



- Introduction – Voting on Tuesday – Section on retaining judges
- How do you choose when you are not sure?
- This applies to a lot more than just Election Day.
- It applies to most every day, as we struggle with issues that are not completely spelled out in Scripture.
- **The Big Idea** – When in doubt about the gray areas of life, choose love.

- Read I Corinthians 8
- Pray

-- Context

Almost all of the meat that the Gentiles ate in Paul's day had been offered to a god of some kind in one way or another. Much of it had been offered as a sacrifice, and that meat would have been distributed in three parts: The first part would be burned to one a god of some persuasion. The second part would usually have been given to the various priests, and the third part would be taken home and eaten or sold in the marketplace. Therefore, if you happened to be at someone else's house, you could very easily find yourself eating meat that had been offered to an idol.

In addition, the Gentiles in Corinth had grown up believing that demons would try to get into people by attaching themselves to the meat they would eat and inhabit them as they consumed it. Thus, even meat that had not been sacrificed to an idol would often be dedicated in the name of a false god in an effort to prevent demons from attaching themselves to it. In any event, the point of all this is that almost every bit of meat that the Corinthians could buy, would have, in some way or another, have been dedicated to an idol.

Although this situation seems quite bizarre to us, it was a major problem for Gentile converts to Jesus Christ. Having been saved out of paganism and idolatry,

these new believers wanted to avoid any contact with that old life they used to live. Because they felt so strongly tempted to revert to it, their first inclination was to run away from it entirely—much like an alcoholic who comes to Christ today. Very often, the best way for an alcoholic to begin living a new life for the glory of God is to stay as far away from the drink as he can. The new life in Christ is so dramatically different from the old life that his most prudent path is the one that leads him farthest away from the old life and all of the temptations that come with it.

That description fits the Christians in Corinth quite well. You see, their old lives had been so thoroughly immersed in the idol worship of the age that they wanted to run from it entirely. Consequently, they abhorred the very thought of eating meat that had been offered to a false god. Yet, to more mature believers, and in particular to Jewish believers, this meat was no big deal. And this is the very situation gave rise to the question that Paul is addressing in our text for today, and it introduces us to a difficult question which is this: How are we, as God's people, supposed to respond to questionable matters like this? That is, how should we handle questions about our speech and behavior that fall in those dreaded "gray" areas of life?

You see, the Scriptures didn't forbid the Corinthians to eat meat that had been offered to an idol. However, it didn't tell them that they *should* eat it either. Therefore, the Corinthians were forced to work through the implications of this issue on their own, and decide for themselves whether it was right or wrong.

But who cares, right? I mean, this topic is completely irrelevant to us today, isn't it? Well, it is...and it isn't. Even though meat sacrificed to idols is of little or no concern to us today, there still remain many "gray areas" of life.

-- Examples

-- Smoking, dancing, makeup, etc.

-- The man who came to our church when I was young and railed against rock-and-roll music.

-- Playing songs backwards.

-- Preaching hellfire against musicians.

Almost every day, you and I encounter the gray areas of life. That is, we have to make decisions about issues that the Bible simply does not discuss in enough detail for us to respond with absolute certainty. And this reality is the point at which our daily lives intersect our text for today. You see, although we really

don't care much about meat sacrificed to idols, we are blessed to understand that there is a lot more going on in this passage than meat alone. In these verses, Paul provides us with at least three ways in which we can learn to choose love when faced with the gray areas of life, the first of which is this: When dealing with the gray areas of life...

1.) Choose kindness over knowledge. (v. 1-3)

-- Dutch Clip

-- v. 1a – *Now about food sacrificed to idols:*

-- Paul is responding to the Corinthians' letter.

-- v. 1b – *We know that we all possess knowledge.*

-- Knowledge is something that everyone thinks he has.

-- v. 1c – *Knowledge puffs up.*

-- I get the image of a puffer fish.

-- It is all show and no real substance.

-- v. 1d – *Love builds up.*

-- Knowledge may make us feel important, but it is love that actually builds up the church.

-- What we know is not as important as how we convey it.

-- v. 2 – *The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.*

-- Only be as certain about knowledge as you can prove it from God's Word.

-- Historical overreaches:

-- Galileo vs. Catholic church, Evolution

-- G.K. Chesterton – “The scientific facts, which were supposed to contradict the Faith in the nineteenth century, are nearly all of them regarded as unscientific fictions in the twentieth century.”

-- Never be adamant where the Bible is silent.

-- v. 3 – *But the man who loves God is known by God.*

-- Knowledge not rooted in love is knowledge not useful in life.

-- Love builds up, so when in doubt always choose kindness over knowledge!

-- Second, when dealing with the gray areas of life...

2.) Choose the majors over the minors. (v. 4-8)

Listen to this news report from Reuters in Los Angeles:

The train driver blamed for the worst U.S. train crash in 15 years was sending and receiving text messages seconds before his crowded commuter train skipped a red light and collided head-on with a freight train, federal investigators said on Wednesday.

The Metrolink commuter train plowed into a Union Pacific freight locomotive on September 12 in Chatsworth, California, killing 25 people and injuring 135 in the worst train accident since 1993... Cell phone records show Sanchez was sent a text message at 4:22:01 p.m.... The accident occurred at 4:22:23 p.m., according to Union Pacific train's onboard recorders. He received seven and sent five text messages between 3:00 p.m. and the time of the accident.

In the same way, harmful consequences are certain to find any of us who focus on the minor issues and yet miss the major concerns of uncertain situations. And we see the same effect in our text today. Some of the Corinthian believers were missing the big picture in favor of the minor details, and Paul pens these verses to help them choose understand what was really important.

-- This principle in our passage:

-- First, Paul draws their attention to the majors of the situation:

-- v. 4-5 – The fact that idols are nothing is vital.

-- v. 6a – The fact that there is one God, from whom all things come, is vital.

-- v. 6b – The fact that Jesus Christ is the only Lord, through whom all things come, is vital.

-- Then, Paul identifies the minors.

-- v. 7 - *But not everyone knows this.*

-- Many of the Corinthian believers were new to the faith and had not yet come to understand that idols are only personal realities, not actual realities.

-- v. 8 – *But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.*

-- Whether or not we eat the meat is decidedly not vital.

-- In other words: “Why all the fuss about food?”

-- Focus on things that draw you near to God, not things that draw you near to the world.

-- Colossians 3:1-2 – “*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*”

You see, what Paul is telling the Corinthians is that their primary focus should be on loving the God who created them and gave His only Son for them, not on what meat they are eating. In the same way, whenever we have any doubt about how to give God the greatest glory, let us always remember to focus on the majors and show grace about the minors. In other words, if we are going to bring glory to God through our response to the difficult questions of life, then we must choose the majors over the minors.

-- Third, when dealing with the gray areas of life...

3.) Choose love over liberty. (v. 9-13)

-- v. 9 – *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.*

-- “Freedom” – Like Paul, many of the Corinthian believers understood that eating the meat was not a sin.

-- “The weak” = Those whose consciences are functioning, but are not fully trained.

-- “Stumbling Block” – Explained in verses 10-12

-- v. 10

-- NLT – *“You see, this is what can happen: Weak Christians who think it is wrong to eat this food will see you eating in the temple of an idol. You know there's nothing wrong with it, but they will be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been dedicated to the idol.”*

-- The critical issue is not the eating itself, but the impact that eating the meat has on others with a weaker conscience.

-- v. 11 – *Destroyed by your knowledge*

-- Because the actions of the stronger believer emboldened to weaker believer to act against his conscience.

-- Principle – It is always wrong to sin against your conscience, even if your conscience is wrong.

-- v. 12

-- *Wound*

-- Sinning against the conscience leads to a seared conscience.

-- If we embolden a weaker believer to wound his conscience, we sin against both him and Christ.

-- Principle – Our liberty in Christ is limited by our love for others.

-- An illustration from the ministry of Paul and Timothy:

- Acts 16:1-3 – *[Paul] came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*
- Timothy had no need to be circumcised, and Paul knew it.
- Galatians 5:6 – *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*
- Timothy was circumcised so that his uncircumcision would not be a stumbling block to the Jews.
- When making decisions about the gray areas of life, God is most pleased with us when we are most concerned for others.
- When in doubt, then, let us choose love over liberty.

- Why have I left the book of Luke to preach this passage from 1 Corinthians?
- Because we have an illustration of this principle in our congregation today.
- Remind the congregation: Holly and Brad’s calling to the mission field.
- Explain why Holly desires to be re-baptized:
 - Some Southern Baptist congregations believe that the only acceptable baptism is one performed by a Southern Baptist minister.
 - Because she does not want to be a stumbling block to Southern Baptist givers around the world who will support her mission work through the Cooperative Program.
 - She is choosing kindness over knowledge, the majors over the minors, and love over liberty.