrayal... trust... and loyalty all play out in family drama of God's Family. **The Bible is a Family Book!!! It's a story about God's Family... warts and all!!!**

**Transition: Listen, Church cannot be a place where the people feel like visitors!** Church is the kind of family where we know our faults and love each other anyway. The kind of family that will encourage and forgive no matter what. It's where we share privileges and responsibilities as we learn to live together in harmony. It's the place where we allow others to see our mess... but call us family anyway. **Talk about messes... talk about tripping... let's read chapter 8 in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians...**

#### God's Take on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians:

NKJV | 1 Co 8:1-13 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. 4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. 7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

#### The Context of This Chapter:

- **This chapter is the chapter on convictions. Not commands. Convictions. The only sin mentioned is the sin of tripping.**
- In this passage, we find Paul as he addresses a problem which was very specific to the Church at Corinth... **eating the meat that was available in the marketplace** that was sacrificed to idols. Some saw no big deal in eating it while some struggled with the idol attachment.
- **Paul's main point is we are to accept one another and not judge or look with contempt on those who differ with us over non-essential matters.**
- He was talking both to weaker and stronger believers. The weaker believers were former Greeks and Gentiles raised in the culture of Idolatry and the distaste for it.
- **Some of the weaker brothers were Jews** caught up with the Jewish law that was fulfilled in Christ and thus no longer in effect. **Some were convinced that the meat was of no concern because the was only one true God and the idols of Aphrodite and Apollo were just man-made pieces of wood and marble.**
- Paul turns mostly to the stronger believers. **He was concerned they would flaunt their LIBERTY IN CHRIST to the detriment of weaker believers, who may be influenced to violate their consciences.**
- **Paul tells the stronger believers that LOVE FOR THE BROTHERS SHOULD TRUMP THEIR USE OF LIBERTY.**
- **As Paul wrote in Romans 15:1... NLT | Ro 15:1 We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves.**
- **There are opposing convictions here... to eat... or not to eat... that is the question.** But we must never forget that there is an obligation from the stronger brothers toward the weaker brother.

One side says, "Don't eat anything connected to this idol!" while the other says, "Are you crazy? There is only one true God... and that idol is nothing!"

#### **We have other examples of conviction wars:**

- Affluence with pastoral cars.
- Issues of apparel and modesty.
- Convictions about what Church people should be. And church attendance.
- Convictions of entertainment. TV or no TV. Movies or no movies. Ratings. Dancing.
- Convictions of how marriage is managed.
- Racial tension on separation or diversity.
- Convictions on politics.

And so often we find church people following the M.O.T.H. Principle... It's My way or the highway. I have this issue figured out! If you don't believe like me... you're ignorant and a bad Christian!!!

**But Paul again addresses the ones who claim superior knowledge and says... 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.**

**This is where Paul is headed for a spiritual crescendo... 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.** Paul is about to give this Corinthian Church a masterpiece in the middle of their mess... 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthian 13... NKJV | 1 Co 13:1 **Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I**

could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

### **How to Tackle Messy Convictions at Church:**

#### **1. To the church: There is no tripping allowed.**

- 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.
- NLT | Php 2:4-5 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

#### **2. To the freedom fighters: There is no freedom flaunting.**

- 8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.
- NLT | Ro 5:8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

#### **3. To the weaker warriors: There is no acceptable long-term milk diet.**

- NLT | Heb 5:12 You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. 13 For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right.

#### **4. To Paul's Call on Conviction: There must be the marriage of knowledge and love.**

- 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

#### **5. To the Family of God: There is no shortcut to spiritual maturity.**

### **Transition:**

### **Our Response:**

#### **Moving from Messy to Healthy Convictions:**

- 1. Practice the lumber rule.** NLT | Mt 7:3 "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?"
- 2. Practice the mirror rule.** NLT | Php 3:10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death,
- 3. Practice the unmerited favor rule.** NLT | Eph 2:8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.
- 4. Practice the soil rule.** NLT | Mt 13:23 The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

### **Transition:** Let me close with this...

## Closing:

**Illustration of Private Convictions:** There was a Toronto food processing plant that produced lunch meat. Employees believed they had the best products on the market. Their products cost twenty cents more a pound than their competitors, yet they believed their lunch meat was better and was worth the increased cost.

Then one day in a sales meeting, the national sales manager brought out a tray of cold cuts. He said, "Here are five different brands, including our own, and I want you to see if you can pick our product out from the rest."

They all tasted them and picked the same one, because it truly the best. And do you know whose lunch meat it was? It was their major competitor, and their product was twenty cents a pound cheaper than theirs. Until then, they had a private conviction that their products were the best, but reality showed them otherwise.

When it comes to personal convictions that aren't clearly seen in scripture... Paul tells us that we are to love our brothers and sisters. To pray for them... and to encourage them to seek the scripture in all things. Paul says it is a sin to trip up your brother.

But one final question I leave you with... **How do we get this love in us?**

NLT | Ro 5:5 **And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.**

**And that my friends requires death to self... and alive in the Spirit.**