

## INTRODUCTION

I drove with several guys from the church to New Mexico this winter to ski. We stopped at a café one afternoon and sat down to enjoy our sandwiches and Sprites. A guy was sitting at the picnic table outside next to us, and he wore a Promise Keepers hat. We started talking to him about Promise Keepers, and he was very fired up supporting this organization. The unusual thing about the situation is that he was holding a can of Coors Light while he was talking about Promise Keepers.

A lot of people would have been really offended by that. But we weren't really offended. I personally have been in a country where Christians are more liberal than we are. For instance, in Europe many Christians drink, and beer is just part of their diet. I've also been in nations where they're much stricter than we are. So when we look at a situation like that man, is that right or wrong? Was it right for him to do that, where it would have been wrong for me to do it?

First Corinthians 8:1-13 says:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. <sup>2</sup> Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But whoever loves God is known by God. <sup>4</sup> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. <sup>7</sup> But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. <sup>9</sup> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup> So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. <sup>12</sup> When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

Paul is addressing a problem that they had at the church at Corinth about eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. Now we have absolutely nothing that compares to it in our historical setting, but we can learn some valuable principles from it. Remember, Corinth had asked him questions about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. And apparently they had also asked him some questions about this topic.

## **I. THE PROBLEM**

The problem in Corinth was about a first-century practice of sacrificing to idols. There was a very formal ceremony that could either be private or public. Usually it was a public ceremony where a person would take some meat to a pagan temple as a sacrifice to an idol. The priest would cut off a portion of that meat to keep for themselves. That's how the priests made their living and got their food. What would the person do with the rest of the meat? He would take it home and serve it to his family or to his friends. Sometimes they would even eat it right there in the temple. That was kind of like their restaurants in the first century. Without refrigeration and without the ability to really preserve meat, they would have to eat it pretty soon. And so they invited all their friends for a wonderful barbecue. So the ones who became Christians came out of that background and wondered if that practice was wrong. Was it wrong for them to eat the meat that had been sacrificed to an idol?

There were two kinds of people in the church. There was one group of Christians whom Paul is addressing who had no problem with eating it. They knew the idol was not a real god. They would say, "There's only one God. There's nothing wrong with that meat; just go ahead and eat it." But there were some weaker Christians who really thought that maybe those idols were somewhat real and so by eating meat that had been sacrificed to those idols, they were committing idolatry. And so Paul says this, even though you might have the freedom to eat the meat with a clear conscience, if you're going to cause a weaker Christian to stumble and wound their conscience, the best thing is not to eat the meat either.

The society of this time really thought demons lived in meat, because when you take a piece of meat and you just leave it out, of course it's going to eventually "come alive" literally with maggots. So, they thought, "Aha! That's what was in that meat!" They didn't understand how flies landed and laid eggs, and that's what caused the worms and maggots. They thought maggots were already in there, and those were demons. And so they thought that by eating meat, a demon could inhabit them and possess them. By offering this meat as a sacrifice to some god, some idol, they were being protected from the demonic influence. The principle for us today is this:

### **1. How much should another's convictions control my actions?**

Many of us grew up in Baptist homes where, for instance, dancing was wrong. Many of us grew up in homes where they said card playing was a sin and so you never played cards. Some also said going to movies was a sin. Now, are they sins? Or are they not?

Some people have come to the point of maturity, or you might say the point of freedom, and they don't think there's anything wrong with playing cards. They'll say, "I think gambling and playing poker could be wrong, but not just playing a game of 42 with friends." That's how playing dominos got started. Baptist didn't play cards, so they just played with dominos instead!

It may be okay for you to do these things, but doing it in front of a weak Christian causes them to stumble. So the principle here is you better think twice before you do it. What about dancing? Can Baptists dance? Some can. And some can't! I've seen it! Some of you come to the point where you say, "I can't find anything in the Bible that says thou shalt not dance. And so it's okay for me to do it." Well, if there's someone who is a weak Christian who's offended by that, you better think twice before you do it. How much we let another person's convictions control our actions is the problem Paul is addressing.

## **II. THE PRINCIPLE**

### **1. Knowledge without love produces arrogance**

Verse 1 says knowledge puffs up. The problem goes deeper than some weak brother being offended by what we do. The problem is this. Some Christian who thinks they are so mature says, "I can do all these things. I'm set free." You're puffed up with knowledge and you become so arrogant. You become so spiritually big-headed that you look down your nose at that weaker brother. Paul says in verse 9 to be careful that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. Some people think they're free, but they're just loose. And there's a difference. Love is always thinking of the other person. First, it's always asking the question, how is my action going to affect somebody else? I don't think it's sin, but how is my action going to affect somebody else?

### **2. Love with knowledge produces accommodation**

There is a principle in the new Testament called Christian accommodation. This definition is not out of the Bible; it's strictly out of the dictionary: "to make adjustments for the sake of another person's comfort." In other words, you're going to change your behavior so that you can keep someone else comfortable. When you stay in a hotel, somebody asks how are your accommodations? That means, are you comfortable? Are you pleased with the setup? And the principle of accommodation always asks: Am I making the other person comfortable or uncomfortable? You say you can play cards and it won't bother you, but is it hurting somebody else? You can dance and do it with a clear conscience, but is it making another Christian uncomfortable?

I learned this kind of early in my life, and I don't tell this story to brag about myself because looking back I might've had the wrong motives. But when I grew up in high school, I was already called to preach by my senior year of high school. They already call me “preacher rev.” But a lot of them did it in derision and ridicule. In my little hometown in South Alabama, it was pretty much a widely held belief that real committed Christians don't dance. I'd already been to dances ever since I'd been a teenager. I'd even played in a rock group! And so it wasn't like I hadn't done it before, but it was time for my senior prom. And I really was trying to live for Jesus at that time, so I had asked myself am I going to go to this prom? Am I going to dance? Well, I didn't think there was anything wrong with dancing. I could have gone to the dance that night and danced all night, like the song says. But I thought about the principle of accommodation. I didn't even know the word then, but I thought, “I am trying to live for Jesus Christ among the whole student body. And if I dance, is it going to offend anybody who's a Christian?” And I determined it would.

There was this senior girl who was a good friend of mine. We never were romantically interested in each other. We were just friends. She had been in an automobile accident, had a concussion, and doctors told her she couldn't dance. And so it just worked out great. I invited her, and the two of us went to the prom that night. We didn't dance, and we weren't smug about it. We weren't trying to show off, but I decided that night of my senior prom that I just wasn't going to dance. I determined that it would offend someone else if I did. That is the principle of accommodation.

Now, have you ever heard of that principle before? It means that you put the other person's feelings in front of yours, and that's what love is.

### **III. THE PRACTICE**

How are you going to put this into practice? How are you going to practice accommodation? Well, there are a number of things in life where we are faced with a moral choice. Is this right? Or is this wrong? There's a lot of things that the Bible doesn't address specifically. The Bible doesn't say, “Thou shalt not have one drink of wine.” It preaches against drunkenness without a doubt. The Bible doesn't say, “Thou shalt not dance” specifically. The Bible doesn't say, “Thou shall not play cards.” There's a whole lot of other things in life that the Bible doesn't specifically address. And so I want to give you a fivefold test that you can follow and you can apply to any moral decision. And if this five-fold test is passed, it's okay for you to do this, I believe.

#### **1. Edification test**

It says in 1 Corinthians 6:12 that everything ought to be done for edification. That means “to build up.” Ask yourself, “I'm about to do. Is it going to build me up as a

Christian? Is it going to cause me to grow as a Christian? Or is it going to cause me to backslide as a Christian?"

## **2. Example test**

First Timothy chapter four, verse 12, says, "Let no person despise your youth but be an example to the believers in word and faith in purity and in conduct." We ought to be an example to other believers. "Is what I'm about to do going to set a good example for other Christians?" The apostle Paul said to be "imitators of me." When you're faced with a moral choice, ask yourself, "If I do this, could I tell some young and immature Christian to do what I do? To follow my example?"

## **3. Evangelism test**

Ask, "Will this draw lost people to Christ? Matthew 12:30 says everything we do either is drawing people to Jesus or pushing them away. The first test, the edification test, asks, "How's it going to affect me?" Question number two, the example test, asks, "How's it going to affect other Christians?" But test number three asks the question, "How is it going to affect lost people?" Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with me, he is against me. And he who does not gather with me scatters." There's no neutral ground. Every deed, every word you say, is either going to have a positive impact on drawing people to me, Jesus said, or scattering people away from me. And so just ask yourself, "Is what I'm about to do going to push people away or draw them to Jesus?"

## **4. Exaltation test**

Ask, "Will this bring glory to God?" First Corinthians 10:31 says, "Whatever you do, whether you eat or you drink, do everything to the glory of God." Paul mentions ordinary activities. Some may think that the only way you bring glory to God is to sing, teach a Sunday school class, or to preach a sermon. Paul says how you eat and drink should be done in a way that brings glory to God. Ask, "Can I ask God to bless what I'm about to do?" Can you bow your head before you do this and say, "God bless what I'm about to do." And if you can do it and God can truly bless it and it can bring glory to God, then it can be something that's permissible.

## **5. Embarrassment test**

To me, this is one of the best ones. Ask, "Would I be ashamed to be found doing it when Jesus returns?" First John 2:28 says, "And now little children, abide in him. [That is in Jesus.] So that when he appears, you will have confidence before him and not be ashamed before him at his coming." Jesus is going to come back in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. We don't know when it is. If we knew the Lord Jesus Christ was going to come back at 3:00 AM central daylight savings time tomorrow morning, I promise everybody would be doing something spiritual then. You'd be on your knees praying or witnessing to people. You'd probably be singing praises to the Lord. And so when he came back, that would be a wonderful way to

meet the Lord, singing praises, praising him. But we don't know when he's going to come back. That's why I seriously doubt Jesus is ever going to come back during a church service because that's when we can expect him. "Lord, come on back. I'm ready. I'm in church."

When I was a youth director, kids used to ask me a bunch of questions. They don't ask me many questions anymore except when am I going to be through preaching? They wanted to know how far they could go on a date. And the answer I always gave to them is based on this embarrassment test. Don't ever do anything on a date that if Jesus Christ came back at that moment, you'd be embarrassed. There's a lot of things you can do with a guy or a girl that if the Lord came back, you wouldn't be embarrassed about. The principle is the same for adults. Ask yourself, "If Jesus comes back while I'm doing \_\_\_\_\_, will I be ashamed before him at his coming?"

## **CONCLUSION**

So these five tests are how you put into practice the beautiful principle of accommodation. We live in an age where everybody says, "I demand my rights. I demand what's coming to me. I'm the center of the universe." When the Bible teaches something totally opposite. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, he's got to deny himself. He's got to take up his cross daily." That means you die to self and follow him. The one who set the greatest example of the principle of accommodation was the Lord Jesus Christ. Just before the cross, knowing the agony and the pain and the suffering that he was going to endure, he told Simon Peter, "Don't you know that I could call down 72,000 angels and they could rescue me? I could miss all this pain. I could go right to heaven right now. And I wouldn't have to endure the cross." But you know what accommodation is. It's making adjustments for the sake of the other person. And I don't know about you, but I'm glad Jesus accommodated for my sin. Now you may be a stronger Christian, or you may be a weaker Christian, but the initiative is on the stronger Christian to be the one who implements the principle of accommodate. You may want that immature baby Christian to grow up. But the impetus is on the stronger Christian to practice accommodation. And that's the way God will bless you.

## **OUTLINE**

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#### **I. THE PROBLEM**

- 1. How much should another's convictions control my actions?**

#### **II. THE PRINCIPLE**

- 1. Knowledge without love produces arrogance**
- 2. Love with knowledge produces accommodation**

#### **III. THE PRACTICE**

- 1. Edification test**
- 2. Example test**
- 3. Evangelism test**
- 4. Exaltation test**
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### **CONCLUSION**