

January 28, 2018
Sermon for 4th Sunday after the Epiphany
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
1 Corinthians 8:1-13

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

1 Corinthians 8:1–13 (ESV)

¹ Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. ⁴ 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.” ⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶ 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. 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. 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. 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. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Sometimes, even though we *can* do something, we *don't* do it so that someone else doesn't get hurt.

You could probably sum it up this way: "Yes, I can, but, no, I won't."

One of the things I remembered about playing little league baseball back in the 1970's was how irate some of the parents would get in the stands. They would yell at the umpires and the coaches and even at a young age, I thought that is was out of place and that I would never do something like that.

I also remember when my older son was playing baseball and I was the parent in the stands. Now, as the parent in the stands, I found myself falling into the same trap. I could blame the other players for errors, I could yell at the umpires when I thought they missed a call and I could get all caught up in the game and get angry. But, now as I think back, those were not the right things to do. Yes, I could do them (that's the way baseball works; it's every fan's "right"), but, no, I shouldn't have done them.

Mike Matheny, the manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, wrote a book for players, coaches, and parents called *The Matheny Manifesto*. It came out of his coaching Little League baseball and a letter he wrote to parents. Essentially, it calls for showing integrity while playing hard. You play smart, but you respect yourself, your teammates, your opponents, and your craft. It also details how parents are to act at their kids' games, with the key word being *respect*.

It teaches that even though you can yell, blame, complain, and be obnoxious, you don't do these things. Instead, by *not* doing them, you teach your kids good sportsmanship.

"Yes, I Can, but, No, I Won't."

The apostle Paul is setting forth that principle in this Bible passage today:
"Now concerning food offered to idols . . ." (v 1).

I know these verses sound strange. Food sacrificed to idols. Not eating meat. What's this all about? Back in Corinth, you would find all sorts of temples and shrines to various idols and false gods. What would happen is that sacrifices of animals would be made and the meat of those animals would be split three ways.

First, some would be left at the altar for the false god.
Second, some would be eaten by people who worshiped there, often in special meals or celebrations, like a birthday, anniversary, or family event.

Third, the rest would be taken to the marketplace and sold.
In fact, most people, if they were going to eat any meat, would most likely have eaten meat that had been sacrificed to an idol before it reached the marketplace.

What complicates matters is that these temples or shrines were the meeting places for that society. That birthday party, anniversary dinner, social gathering you were planning, well, it was going to happen at places where idols were worshiped.

The meat for the meal came from the altar where it had been sacrificed to a false god.

Now, some of the members of that Corinthian congregation were a bit too puffed up in their own knowledge. They said, “We know those are false gods. We know the idols are just wood or gold or stone. We know there’s just one true God. We know this food isn’t going to get us any closer to Jesus or push us further away. It’s just plain food because those idols don’t really exist anyway. We can go ahead and eat at these temple meals.”

In the church, however, were some people who had been very involved in those kind of sacrifices. They couldn’t separate the eating they were doing now from the eating they were doing when they were worshiping the false gods and idols before. So their conscience was hurt. Their conscience was weak because to eat this meat would lead them back to the idols and away from Jesus.

Paul steps into the situation. He isn’t talking about things that are definitely wrong here. He isn’t dealing with actual worship of the idols. Of course that’s wrong. And he isn’t dealing with adultery, stealing, abusive anger, using profanity, getting drunk, or other things that are forbidden. No, he’s talking about this gray area of whether we can eat this meat or not. Can we eat it in the privacy of our homes? Can we eat it when other people see us?

Paul says, “Yes, you can eat this meat, at least in the privacy of your home, since you know the idol is a fake, and you don’t at all mean to worship it.” And later on, in ch 10, he comes back and says, “No, you can’t be a part of those temple meals, even if it is mostly a social gathering. That meal is participating with the demons that may be present there. That meal gives the wrong public witness to those who are struggling to stay faithful to Jesus.”

But what about when you're with other people at your home or eating at church as a congregation? Can you eat the meat that had been sacrificed to idols then?

Well, here the principle we started with comes into play, "Yes, I can, but, no, I won't because it might hurt someone I'm with."

See, they might think eating the meat that was sacrificed to idols means it's okay to worship the idol too. Out of love for the brother or sister who could stumble, even though you could, you don't.

Paul ends up with, "Yes, I can because it's not forbidden or commanded one way or the other. I have this freedom in Christ to do it. The food isn't going to make a difference one way or the other in my relationship with Jesus. But sometimes I won't eat the meat for the sake of my brother or sister in Christ."

Now, how could you apply this since we don't have the same problem of meat sacrificed to idols today? I read a couple books about this passage and both of them mentioned the same example. I brought with me a glass.

I remember these glasses as a child. Sometimes, at family gatherings my grandfather would bring these glasses out to share a beer with family. So, is it okay to have a glass or can or bottle of beer?

We yes it is. Alcoholic beverages in any form are not forbidden in the Bible. Now, we're not talking about getting drunk. The Bible says that's wrong but it does not forbid drinking in moderation.

But let's take it to where the apostle Paul comes into play. Did you know that in the United States today, one out of six Americans have a problem with overindulgence? They can't have just one or two.

I heard the phrase once that one drink is too many and a hundred is not enough.

Of course, this drinking problem extends into families and relationships with friends and co-workers. For some it is a daily struggle because everywhere you look, there are opportunities to drink. Watch the Super Bowl next Sunday and see how many commercials are paid for by Budweiser.

Although there is nothing wrong with a beer or two, does that mean we should always exercise that right?

How does this play out for those of us in church? Can you take a drink? Yes. But, if you know somebody is there who has troubles with alcohol, it's the time to say: "No, I'm not going to drink. I'll have tea or a coke instead or whatever instead." You say no because you don't want to hurt someone by somehow encouraging that person to take a drink, which would lead to a fall back into problem drinking.

That's how it works. I know I can, but for the sake of someone else, the love I have for my neighbor, my brother or sister in Christ, this time I won't do it.

It's not just drinking. Some people have trouble with spending money. If you have an opportunity to go out with that person and know the difficulty they have with finances, then the invitation is not to go shopping but to do something else. Could you go shopping? Yes. But for the sake of someone who could stumble into some sin, you don't.

It could be eating certain foods when someone is struggling with weight [I held up a brownie mix for desserts]. Yes, I can, but for the sake of a brother or sister in Christ, I won't.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, when I was at my son's baseball games, I wasn't always that good a parent. I ended up yelling at an ump or blaming a teammate or losing my cool.

Do you think we've exercised our freedom to do something but hurt a brother or sister in the process? Of course we have.

Sometimes we've done that without knowing it. I'm sure we've hurt someone because we weren't even thinking about what we were doing. I imagine we've had too many times when we weren't even taking into account someone who is weak in a certain area of life. Maybe we didn't even care if someone was struggling. "I can do it, so I'm going to do it" was the attitude.

Even for those times, though, Paul has some good news in this passage. Remember his words: Jesus died for our brother or sister in the Church. He has died for you and me as well.

Now Jesus could have opted out. He could have used his freedom to say, "I'll just stay in heaven and not worry about the people in need of forgiveness." He could have done that. But He didn't. He did what we needed so we would become His brothers and sisters in his Church.

We are all sinners in many different ways. Jesus went through the agony, the beatings, the bloodshed to become the once for all, onetime sacrifice for all of us.

No sacrifices needed at any shrine. No meat needs to be offered up to Him. No other false gods or idols allowed. We have only one Savior, one Lord, and His name is Jesus Christ! By His sacrifice, He won our forgiveness.

Even more, in the freedom He now gives us, when it comes to those things He doesn't forbid us or command us, He wants us to serve one another.

We don't flaunt our rights, but in love do what we can to keep our brother or sister in Christ from stumbling into some sin. As Jesus has sacrificed Himself for us, He wants us to sacrifice our rights for others.

Or here is another way of putting this: Because of Jesus, I can do this; but because of Jesus and my love for my brother or sister in Christ, this time I won't.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

“Yes, I Can, but, No, I Won't.”

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

- I. Corinth is a good example of “yes I can, but no I won't.”
- II. Various situations today call for the same phrase.
- III. Jesus' sacrifice gives us freedom, but also leads us to love our brother or sister in Christ.