Crossroads International Church/ CIC Dr. Rick Griffith

27 April 2008/ 20 Jan 2013 Message #11 of 24

NIV 35 Minutes

Title

**Using Your Gray Matter on Gray Matters**

***1 Corinthians 8***

**Topic:** Conscience

**Subject:** Why must we give up our rights on gray matters?

**Complement:** Show love more than knowledge when dealing with gray matters.

**Purpose:** The listeners will lovingly relinquish their rights in matters of conscience out of love for weaker Christians.

**Attribute:** We worship our meek God

# Introduction

### Interest: [Should my student give up pork—what would you do in this situation?]

Pork Debate

#### One of the challenges faced by my students at Singapore Bible College is having families from different countries living in the same flat. This past week I learned of one of my student families living with another couple from a neighboring country with Muslim influence. This other family was horrified to find the wife’s pork in their shared fridge—stuck way in the back so as not to be seen. The Muslim background wife told them, “Your pork is contaminating my family’s food in the fridge. I don't want any pork in this apartment!” But the other family loves to eat pork, and is wondering what to do—especially since this other wife has a terrible problem with anger about many things. Both families are, of course, Christian families and both husbands are pastors.

• Hates pork

• Loves pork

#### OK, so you are in this situation. What would you do? Let me give you one minute to discuss this with someone next to you…

Title

### My message title is, “Using Your Gray Matter on Gray Matters.” We’ll look at this continuing our series on Paul’s letter to Corinth, Greece.

Map

### Christians have convictions based on *Scripture* as well as *conscience*.

Convictions

#### *Scripture:* We sometimes follow a practice since this is what the Bible says. Scripture is clear about many things that we’ve already discussed in 1 Corinthians:

• Scripture

##### Dividing over favorite teachers is wrong (1 Cor. 1–4).

Divisions

##### Sex outside of marriage is wrong (1 Cor. 5–6).

• Immorality

##### Married people and singles alike should be content with their state (1 Cor. 7).

• Discontent

#### *Conscience:* But Christians also believe things due to conscience and tradition. These are often called “gray matters” or “doubtful issues.”

• Conscience

##### Here we need to use our brains—our gray matter—to discern God’s will.

• Brain

##### Many issues are black & white—black are practices that the Bible says are always wrong (idolatry, adultery, murder & coveting)—but white issues are what the Bible says are always right (contentment, obedience, prayer, & purity).

• White   
• egs.

• Black   
• egs.

Black & White

##### However, not every practice is right or wrong, black or white. I define gray areas as *practices not forbidden in the Bible over which Christians disagree*. Some believers consider them sinful while others think them legitimate.

Gray Areas

##### Want some examples of gray areas? Over the years I have added to a list I made of them. At present it is 98 items long—so today I have a 98-point sermon! Just kidding, but thousands more could be added. Let me share with you the first 27 in alphabetical order from A to L:

Accepting gifts with the left hand

Being a Democrat (or Republican!)

Buying a Mac (or Windows) computer

Celebrating Christmas or Easter

Celebrating Good Friday

Celebrating Lent

Celebrating Palm Sunday

Changing one’s name to a “Christian” name

Chinese New Year giving of *hong baos*

Christmas trees in the church sanctuary

Clapping in church services

Dancing (western, tribal, ballroom, square dance, frenzy)

Drinking beer

Drinking hard liquor

Drinking wine

Driving a motorcycle

Eating bloody foods

Eating food sacrificed to idols

Eating junk food

Examples 2

Examples 3

Examples 1

Eating meat or pork

Eating only “Christian food” (whatever *that* is!)

Giving only “Christian” greetings (New Year)

Giving to non-religious causes

Having a gynecologist who performs abortions

Killing in war

Laughing with men and women together

Listening to rock music

### Need: We certainly should follow our conscience, but should we also follow *someone else’s* conscience? Do you know what you should do when you don’t think something is wrong, but others you know feel it is wrong? Should you do it or not do it?

To Do, or not to Do?

Else?

### Background: Paul is dealing with three basic areas in his letter: divisions in chapters 1–4, disorders in 5–6, and doctrinal difficulties now in chapters 7–16. The particular matter at hand concerns food sacrificed to idols in chapters 8–10.

Chart

Overview

### Proposition: In our text for today in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul declares this truth: We shouldgive up our rights on gray matters!

Give up

### Subject: Why give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek here? 3 reasons!

• 3 reasons

• Why?

### Transition: The first reason not to cling to your rights on gray matters is you should…

# I. Meekness shows love more than knowledge (8:1-3).

MPI

[Caring for others in debatable areas is more important than our understanding of these areas.]

## Love is more important than *knowledge* in debatable matters (8:1).

8:1

### Background: What historical context helps us understand this stuff about idols?

#### The marketplace at Corinth had a mixture of both pagan temples and shops. This diagram shows just how close the temples (in red) were to the shops (in blue).

Shops

#### Pagans offered their animals up at the temples, but sometimes the temples had too much food, so they sold it to the shops at bargain prices.

#### Now if you were shopping for meat and saw identical meat for sale—one at $5 a kilo and the other at $2 a kilo—which would you buy? You ask the shop owner, “Why such a huge price difference?” and he says, “Oh, I got this meat at a bargain price from the temple.” Which meat would you buy? Both are healthy and fresh!

• $5 meat

• $2 meat

#### Some Corinthians said, “Hey, I’m gonna be a good steward of God’s money” and they bought the bargain meat offered to idols.

#### Others—probably those from pagan backgrounds—said, “No way will I buy tainted meat. I’d rather pay more!”

### So the Corinthians struggled with their rights concerning food offered to idols.

## God accepts those who love more than those who think they know a lot (8:2-3).

#### Pufferfish, also known as blowfish, defend themselves through their famous “inflatability” because their slow, clumsy swimming style makes them vulnerable to predators. They can’t escape, so “pufferfish use their highly elastic stomachs and the ability to quickly ingest huge amounts of water (and even air when necessary) to turn themselves into a virtually inedible ball several times their normal size. Some species also have spines on their skin to make them even less palatable.”

• Blown up

• Spines

Pufferfish

#### “A predator that manages to snag a puffer before it inflates won’t feel lucky for long. Almost all pufferfish contain tetrodotoxin, a substance that makes them foul tasting and often lethal to fish. To humans, tetrodotoxin is deadly, up to 1,200 times more poisonous than cyanide. There is enough toxin in one pufferfish to kill 30 adult humans, and there is no known antidote” says the National Geographic website (<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/pufferfish/>).

#### People who pride themselves on their knowledge are like pufferfish.

• 8:1 puffs

#### So how do verses 1-3 introduce in this chapter? It’s the general principle that all of us can grow in our knowledge, but even perfect knowledge isn’t as good as love! God accepts those who love more than those who think they know a lot.

• 8:2

## Whatever you think of a gray matter, make sure that you show love more than being concerned about having the so-called “right” view! For example…

Love

### Music is a gray matter.

• Music

#### Hey, do you youth like the music here? Would you prefer music more lively and youthful? Music isn’t an issue to die over. The biblical hymnbook (you know what that is, right?) only has lyrics—no musical notations beyond “selah” (and scholars still debate what that means!) and a few other obscure terms.

#### I want you youth to know that we love you and love to have us worship with us and we love your input here. It’s great to see youth comprise half of our worship team.

#### The bottom line is this: Is showing love a higher value than making sure that your song preferences are sung here at church?

### Drinking wine is also not clearly prohibited in the Bible.

• Drinking

#### Drunkenness is wrong, but some of us think Jesus turned the wine into water (it’s the other way around). But will we abstain here if it causes offense?

#### At our first fundraising banquet for ICS in 1994, some board members who had no qualms about drinking organized it. My job as chairman of the board was to be the first person to greet those who showed up at the country club—and invite them over to the table for their wine or champagne or whatever alcoholic drink they wanted. Drinks were on the house to raise money for this Christian school! I recall thinking, “Isn’t that interesting? The organizers put one of the few board members who doesn’t drink in this spot! But I also knew that Bible doesn’t prohibit drinking and that love was more important than knowledge, so I did my job.

Bottles

# (So love supersedes knowledge. A second reason to give over our rights on gray matters is because…)

MPII

# II. Meekness protects the conscience of weak believers (8:4-8).

[Consideration protects how weaker Christians respond to their convictions.]

## Since there is only one God, there really are no gods that people can worship (8:4-6).

Idol (8:4)

### Does an idol as “nothing” mean that idols do not exist (8:4)? Or does it mean that the demons behind them don’t exist? No, both exist. And idols really do encourage worship of demons—it’s just that the material the idol is made of has no real significance. It’s just made of wood, stone or metal.

### Does verse 5 mean that other gods do exist after all? No. This is a clause that only indicates a BIG “IF” other gods do exist—which they don’t!

8:5-6

### The point is do not worship images which are not gods—even American idols!

American Idol

(“However, not everyone knows this…” verse 7 says.)

## Those with a weak conscience and knowledge think an OK practice is wrong (8:7-8).

Pigs

### Question: Don’t people really sacrifice food to idols? Then why does v. 7 say that people “think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol”? The NLT reads, “Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated.”

### “But food (or any other gray area) itself doesn’t bring us near to God” (8:8).

# (So why give up our rights? We should be meek by giving up rights because it shows love and protects the conscience of others. Now what’s the third reason to be meek?)

S

II

I

# III. Meekness keeps you from ruining the faith of a weaker believer (8:9-13).

MPIII

[If practicing your freedom wounds another with a more sensitive conscience, stop!]

## Don’t exercise your freedom if it hurts a weaker believer (8:9).

Don’t

### In 2008 I had some extra time on Sunday morning, so I suggested that I wash the car at the Bible college. I told Susan that I was going out to wash the car, which is right at the entrance to SBC where faculty and students walk. “Honey,” she said, “But all the students and teachers walk right past there to and from church. Can’t you do it on another day? That might offend some of them.” I said, “Oh, I’ll just ask them which verse in Scripture tells me I can’t wash my chariot on Sunday!” No, I’m just kidding. I realized that Susan was right—so I washed the car on another day.

• Car

### I also have the freedom to wear whatever I want. I used to like ties, but after coming to Singapore’s heat, my desire to don the tie diminished substantially. Yet most preachers here only preach with a tie on. In fact, in many churches it is considered offensive not to wear a tie. I got this speaking invitation to another church for next month that says “dress code: long sleeve shirt & tie.” While preaching in Indonesia I wore a full suit! In the tropics! Why did I do it? Because I gave up my right not to wear a tie so I do not offend weaker brothers and sisters in Christ.

• Tie

## Bad things happen if you insist on your rights in gray matters (8:10-12).

Results

### You may encourage your weaker brother to sin (8:10).

• He sins

#### The strong brother will likely cause his more sensitive brother to sin by also eating in an idol’s temple (8:10).

#### Should we *never* eat in an idol temple, according to verse 10? Paul doesn’t give an absolute prohibition here, but he clearly prohibits this in 10:18-22, where he says that these sacrifices are offered to demons!

#### Don’t cause others to sin! I’ve heard of social drinking Christians serving other believers alcohol, knowing full well that these brothers were saved out of an alcoholic past. It only emboldened these weaker brothers to slavery again.

### The weak brother could even give up his faith (8:11).

• Give up

#### What does it mean to “destroy” a weak brother? It refers to motivating him to violate his conscience, as noted in verse 12.

#### When it is pouring down rain, the speed limit signs still say 90 km/hr. However, it would be foolish to drive that fast even though it’s not against the law.

#### Sometimes Christians insist on their freedom in a gray area, even to the detriment of another believer. I’ve seen weaker Christians actually stop going to church and deny Christ due to a gray area! Like a church that has a required dress code!

### You sin against your brother and against Christ (8:12).

• You sin

#### Youth, this applies to you too! This definitely applies to physical contact in BGR. Boy-Girl Relationships must define what is appropriate in their dating relationship.

Touching

#### Before we got married, my wife and I made a continuum of physical contact to clarify how far is too far. It started with innocent touching in western culture—a handshake—and ends in sex. But there are many types of touching along the way.

• Scale

#### He might feel fine about kissing—but she has her own continuum, which may fall short of kissing. Where do you draw the line? Susan and I talked this out to make sure I didn’t overstep my bounds and violate her conscience—or mine! Then we both stopped short of the *lower* line of the two—like Paul says in this final verse…

• Her

• Him

## Give up your rights permanently if they hurt a weaker believer (8:13).

Paul’s “line”

### Paul knew that his eating habits might cause weaker brothers to sin—so he was even willing to be a vegetarian (8:13).

### How far should we bring the idea of being sensitive to weaker brothers and sisters? Paul says he will never eat meat again if it remains a problem.

Subject

(So why must we give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek here?)

# Conclusion

### Meekness shows love to protect the conscience and faith of weaker believers (MI). Don’t insist on your rights on debatable issues (MI stated negatively).

### Probably the verse that sums it up best is verse 9: “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.”

Brain

Main Idea

### Using *only* your gray matter on gray matters will only cause you to defend your freedom. But love for others will cause you to give up any right for Christ.

Heart

### So *now* what would you say to my students who have to make a decision about whether to give up eating pork for their flatmate wife’s weak conscience?

Pork

#### I don’t know about you, but it seems to me that grasping for the right to eat pork is a small matter compared to getting along—and showing love to a weak believer. I’d just give it up for a year or two until after graduation.

#### The more spiritually mature believer often is the one who must humble himself to restore a relationship. Maybe my student’s willingness to sacrifice his rights will even talk sense into the other wife. Probably not, but it is an issue of love.

Which?

### So which gray matter is God asking *you* to give over to Him? Let’s pray…

Black

• You sin

**Preliminary Questions**

**Verses Questions**

Context What did the author record just prior to this passage?

Purpose Why is this passage in the Bible?

Background What historical context helps us understand this passage?

#### The marketplace at Ancient Corinth had a mixture of both pagan temples and shops of all kinds. This diagram shows just how close the temples (in red) were to the shops (in blue).

#### Pagans offered their animals up at the temples, but sometimes the temples had too much food, so they sold it to the shops at bargain prices.

#### Now if you were shopping for meat and saw identical meat for sale—one at $5 a kilo and the other at $2 a kilo—which would you pick? You ask the shop owner, “Why such a huge price difference?” and he says, “Oh, I got this meat at a bargain price from the temple…” which meat would you buy? Both are healthy and fresh!

#### Some Corinthians said, “Hey, I’m gonna be a good steward of God’s money” and they bought the bargain meat offered to idols.

#### Others—probably those from pagan backgrounds—said, “No way will I buy tainted meat. I’d rather pay more!”

Questions on Each Verse

1. What does verse 2 mean by the man who “thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know”? How can we reword this? It means that all of us can grow in our knowledge—so whatever your view on eating food offered to idols or gray matters, you can still learn to understand this better.
2. Paul’s first statement relates to idol foods (1a), but the statements following in 1b-3 “says nothing about eating or food or idols” (Fee, 364). How does loving God and being known by God relate to idol foods (3)? I think it means that God knows what is in each of our hearts.
3. How do verses 1-3 introduce in this discussion? The idea is the general principle that all of us can grow in our knowledge, but even perfect knowledge isn’t as good as love! The right foundation of our Christian faith is *not* knowledge, but love.
4. Does an idol as “nothing” mean that idols do not exist (8:4)? Or does it mean that the demons behind them don’t exist? No, both exist. And idols really do encourage worship of demons—it’s just that the material the idol is made of has no real significance. It’s just made of wood, stone or metal.
5. Does verse 5 mean that other gods do exist after all? No. This is a subjunctive clause that only indicates a BIG “IF” other gods do exist.
6. Don’t people really sacrifice food to idols? If so, why does verse 7 say that people *“think of it* as having been sacrificed to an idol”?
7. Should we *never* eat in an idol temple, according to verse 10? Paul doesn’t give an absolute prohibition here, but he clearly prohibits this in 10:18-22, where he says that these sacrifices are offered to demons!
8. What does it mean to “destroy” a weak brother? It refers to motivating him to violate his conscience, as noted in verse 12.
9. How far should we bring the idea of being sensitive to weaker brothers and sisters? Paul says he will never eat meat again if it remains a problem.

**Tentative Subject/Complement Statements**

Text

**Possible Illustrations**

### Interest: [Should online plagiarism be penalized—what would you do in this situation?]

#### One of the things I’m trying to implement at SBC is online learning. Students in my classes are more-and-more taking quizzes and exams online—and one special component is online discussion. I have students in groups of 5-6 participants who discuss a question each week. They get graded on how well they contribute and most groups have about 30 postings weekly—that’s about 5 posts per student. It’s designed to give my class of 36 students a more personal flavor since the class is too big for all to contribute in the two-hour period each week.

Online

#### Well, in 2008 a student felt his grade was too low for that week, so he asked me to check over his work. I did, and to my horror, I discovered that his post was a study that I myself had done and put into the course notes!

#### Then I looked at another student’s postings and saw that she also had copied verbatim from my notes.

#### So I sent an email to both of them telling them that they had failed that assignment, that I was required by faculty policy to bring the matter to the entire faculty, and that if they did it again, they would be expelled from the college. When I spoke personally to the second student, she said that this was not a research paper. It was only an online discussion, so she felt that the normal rules of citing sources did not apply. She did not consider it plagiarism and said that all the students do this so she was been unfairly punished.

#### OK, so you are in my situation. What would you do? Let me give you one minute to discuss this with someone next to you…

### Conclusion: So what happened with my two students when I met with them this week?

Black

#### I met with them to find out why they would copy directly from my class notes.

#### They told me that they did not know that copying applied to online discussion like it did to research papers. In fact, they felt I was really unfair to fail them on the assignment when many others in the class also copied from my notes.

#### As I talked with them, I realized that I was really dealing with a gray matter. I saw that I had been overly harsh by failing them before talking to them personally, so I asked their forgiveness and restored their grades to the former level.

#### The more spiritually mature believer often is the one who must humble himself to restore a relationship. Maybe they will be willing to accept blame in the future.

##### How can we discern if a certain practice is gray or not? Perhaps the following flow chart will help (explain).

Examples of Gray Areas:

Accepting gifts with the left hand

Being a Democrat (or Republican!)

Celebrating Christmas

Celebrating Easter

Celebrating Good Friday

Celebrating Lent

Celebrating Palm Sunday

Changing one’s name to a “Christian” name

Chinese New Year giving of *hong baos*

Christmas trees in church sanctuary

Clapping in church services

Dancing (western, tribal, ballroom, frenzy)

Drinking beer

Drinking hard liquor

Drinking wine

Driving a motorcycle

Eating bloody foods

Eating food sacrificed to idols

Eating junk food

Eating meat

Eating only “Christian food” (whatever *that* is!)

Giving only “Christian” greetings (New Year)

Giving to non-religious causes

Having a gynecologist who performs abortions

Killing in war

Laughing with men and women together

Listening to rock music

Masturbation

Men wearing a beard or sideburns

Men with earrings

Men with long hair

Mothers working outside the home

Music with a beat

Music with instruments

Obesity & gluttony

Owning a Mercedes or BMW

Owning an executive flat

Pastoring without a Bible college degree

Pastoring without a seminary degree

Pastoring without a doctoral degree

Playing cards

Playing Dungeons & Dragons

Playing golf on Sunday

Playing the drums in church

Playing the organ in church

Playing video games

Polygamy?

Posting pictures of Jesus

Preaching past 12 noon

Preaching while sitting (not using a pulpit)

Preaching without a tie (or coat)

Premarital kissing

Raising one hand in church

Raising two hands in church

Refusing to recycle

Saturday night church services (Sabbath)

Shaking hands women (Nepal, Cambodia)

Singing karaoke

Sitting with your spouse in church

Skipping church while on holiday

Skipping Sunday School at church

Smoking or chewing tobacco

Swimming with the opposite sex

Take communion at a Catholic church

Take communion at an Eastern Orthodox church

Talking between men and women (Burmese)

Tithing

Using birth control

Using magic or illusions

Using non-KJV translations

Voting for opposition political party candidates

Watching cable TV

Watching movies at church (esp. in worship)

Watching PG-rated movies

Watching R-rated movies

Wear native dress rather than western clothes

Wearing contact lens rather than glasses

Wearing sandals to church

Wearing shorts in church

Woman C.E. director

Woman pastor to women

Woman song leader in services

Woman Sunday School Superintendent

Woman Sunday School teacher (adult level)

Woman Sunday School teacher (primary level)

Women going bra-less

Women with epidural to reduce childbirth pain

Women wearing an Indian forehead dot

Women wearing a sari

Women wearing jewelry

Women wearing makeup and/or lipstick

Women wearing pants in church

Women with short hair

Working at an abortion facility

Working at a night club

Working at a beer, wine or tobacco company

Working on Sunday

Worship in a different language

# By Hee Kiat (fax 791-0676)

# Sermon manuscript: Grace Baptist Church

# Title: “When a miss is a hit” 22 November 1998

# Text: 1 Cor 8 by CHEONG Hee Kiat

*Introduction*

Arouse interest

What would you do if, on returning home tonight, you are served a dinner which contains food that has been offered to idols at an altar, or brought back from the temple? Or if you are invited to a friend’s house for dinner and find out that food offered to idols is being served? Is it any concern for you at all that you may be eating food that is used in prayers to idols even though the idols don’t mean anything to you?

Has anyone agonized over this issue? Well, as a younger man, I had to grapple with it. My parents were staunch Taoists, and we had seven altars in our house. I helped them with their religious rituals, and enjoyed the food after the worship. There was always food at the main altar. Good food brought home was always offered at the altar before we consumed it.

Then, I became a Christian; and I realized I could not be a part of the rituals, and I felt uneasy about taking the food. It was quite a sacrifice... all that good food! Worse, I was at first secretly a Christian. Can you imagine the awkward situation? – me at the table, chicken from the altar served, mum as usual coaxes me to eat the chicken (saying its good for me). What do I say – uh, I’ve gone off chicken today. Uh, I’m vegetarian today – because the only dish that had not been offered was the vegetables. (I developed a great respect for those who could keep strictly to a vegetarian diet.) What do you do when everything on the table has been offered at the altar? If I didn’t take the food, I had nothing to eat! What if this went on day after day? No choice, I ate – pretended to consume but ate as little as possible, as if by doing so, I’ll be less ‘guilty’, less compromised.

*Need*

Coming back to my question when I started – what will you do in such situations, as a Christian? Do you struggle with the thought or act of eating food offered to idols? Will you simply refrain from it or eat with a bad conscience? Or will you, like some liberated Christians, take the food without batting an eyelid?

*Subject*

What does the Bible say about eating food offered to idols?

*Background*:

You may think that this is an issue only with the Chinese, those with Taoist or traditional background. But offering food to idols is also practiced elsewhere, and missionaries moving into societies with animistic cultures also face similar predicaments.

Almost 2000 years ago, people had the same problem in Corinth. The Greeks and Romans worshipped many gods and believed in the existence of many evil spirits. They had a god of war, a goddess of love, a god of travel, a goddess of justice, and so on (hmm, sounds like the kinds people have today also). They believed that (1) evil spirits try to enter the human body by attaching themselves to food before it is eaten, and (2) these spirits can be removed only by sacrificing the food first to a god. So, by sacrificing the food (usually meat) first to the gods, they achieved two ends: (1) it pleases the god, and (2) it removes spiritual impurity. What was not burned at the altar was served at pagan feasts, or brought home by the offerer. Often the priests could collect so much food that they could sell some of it in the temple markets. If you had gone to those markets for your daily edibles, chances are the meat you would buy would have come from the temple.

Corinthians who became Christians came from such a background – when they became Christians, *they* had changed, but everything around them had *not* changed. So, there was this offered food, there were these affected Christians, and apparently, there were other ‘older’ Corinthian Christians who ate the food. Does this sound familiar in today’s context?

*Preview*

Paul saw the problem and he offered some spiritual and practical advice in 1 Corinthians 8. On the surface of it, it was about whether to eat or not to eat the food. But, as we shall see, the action we take in this matter has an impact on fellow believers and unbelievers. And, there is an underlying principle involved which stresses the importance of love in determining our response to this practice. This is how Paul develops the arguments for his advice to the Corinthian Christians.

***I. Knowledge needs to be applied with love (Vs 1-3)***

*A. Knowledge makes us proud, but if applied with love, helps other believers. (Vs 1-2)*

*B. God will acknowledge us for our love, not our knowledge. (Vs 3)*

First, Paul talks about knowledge (read Vs 1&2) – what did he have in mind? Well, let’s face it – we can’t believe and obey what we don’t know. As a true Christian, we need to know the Bible. Besides, the main inhabitants in Corinth were Greeks, and these ancient Greeks were great seekers and respecters of knowledge. Paul is saying here: being learned is just not adequate. Knowledge can make a Christian proud, but if applied with love, knowledge helps other Christians, as well as other non-Christians. You may have encountered people who are very knowledgeable, but who refuse to share, or who look down on the less informed, or who are insensitive, applying the truths they know only to themselves without caring how it affects others. [Give examples] One writer puts it this way - “if we are puffed up with what we know, we may be solid in doctrine, but weak in love; strong in self-love but weak in brotherly love.” As Paul develops it so well in 1 Cor 13, it is love which edifies, helping others along, lifting spirits, affirming and building up others.

How does God view love and knowledge? Verse 3 tells us that God will acknowledge us not because we have knowledge, but because we show love. Sure, He’d want us to study the Word and master it, but if we don’t love as we apply the Word, its not honouring to God. Look at the Pharisees – they were probably the most learned among the Jews about Jewish history and laws, but they were condemned by Jesus because they applied the laws on fellow Jews legalistically and devoid of love.

How does this point about love and knowledge apply to food offered to idols?

***II. Actions based on what we know may hurt others without the knowledge (4-8)***

***A. There is only one true all-powerful God – all idols are insignificant. (4-6)***

***B. The strong Christians believed that eating food offered to idols has no special significance.***

***C. Weaker Christians may become doubtful and confused. (7)***

***D. The truth is: food is impartial. (8)***

The Corinthian Christians knew that there is only one true God, who is all-powerful, who created everything. But all around them, pagan Corinthians still worshipped idols, and believed only in the existence of evil spirits. In fact, many Corinthian Christian converts had such a pagan past – they participated in the numerous rituals and sacrifices, and immoral practices. Paul wrote that all these idols were insignificant, nothing, powerless when compared to the God whom the Christians believed (read vs 4-6). Listen to how Psalm 115 describes idols in comparison with our God (read Ps 115:4-7). There was nothing to fear, no need to bother with such idols and practices anymore. Food could not contaminate them. To the strong believer, eating food offered to idols therefore had no special significance. So, they continued to buy meat at the pagan markets, ate food brought back from the temple, and sat at dinners where such food was served.

But apparently, to some new Corinthian believers, it represented a crisis point. Eating food offered to idols was a bad and vivid reminder of their past pagan bondage. If they had non-Christians friends and family members, it was almost impossible to avoid facing the question of eating idol sacrifices. Many social occasions involved such types of food. These weaker Christians became doubtful and confused (read vs 7). They were not strong in their faith yet, they had not appreciated fully the almighty nature of God, they likely still thougt that there was some power in the idols and in the spirits that other Corinthians feared. In short, they did not have as much knowledge as the mature Christians. So, to mature believers, there might not seem to be anything wrong in eating such food, but to the immature Christians, they were quite disturbed—their conscience was pricked. Older Christians seemed to be compromising.

Those of us who have come from such a kind of idol-worshipping past will understand this very well. Thank God that my parents received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, but after sixty years of worshipping idols, they had difficulty refusing sacrificed food from their relatives, and even more troubled consciences when deciding whether to consume the food. Until today, my mother does not eat beef, a legacy from her Taoist past. Some Christians regularly keep vegetarian days, again a habit from their past religious practice.

Verse 8 says food is impartial. Eating or not eating food is not spiritually significant in itself. Neither act will bring us closer to God nor drive us further from Him. The general point is that doing things not forbidden by God has no significance in our relationship to Him. But of course, we must exercise common sense and self-control in eating out of concern for our body’s health. For example, don’t overeat or eat too little. Food does not convey other special effects - like, eating chicken is good for memorising verses, or taking hokkien mee will make us more patient, or eating more chilli will cause us to get angry more easily. And certainly not, that evil spirits will enter us through the food we eat.

But, therein lies the tension and the ambiguity, which needed to be resolved. If food is neutral, why worry about taking the sacrificed food? Should we be careful when doing so? Why not get the weak Christians instead to be used to the idea that eating sacrificed food is OK?

**III. If our actions, based on our knowledge, stumble others, it’s better not to do them (9-13)**

A. By taking our Christian liberties, we can mislead weak Christians. (Vs 9)

B. If strong Christians eat food offered to idols, weak Christians may follow without understanding. (Vs 10)

C. In doing so, they may return to their old ways and reject God. (Vs 11)

D. Such actions are sinful, against fellow Christians and against God. (Vs 12)

E. Thus, if our actions stumble fellow Christians, we should refrain from doing them. (Vs 13)

In verses 9-13, Paul offers an answer and a prescription for action. We have the liberty to eat sacrificed food; after all, Christ had come to set us free from fear and superstition. Well, not exactly. As Paul explains in verse 9, we must be sensitive to others when claiming those freedoms. For, by taking our Christian liberties, we can mislead weak Christians.

Take this ‘food’ business: the weak Christian sees a spiritually stronger brother eat sacrificed food freely, he becomes unsure, some of his pagan past comes back to mind, his Christian brother is doing something the new Christian has just rejected. Or, the weak Christian joins in the eating; slowly and unperceived, his pagan past creeps back into his life. His faith is undermined. He may return to his old ways and ultimately reject God (vs 11). Far fetched? Apparently, Paul doesn’t think so. If you need any convincing, think of a drunkard who became a Christian. If he is a weak Christian, liquor may still have remnant influence on him, tempting him, calling out to him. He sees his Christian friends enjoying good spiritual fellowship - that is, of the XO or VSOP type. He struggles against joining in; but, they seem to be in good control of themselves, it must be all right, so he joins in. Tragically, he ends up succumbing to his old enemy, the bottle. His friends lose a brother. Paul says that by exercising our liberty with sacrificed food without looking out for our weaker fellow Christians who are troubled by our act, we sin against them, and we sin against God.

What about the non-Christians? Oh, they are watching, to see how far Christians can be stretched. They’ll observe that some will eat and others won’t, and that can be exploited to divide and confuse. They’ll be very happy if we would join them at their table, compromise our stand about worshipping only one true God. Our witness will be blunted, our own faith undermined.

Is there a deeper message from this Chapter? Is it just about sacrificed food? I suggest not. The Bible is clear on many issues and actions that we can or cannot do, or those which are always good to do. But, there are many aspects of our lives that the Bible is silent on, which do not have a biblical right or wrong, where God has not said that He forbids a certain action. Drinking wine or spirits is one of them. What about trading in shares, or short-selling shares, or watching TV and the cinema? What about putting on make-up or listening to rock music, or playing cards? We do at least some of these without ever wondering how they will affect other Christians or turn non-Christians from God, don’t we? Yet, they can needlessly offend and stumble others. There is an over-riding principle that should guide us. Paul says that if our actions stumble fellow Christians, we should refrain from doing them. We should put the interests of others before ours; even though we have the right or liberty to act in a certain way, we should give up that right or freedom if that helps someone else from falling. That is applying knowledge with love.

Does this mean never to eat food offered to idols? In the last verse, Paul says that he will never eat sacrificed food again if that causes his brother to stumble. In Chapter 10, he categorically states that we should not eat at a table when it is clear that it is part of the worship of demons and idols. We certainly should not eat if the meal is part of a festival or ritual where worship of idols takes place, such as the hungry ghost month, ching ming, anniversaries of deaths of ancestors, etc. I’d like to suggest that we exercise great restraint when asked to eat sacrificed food, and abstain altogether if possible. With my parents, I made a stand later about not eating such food - I did it firmly but gently, and they knew I was serious. The result - my mum would set a portion of the food aside and tell me that I could eat because that had not been placed on the altar. What a relief for my stomach, what a victory for Jesus. Those struggling with this issue - you can make a stand, too, and the Lord will honour it.

**Conclusion**

1. Act in knowledge and love.

2. Refrain from eating food offered to idols if this action stumbles others.

3. In all your actions, put others’ interests before yours.

Take these three thoughts with you as you go out to meet the week ahead:

1. Act in knowledge and love.

2. Refrain from eating food offered to idols if this action stumbles others.

3. In all your actions, put others’ interests before yours.

**Using Your Gray Matter on Gray Matters**

***1 Corinthians 8***

**Exegetical Outline**

***Exegetical Idea:* The reason a knowledgeable believer must give up his right to eat food sacrificed to idols (and to participate in other amoral areas) is to show love for a believer who would be offended due to his more sensitive conscience.**

# Subject: Why did strong Corinthian believers have to give up their rights on gray matters?

# I. The guiding principle in the idol food issue is that love is more important than knowledge (8:1-3).

## Love is more important than *knowledge* about eating food sacrificed to idols (8:1).

## God accepts those who love more than those who think they know a lot (8:2-3).

### Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much (8:2).

### But God accepts the person who loves Him (8:3).

# II. The reason some believers defile their conscience if they eat idol foods is because they do not realize that there really are no gods behind idols (8:4-8).

## Since there is but one God, there really are no gods to whom people can offer food (8:4-6).

## Eating idol food is no big deal, but some people have a weak conscience here due to their lack of knowledge (8:7-10).

# III. The application of knowing that love is everything and idols are nothing is to even permanently give up the right to eat idol meat in a pagan temple if it hurts a weaker brother’s conscience to sin against Christ (8:9-13).

## A believer should never exercise his freedom if it hurts a weaker believer (8:9).

## The results of a believer who insists on his right to eat in an idol’s temple are terrible (8:10-12).

### The strong brother will likely cause his more sensitive brother to sin by also eating in an idol’s temple (8:10).

### The weak brother could even give up his faith (8:11).

### The strong brother sins against his brother and against Christ (8:12).

## Knowing that Paul’s eating habits can cause weaker brothers to sin made him even willing to be a vegetarian (8:13).

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest: Eating pork—what would you do in this situation?

### Christians have convictions based on Scripture as well as conscience.

### Need: We certainly should follow our conscience, but should we also follow *someone else’s* conscience?

### Proposition: We *should* give up our rights on gray matters!

### Subject: Why must we give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek here?

### Transition: The first reason not to cling to our rights on gray matters is because…

# I. Meekness shows love more than knowledge (8:1-3).

## Love is more important than *knowledge* in debatable matters (8:1).

## God accepts those who love more than those who think they know a lot (8:2-3).

# (A second reason to give over our rights on gray matters is because…)

# II. Meekness protects the conscience of weak believers (8:4-8).

## Since there is but one God, there really are no gods that people can worship (8:4-6).

## Those with a weak conscience and knowledge think an OK practice is wrong (8:7-8).

# (A second reason to give over our rights on gray matters is because…)

# III. Meekness keeps you from ruining the faith of a weaker believer (8:9-13).

## Don’t exercise your freedom if it hurts a weaker believer (8:9).

## Bad things happen if you insist on your rights in gray matters (8:10-12).

## Give up your rights permanently if they hurt a weaker believer (8:13).

# Conclusion

### Why must we give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek here? Meekness shows love to protect the conscience and faith of weaker believers (M.I.).

### Don’t insist on your rights on gray matters (M.I. stated negatively).

### Using *only* your gray matter on gray matters will only cause you to defend your freedom. But love for others will cause you to give up any right for Christ.

### Which gray matter is God asking *you* to give over to Him?

**Bulletin Outline** (filled in)

# Introduction

### Christians have convictions based on Scripture as well as conscience.

### Question: Why must we give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek?

# I. Meekness shows love more than knowledge (8:1-3).

## Love is more important than *knowledge* in debatable matters (8:1).

## God accepts those who love more than those who think they know a lot (8:2-3).

# II. Meekness protects the conscience of weak believers (8:4-8).

## Since there is but one God, there really are no gods that people can worship (8:4-6).

## Those with a weak conscience and knowledge think an OK practice is wrong (8:7-8).

# III. Meekness keeps you from ruining the faith of a weaker believer (8:9-13).

## Don’t exercise your freedom if it hurts a weaker believer (8:9).

## Bad things happen if you insist on your rights in gray matters (8:10-12).

## Give up your rights permanently if they hurt a weaker believer (8:13).

# Conclusion

### Why must we give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek here? Meekness shows love to protect the conscience and faith of weaker believers (M.I.).

### Which gray matter is God asking *you* to give over to Him?

**Bulletin Outline** (with blanks)

# Introduction

### Christians have convictions based on Scripture as well as conscience.

### Question: Why must we give up our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on gray matters? Why be meek?

# I. Meekness shows \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ more than knowledge (8:1-3).

## Love is more important thanknowledgein debatable matters (8:1).

## God accepts those who love more than those who think they know a lot (8:2-3).

# II. Meekness protects the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of weak believers (8:4-8).

## Since there is but one God, there really are no gods that people can worship (8:4-6).

## Those with a weak conscience and knowledge think an OK practice is wrong (8:7-8).

# III. Meekness keeps you from ruining the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of a weaker believer (8:9-13).

## Don’t exercise your freedom if it hurts a weaker believer (8:9).

## Bad things happen if you insist on your rights in gray matters (8:10-12).

## Give up your rights permanently if they hurt a weaker believer (8:13).

# (So why must we give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek here?)

# Conclusion

### Meekness shows \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to protect the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_ of weaker believers (Main Idea).

### Which gray matter is God asking *you* to give over to Him?

 **Rick Griffith**

20 January 2013

*Message 11 of 24 in “Becoming Who We Are” 1 Corinthians Series*

**Using Your Gray Matter on Gray Matters**

***1 Corinthians 8***

# Introduction

### Christians have convictions based on Scripture as well as conscience.

### Question: Why must we give up our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on gray matters? Why be meek?

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## Don’t exercise your freedom if it hurts a weaker believer (8:9).

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# (So why must we give up our rights on gray matters? Why be meek here?)

# Conclusion

### Meekness shows \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to protect the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_ of weaker believers (Main Idea).

### Which gray matter is God asking *you* to give over to Him?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Read 1 Corinthians 8 aloud, listing contrasts between these two types of Christians:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strong Believer** | **Weak Believer** |
| Knows freedom on gray areas (1a) | Knows dangers of gray areas (1a) |
| Few taboos | More taboos |
| Realize idols are not gods (7a) | Thinks idols are real (7b) |
| Fine to eat idol food (7a) | Won’t eat idol food (7b) |
| Has liberty in debatable issues (9a) | Easily stumbled (9b) |
| Tempted to dine in idol temple (10a) | Abhors dining in an idol temple (10b) |
| Superior knowledge (11a) | Inferior knowledge (11b) |
| Sins by encouraging others wrongly (12) | Sins by doing things they think wrong (12) |
| Should be willing to limit all rights (13a) | Already limits his rights |

1. What gray areas have been the most relevant in your experience?

Men with pierced earrings

Going to movies

Playing cards

Music & dancing

Alcohol: beer, wine, vodka

1. Which gray matter have you shown meekness about in the past? Which is God asking you to give over to Him now?

I became less rigid once my sons hit their teen years (sagging pants, long hair, etc.)

I now am OK with men having earrings