Love For Others Guides Our Actions (true-story)

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Myself and three other pastors were at an airport leaving a conference. We were going to a restaurant together while waiting for our flights. One guy in our group walked up to me, placed his hand on my shoulder, and asked: "Would you mind if I drink a beer at the restaurant while we wait for our flights?"

That interaction with my pastor friend was a good reminder that our love for others guides our actions in front of them. His love for me guided whether or not he should drink a beer in front of me. (I'm confident that if it would have been an issue for me to watch him drink, he would have decided not to drink a beer.)

The believers in Corinth faced a similar situation but theirs involved meat, not beer. The Greeks and Romans would burn the less desirable parts of animals as religious sacrifices to their gods, but keep the best parts of the animals and eat those. Often those desirable parts of the animals were sold in the marketplace to normal everyday people like the Christians.

This caused the Corinthians to have to consider two questions. Was it okay to eat this meat? Was it okay to eat this meat in front of other Christians that believed it was wrong to eat the meat?

Paul describes the correct action for them to take in 1 Corinthians 8:8-13, *"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"* (NASB).

Paul tells them to eat what they want, but only eat it if it does not cause harm to others. Their freedom did not supersede their obligation to be considerate of others. If eating this meat in front of others offends them, then they should not eat it.

And this impacts us today. If someone we know has struggled with drinking alcohol in the past, we should abstain from drinking alcohol in front of them. If our spouse is on a diet to lose weight, we should not eat the fatty foods in front of them. If we know someone is trying to quit smoking, we should not smoke in front of him or her.

Paul's message to the Corinthians is the same message to Christians: Our love for others should guide our actions in front of them.

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