

“THE CROSS INTO OUR CHAOS: GREY AREAS” (Series Slide)

How do we follow Jesus in 2022? Specifically, how navigate the complexities and difficulties of so many issues that the Bible doesn't address [or at least speak much about].

In short, how do we follow Christ in our culture? What do we do when we encounter areas of life where there is not a clear black and white response? People often call these “Gray Areas,” situations where there is no specific road map, where wisdom may lead us to do one thing in one situation and the exact opposite in another.

Throughout history, we have seen God's people wrestle these questions. This may surprise you, but each generation, no matter what century (BC or AD) has answered in one of three ways. This is true from Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, to the first followers of Jesus living in a very pluralistic Roman culture.

Christians & Culture

- 1) Christians Against the Culture. This response rejects most everything in the culture and often retreats into their own Christian subculture (Amish, Some Monastics). We could call this “cultural starvation.” They say: “If the world touches it, let's forsake it!” Want to go to movies? Nope. Hey, did you download that new app? From the devil... Go to the beach? You might sin... There are definitely things we should reject, but that should not be our general posture toward the culture. #2. . .
- 2) Christians of the Culture. This response receives the culture with little discernment and without the restraint. In the end, Christians end up blending into the culture, where its almost impossible to see a difference between how they live as Jesus followers and everyone else. “If God made it, let's enjoy it!” Encore tonight? I just got paid! Take a hit of this somethin, somethin? God made dirt, dirt don't hurt. Wear this dress? If they look, that's their problem. Download this song degrading women. I'd pass but that beat is fire! We could call this “cultural gluttony.”
- 3) Christians In the Culture. It neither rejects everything nor receives everything. It is not “against” nor “of.” It is not fearful nor naive. Christians in the culture live “in the world” but consistently show they are not “of the world” as they follow the way of Jesus. They receive some things, reject others, and look for opportunities to redeem whatever needs a touch of heaven. We could call this “cultural fitness.”

These followers of Jesus in Corinth faced these same questions. How do we navigate our old way of life with our new way of life? How do we live in the world but not of the world?

Their primary issue centered around food, specifically food that had previously been sacrificed to idols. Was it okay or not okay to eat it?

Believe it or not, Paul takes three chapters to answer this question (covering it in 8, 9, & 10). The first thing he is going to teach us is that we should...

“Bleed Red in the Grey Areas”

Do you see where I'm going with that? You tracking with me? Another way of saying that is this:

The Point: Carry the love of Christ to every person and into every circumstance.

We encounter two major principles: 1) Eat what you want as if it is not inherently wrong. 2) Abstain if it harms someone else's faith.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 (Text Displayed)

1. Love outshines knowledge. (8:1-6)

Once again, we see Paul addresses a concern of the Corinthians. Again, they were surrounded by pagan temples which essentially served as the primary meat markets of their day. Sometimes this meat would be eaten in a temple dining room (basically like our modern day restaurants) or sold for people to buy and cook at home. At times, it was eating as part of a "pagan rite of worship." Paul addresses each context. To give you a preview, he says, "At times, go for it. At times, don't." As one scholar puts it: "It is more about venue than menu."

It seems the Corinthians were divided on this. With some saying, "Never eat it." and others saying: "Eat whenever you want."

We find the latter (the eat whenever crowd), stating their position in verse 1. "Hey Paul, when it comes to food sacrificed in these pagan temples, WE KNOW BETTER. We KNOW idols are false. We KNOW cannot be hurt by eating that Bobby Flay quality BBQ, so we are going to do our thing!"

Paul said it like Lecrae: "Holupwait." Look how he responds.

Paul says, "This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

- Your knowledge is making you arrogant. Pride (elevating self) and love (giving yourself) are not compatible.
- Notice Paul says, "This knowledge." Not all knowledge. That should be comforting for us as we live in the "Athens of America."
- In verse 2, Paul provides a little pastoral correction. "If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know." If you think you have the knowledge market cornered, you betray the fact that you've got a lot more to learn! Moreover, if your pride leads you forsake love, you knowledge is really foolish ignorance.

Then I love what Paul does in verse 3. He weds his theme of "love outshining knowledge" with the truest knowledge. Check this out: "But if anyone loves God, he is known by God."

- The bigger issue is not what you know, but who knows you!
- This perspective resets the heart. This brings us back into right thinking.
 - Corinthians, do you love God? Of course you do. Don't focus on what you know but who knows you!
 - I believe Paul is intentionally reorienting them to grace, because he wants them to live graciously!
 - Let me explain. You talk about what you know. Remember who knows you.
 - God thought of you before you thought of him. God was already looking for you and coming after you before you starting looking for and going after him. (Incarnation. Cross. Return)

- “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)
- You’ve been loved, you are known, so live in a loving way toward one another.

After setting their knowledge within the parameters of God’s love (in vv. 1-3), he moves on to talk about true knowledge in vv. 4-6.

He’s in agreement with the “we have knowledge” crowd.

- Look at verse 4: We know “an idol has no real existence.”
 - Paul’s like, “Yep, that’s true.”
 - Paul knew Psalm 115 says, “idols have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear.”
- Added to that: We know “there is no God but one.”
 - Paul’s like, “Yep, that’s true too.”
 - And then he goes on to make the argument for them in vv 5-6.

There are lots of “so-called gods in heaven and earth.” Greek and Roman mythology. Various forms of idol worships. Today, we would add major world religions (like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) and cults scattered all over the place (like Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christian Science), not to mention competing philosophies like (atheism, agnosticism, secular humanism, and moralistic therapeutic deism). All of these have a set of beliefs by which they explain the world, a view of “god,” and how to experience human flourishing.

Paul then says, of all the 1000s of “so-called gods,” there is only one. Look at his language. I love this.

“YET FOR US THERE IS ONE GOD...”

- This is our confession. One God, who made everything and everything is for him, for his worship.
 - Listen, you were made to know God, love God, and worship God in everything.
 - We hear echoes of the Deut 6:4: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” That echo makes the next line even more potent.
- This is our confession. One Lord, Jesus Christ, who made everything and who keeps us going.
 - Some have called this the most extraordinary statement of Jesus’ divinity, outside of John 1:1.
 - The one God, the only God, the one Lord, the only Lord, is our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Is this your confession?

- We all need that “Yet for me” moment. The moment we realize:
 - Nobody came after me like JESUS
 - Nobody loves me like JESUS
 - Nobody offers me grace like JESUS
 - Nobody rose again from the dead like JESUS
 - Nobody else made me or keeps me going like JESUS
 - Sheesh. Jesus is the one. I’m following him.
- We all need to make sure the people we care about understand what makes Jesus the one true God.
 - When you share talk with people of other faiths (any faith), here’s the best advice I can give you: focus on Jesus.
 - Incarnation - God became Man. (No other story)
 - Crucifixion - (No other God died for us. No other god understands human suffering like our God because our God suffered in our place).

- Salvation by Grace - (Religion says, "earn it." Jesus says, "receive it.")
- Resurrection. (No other god rose from the dead!)
- Keep bringing it back to Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. (Flag?)!
- But do it with the love of Jesus. (Story: Utah - I was getting heated with dudes. I was setting a bad example for our Students.)

T: As you seek to bleed red in the gray areas, remember that LOVE OUTSHINES KNOWLEDGE. That's #1. Then, #2...

2. Love limits freedom. (8:7-13)

7 - Correction: Not all possess this knowledge. Some are newer to the faith. Some see it differently.

- Who might they be? Former association. Former idol worshippers.
 - They used to come and bow down before these idols. They tasted the darkness of that false worship. The smells and the chants brought back horrible memories.
 - This picture reminds me of a trip I took to India, where we visited one of the most important Hindu Temples in a city called Ujjain. It almost felt like you were wading through a thick, unseen darkness!
- Weak Conscience.
 - Conscience - 7, 10, 12 - "inner judge" "moral compass within"
 - "Keeping a clear conscience before God is part of basic Christian living." (Wright)

8 - Paul fundamentally agrees with them about food. Go vegan, vegetarian, carnivorous, keto, g free, d free, sugar free ... Food is not the issue. Paul sounds like his a "Christian of the Culture." Take it, eat it, enjoy it!

9-13 - Then he shifts to where he lives, as a "Christian in the culture" This is the place of nuance. There is the place of wisdom. Why? At times, yes. At times, no. Look at what Paul says, (verse 8 - food isn't the issue, verse 9 - love is the issue).

"But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."

- The word "right" in verse 9 can be translated "liberty." This is where we get the idea of Christian freedom and how love for the community should limit our individual freedom.
 - We all love freedom. We live in the land of the free!
 - I'll never forget a family vacation we took the summer of my sophomore year in HS. We did a massive loop in the Western part of the US (Dakotas, Wyoming (Yellowstone, Jackson Hole), down through Utah and Arizona, back across. We took a quick detour into Montana... Speed limit ("Reasonable and prudent") (c'mon dad, go a little faster. Mom, "Curt, that's fast enough!") - Why? We all love freedom!) [He actually got a speeding ticket in Wyoming a couple of days later - haha!
 - Your freedom may be someone else's prison.
- Verse 10: Even if he feels like he shouldn't, he does it anyway because he sees you doing it. The word for "encourage" can mean to "fortify." Oh, this must not be bad. I mean, I wasn't sure, but if they do it, it must be good for me.

What is the result? The consequences can be very serious.

- In verse 11, Paul says, the weak person is destroyed.
- In verse 12, he says their conscience is wounded (or struck).

- In verse 13, like 9, he says, they made to stumble. This trips them up, causing them to fall.
- All of this to say, it can be detrimental to their faith.

**“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.”
(Romans 14:13-15)**

In all of this, Paul’s greatest concern is Christ. Paul is always looking back to the cross. In verses 11-12, he gives them the strongest possible motivation. Love limits freedom because Jesus died that your brothers and sisters might live free. Don’t do anything that would cause them to stumble. In fact, to sin against them in that way is to sin against Jesus.

Everything flows from a Christ-centered view of the world!

This leads Paul to a radical conclusion, a radical declaration of love in verse 13. “Therefore, if food makes my Brother stumble, I will NEVER eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

I love food, but I love you more!

Conclusion

As we think about the every day decisions we make, go there, listen to that, wear this, don’t say that, in everything, we want to bleed red in the gray areas. We gladly set aside our rights, so that other people can know and experience God’s love.

This reminds us of the greatest act of love. Jesus set aside his rights. He had never sinned, yet he set aside his perfect record, to go to the cross and become sin for us!

The way of Jesus is the way of love!

How do you need to receive his love? For the first time? For strength to live in a culture that is often so contrary to God’s plan?