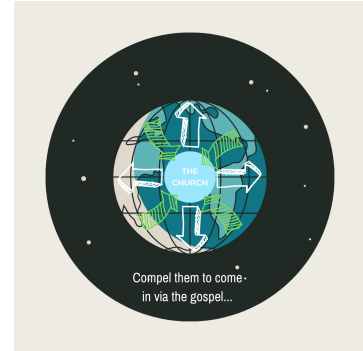
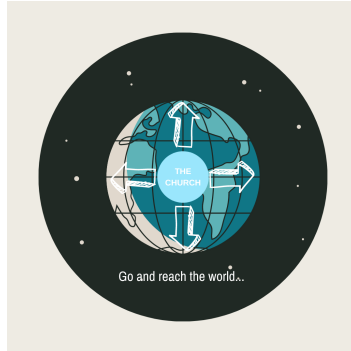


# ISSUES OF CONSCIENCE

## 1 Corinthians 8



**INTRODUCTION: I want to introduce you to the cycle of evangelism.**

1. **SLIDE 1** - As Christians we exist in a sub-culture (called the church) within a larger culture (called the world). We are called to live holy lives, separate and distinct from the culture around us.
2. **SLIDE 2** - Simultaneously, we are compelled by the Spirit and the Word to go into all the world and reach them for Christ.
3. **SLIDE 3** - Then we are to incorporate those we reach back into the subculture of the church and the cycle continues generation after generation.

Historically the Church has Err'd on one of two sides.

- **Sectarianism** - come out of the world.
- **Syncretism** - be OF the world.

Jesus says, I want you to be **IN** the world, yet not **OF** the world.

The problem is, the culture of the WORLD is perpetually changing. As new options are added questions are constantly raised and various positions are formed.

- **SECTARIAN** Christians - tends to answer the questions from the **LEGALISTIC** perspective.
- **SYNCRETISTIC** Christians - tend to answer the questions from a **LICENSE** perspective.

**Legalism** – focuses on NOT OF THE WORLD puts everything in a black or white box, even if scripture doesn't do so. The legalist also expects that others should make the same decisions about issues as he or she makes. The rule of thumb for the legalist is, ***"If it is fun it can't be good"***.

**License** – focus in IN THE WORLD - it has no gauge, no rules, no restraint be runs head long into whatever, whenever without asking any questions for the sake of conscience.

## **BOTH CAMPS CAUSE THE CYCLE OF DISCIPLESHIP TO BREAK DOWN.**

**Consider how each camps address issues like:**

**MODESTY** - Scripture calls us to be modest, but there are various cultural norms that effect the definition to some degree. If we were in Tehran, most ladies here today would be considered immodest, but for our culture, this is perfectly acceptable.

Even within a culture, modestly flexes from place to place. What is perfectly acceptable and impeccably modest on the beach by sliders, would be considered highly inappropriate in a corporate worship environment. You see?

So how do you know? Well common sense helps... But the legalist and license camps both have different approaches.

The legalist sharply defines modesty.

- The Church I grew up in, women were expected to wear dresses to church. If they wore pants we assumed they were lost.
- I attended a church once that had a rule that women could not wear sleeveless shirts, because they reveal a woman's armpits". Now friend, if an armpit makes you stumble, you have other problems.

I have also see situations where Modesty doesn't seem be even be a consideration. The car line at the high school for example. :)

**ISSUES of STYLE** - What issues pertaining to certain sub-cultures?

- Stylistic choices that are more Emo or Goth, tattoos, body piercing
- What if someone dressed like a biker before they were converted and continue to dress like a biker after their are converted?
- Are certain musical styles that are synonymous with sin? Show tunes for example.
- In our own church there are adults who feel the freedom to drink alcohol, and there are those who don't feel that freedom.

## **ENTERTAINMENT**

- Should a Christian play a game that simulates him going on a killing spree pumping other humans full of bullets till they drop dead?
- Should we play games where we simulate the grand theft of vehicles?
- What are the rules there? Is there a verse that says, "Thou shalt not partake in virtual reality murder".
- Should a Christian woman read 50 shades of Grey, or watch the movie?

## **MARKETPLACE DECISIONS**

- I did a quick search for nationally recognized ANTI-CHRISTIAN businesses and 138 were listed.
- ANTI CHRISTIAN CELEBRITIES - 46 were listed
- Should a Christian shop at a store that finances the abortions of their employees?
- What if they are championing the LGBTQ+ agenda?

Don't you wish it were just as simple as, ***“Thou shalt not shop there....” Or “Wear this not that...”?***

Well, its not... and we do damage to Scripture and people if we try to make it that simple.

God gives us principles that making such decisions... Most of them are found in our text this morning. But you have to learn to recognize the principle behind the precept.

**CONTEXT:** Chapter 8 is all about MEAT SACRIFICED TO IDOLS. That issue was dividing the corinthian church, and I'll explain why in a moment. If you simply read it at face value, the text will seem irrelevant. I've never in all my life eaten any meat sacrificed to idols, you probably haven't either.

But if you read the text with understanding, you will observe that the issues we have mentioned are simply 21st century equivalents to this issue in the 1st century.

*Look at it with me...*

**TEXT: 1 Corinthians 8:1–3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning food offered to idols:

We are not familiar with this form of Idol worship so let me explain it to you.

- Each Family would **bring a sacrifice** to the idol's temple, at Corinth it was likely the temple of Aphrodite. The family would give the sacrifice to the priest. This was basically their tithe. It was returning a portion of their wealth to the (little g) god in order to seek his blessing.
- The priest would **slaughter the animal**. Typically, he would cut the throat, then cut off the legs usually from the knee down. He would split it open and pull out all the entrails and he would burn them on the alter. As he burned them, that smoke would go up supposedly rising into the nostrils of whatever idol god they were worshiping.
- There was a **carcass left**. The priest would then cut off a little section for himself that's how he made his living. Then he would take the rest of the carcass and give it back to the person who brought it.

**Now the person who brought the sacrifice could do several things with the meat they received back.**

- 1. He could just cook it there on the fire and have a big celebration right there in the pagan temple and invite people to come eat with him.
- 2. He could take it home and cook it and eat it at home and invite folks to come.
- 3. He could take it and hang it in the market place and sell it. The more expensive meat was this meat that had been blessed by the idol.

The Corinthian Church was split on how to respond.

- Some thought - well the idol is nothing, just a block of wood, so praise the lord and pass the lamb chops.
- Others thought - but this is basically an act of communion. You see, when they worshipped at the Idol Temple, eating that meat meant something. It was like communion.

**NOTICE HOW PAUL LEADS THEM...**

## 1. Love Deeply

1b. we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup> If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

Both sides believed that they were right because, well, they were just a little smarter than the other side. They knew the Bible better, and truth was on their side.

Paul, who put a very high premium on knowledge and doctrine... says, “without love, knowledge is actually quite dangerous”.

- **Social media rewards knowledge**, if you have a unique insight or perspective, the algorithm will allow you to be seen by 10,000 viewers. But it has no way to measure love. If you delete a post because it would be damaging to a brother or sister in Christ, out of love... there is no reward for that... in fact your social capital will suffer a bit.

The thing about knowledge is that it makes a person an **elitist**. Divorced from love a person who knows a great deal about **ANYTHING** suddenly thinks he is an expert on **EVERYTHING**. I think this is a major tendency when related to biblical knowledge. Some of the most theological accurate people I have met have been some of the most arrogant.

Paul attacks that tendency by saying, “all of us possess knowledge”. You may have knowledge I don’t have, I may have knowledge you don’t have - but we all have knowledge. It’s a relatively cheap commodity.

**Someone has defined knowledge as** “*the process of passing from the unconscious state of ignorance to the conscious state of ignorance.*”

**Following a TED talk one Harvard Professor said,** *I fully realized that I have not succeeded in answering all of your questions. Indeed I feel that I have not answered any of them completely. The answers I have found only serve to raise a whole new set of questions which only lead to more problems, some of which we weren’t even aware were problems. To sum it up, I believe in some ways we are as confused as ever, but I believe we are confused on a higher level and about more important things.*

I hope you don't leave church feeling that way!

**True understanding produces true humility** because the mind is open to the expanse of reality that can never be understood this side of eternity. So whatever knowledge you have - ***baptize your knowledge in love.***

- When someone questions your freedom, ask yourself, can you look at that person and honestly say, "I love this person?"
- When someone criticizes your decisions, can you honestly say, "I love this person"?

**In Romans 9:1–3 (ESV) Paul is writing about his LOVE for the Jewish people.**

<sup>1</sup> I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> ***For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.***

WOW - When I first read that passage I thought to myself, "Ah that's hyperbole, he's exaggerating for the sake of effect....I get it". But then I reread the first two verse again. <sup>1</sup> I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—

Paul deeply loved these people. By the way - his biggest problems came from among the Jews. They followed him from city to city in order to destroy his ministry.

*So if you are going to make the right decisions in GREY AREAS, you must first LOVE DEEPLY.*

## 2. Think Deeply

### A. Think about what YOU know

*That's what Paul does in verse 4 -*

<sup>4</sup> Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." <sup>5</sup> For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"— <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Now when you face a grey area - you have to wrestle with **WHAT IS TRUE?** What does the Bible say. This is not always as easy as it sounds. A verse out of context can be a pretext to any belief under the sun. So within the proper context, interpreted within its particular linguistic genera, does God allow, promote or forbid the action in question?

**ILLUSTRATION:** I once had a parent come to me because their 13 year old wanted a tattoo. The dad said, "There's got to be a verse on this... so they dug around and found the verse that forbids, "marking for the dead" in the Old Testament. So they came to me with their kid and said, "Pastor I want you to tell my child that she CANNOT get a tattoo because the bible says so. I said, "Do you want me to really tell them the truth about what the bible says? The Parent said absolutely. Well, I said, this particular verse applied to modern day tattoos is taken out of context. As a matter of fact I haven't seen anything in scripture forbidding tattoos. The kid was glowing. However, I said, the bible is explicitly clear that a child should obey their parents in the Lord. And if your Dad says no tattoo, then for you it would be a sin against Dad and against God.

You see - don't just proof text, interpret, study, process and digest the truth and speak the truth in love.

## B. Think about what THEY know

7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

You must consider the fact that every believer is at some different place when it comes to their understanding of God's Word.

- Evaluate, consider who is before you. It is a mature Christian who ought to know better? You see, ***some people are professional weaker brothers***. This is like the Pharisees of Jesus day. Other people genuinely are trying to figure it out. Ask the question - what do ***they*** know?

## C. Think about what DIFFERENCE IT MAKES

- **What difference does it make to God?**

8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

Would moving forward with your decision bring you closer to God or is does it really not make any difference? Can you worship God freely with the decision you made? Is your prayer life inhibited?

- **What difference does it make to them?**

9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. 12 Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Would moving forward with your decision cause this person to stumble?

CONSCIENCE IS VERY IMPORTANT: It can be weakened, it can be defiled, it can be seared.

So, we have the Bible, we have the Holy Spirit, and we have a conscience. It is never a good idea to violate your conscience.

Now, we ought to recognize that our consciences are works in progress. It is possible to feel conviction for something that is not at all sinful.

If a new believer with a very sensitive conscious gets in the habit of violating his or her conscience... it will typically reinforce the inaccurate beliefs they hold.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I remember hearing John MacArthur describe how his father who was an iterate evangelist was traveling and preaching in a particular church. The host Pastor asked what he would like to do after the service. Mr. MacArthur said, "I like to go play a little golf, just to unwind and relax". Now the host Pastor believed that entertainment on Sunday's was a sin, so he didn't golf, he didn't go to the movies, anything. Now the host Pastor was wrong... but against his conscience he went with Mr. MacArthur. On about the 4th hole - the Host Pastor was hit by a stray golf ball. NOW - how do you think he interpreted that incident? 1. I knew it! His incorrect conviction was deepened. 2. God is judging me - so he assumed God caused that golf ball to hit him. 3. It took him MUCH longer to get freedom in that area.

*Think Deeply, Love Deeply...*

### **3. Decide whether to Receive, Redeem, or Reject**

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

**Later in chapter 10 Paul illustrates...1 Corinthians 10:27–33 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>28</sup> But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—

Remember - we exist as a culture within a culture, a city within a city. As you decide how to relate to the larger cultural context there are basically three things you can do:

1. Some things You can **receive** - Some things are not moral, baseball for example you can just receive. You don't have to make it Christian baseball. Just enjoy it.

2. Some things You can **redeem** - Music created in the larger culture can be redeemed. As a matter of fact most of the great hymns of the faith were, "borrowed" from saloon tunes.
3. Same things You **MUST reject** - Pornography for example cannot be redeemed. You can't make it Christian porn.

**Martin Luther** *"A Christian man is the most free of all, and subject to none, a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one."*