

2009, 2-1 right or wrong, you make the call 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 (Epiphany 4)

I remember watching baseball games on TV as a kid. During those games there used to be little clips of old games shown with difficult decisions to be made by the umpires. These segments were called, "You make the call." After the commercial break you were supposed to decide what the right call was for these tricky plays. The umpires always made the call according to the rule book. But often times you were often left wondering, "What is the right call?"

As a Christian we are often wondering what the right thing is to do. Sometimes we look to the Ten Commandments to set the standards for our life and that is good that we do. But some things we don't have the answers for in the Bible. The Bible might mention them, but we are not sure what we should do.

For example Christians of different denominations believe some things are wrong. Drinking, dancing, smoking, watching movies, or even the ancient practice of eating food sacrificed to idols. Lutherans seem to have the most Christian freedom of all, since we can do all these things.

But some people are baby Lutherans and don't understand these things. Some people are not Lutheran, but Christian, and don't understand these things. And some people are not Christian, and they think we are hypocrites for doing these things.

We are concerned about the non-Christians, but even more about the baby Christians. Paul makes the call to the Corinthians that they should not eat the meat sacrificed to idols because it might cause others Christians with weak consciences to fall into sin and think it is OK to worship other idols.

If you're still following me, you are doing a good job. Paul even says that when we cause another Christian to sin, we too have committed a sin against Christ. Suddenly things are not so cut and dry. This passage makes the Christian life much more challenging because we have to think outside the box of what the Bible says.

Let's ask ourselves a few questions to see what action we might take on a particular issue. Do our actions build others up? Paul says at the beginning of the passage that love builds up, but knowledge only puffs up. Love involves looking at how your life and actions affect others. Knowledge sometimes involves looking at something and thinking, Yes, I have permission and therefore I don't care how it affects others.

Paul says earlier in Corinthians that some things are permissible, but not beneficial. A good analogy would be if a friend was a recovering alcoholic and you invited them over for dinner. You offered them alcohol, knowing full well it might lead them into a binge. They refuse the beverage, but then you get one out for yourself. Then you describe how incredibly delicious it is and you explain how the Bible says it is OK to drink alcohol. You may be correct in your statements about it being delicious and permissible according to the Bible, but what you have done is wrong and a sin.

Sometimes we have to stop ourselves from doing something that is perfectly permissible, but leads us to sin. Some things are like Lays potato chips to us, you just can't eat one. Some things make you eat the whole potato chip bag.

Most often though we are eating whole potato chip bags already, and we are wondering if this is a sin. Maybe it is, maybe not. You make the call.

We may need to ask ourselves some questions to determine whether we have gone too far. Maybe your conscience is weak about a certain issue. Do you try to hide

your behavior? Whenever you are doing something, although it is permissible, ask yourself, "If someone knocked on the door right now, could I open the door without scurrying around and hiding what I am doing?" If you are afraid that someone who is a Christian will find out about it, chances are what you are doing is causing you to fall into sin.

It is all so confusing, isn't it. Even though we know some things in life are clearly wrong, and some things are clearly right, other things are right sometimes and wrong other times. Here is a story about someone who did something wrong, but didn't realize it until they saw their own actions.

A woman was in the airport waiting for a plane. It had been delayed and she was getting tired because it was around midnight. She was tired but also hungry so she went and bought a box of cookies. She sat down and opened her hand bag, searching for a book to read. A man sat down next to her and the next thing she knew, he opened the box of cookies and was eating one of them. This upset the woman, but she did not want to create a scene. Besides, she thought, "Well, he is only eating one." But then he took another one. Rather than grab all the cookies, the woman took one. Then he took one and she took another one. This continued until there was only one cookie left. The man picked up the final cookie and said to the woman, "Would you like to split it with me?" She was so furious that she grabbed it out of his hand, took her bag and stormed away. When she got on the plane she was still fuming. Before she sat down, she reached into her bag to find her book. What she pulled out was a full box of cookies, the ones she had bought!

The amazing thing was that her very attitude could have been just as the man's was, giving and generous. Doesn't this story show sometimes we don't know exactly what is right or wrong but we still have a choice to show love or hate. Before the woman saw her cookies, the man and the woman were in the same situation, but the man acted in love, while the woman acted in rage.

Don't assume that the man was flirting with the woman with his cookies. That would just mess up the whole story. Instead consider how he was generous, even though he had every right to take the cookies and leave.

Just because we have the right to do something, that doesn't make it right. When we are making the call about something we can step outside of the rulebook. We can just do something that is based on love, not on knowledge. We can give to others even though we deserve to have it for ourselves. We may have permission from the rulebook, but not permission to trample on a weaker person.

It is tough trying to decide what the right thing to do is. There are no easy answers. We still have to look at the situation and make the call on how to act. God encourages to build each other up in love, and to take care of someone with a weaker faith, a weaker conscience, and a weaker body when it comes to addictions.

Jesus summed up the commandments by saying that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. Sometimes we need to go beyond just not doing what is wrong and do what is even more right. Sometimes we need to look to the interest of others instead of just our own.

If we look at Jesus we could say hey he was a good guy. He followed the commandments. Never stole from others. He never hurt anyone. But you and I know

that Jesus went beyond the normal rules. He made the right call. He died for you.

Amen.