

Lesson 2 - Stewardship Principles Applied, A Bible Example

Theme Verse for Series: Matthew 22:36-39

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?

Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Summary from Last Week

The New Testament specifically identifies two things as most important. While these two things can be thought of separately, they are complementary and virtually inseparable: Gospel and Love

Nearly all of the New Testament is centered on these principles: the gospel and love.

These are the overarching principles a good Biblical steward must use to guide their decisions and actions.

Rules can be broken, but not the overarching principles.

If the Gospel and Love are most important, how should that affect our stewardship decision-making?

Let’s look at a Bible Example that applies these principles/priorities: Meat Sacrificed to Idols

Excerpts from 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

“Now concerning food offered to idols:”

...

“Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”

...

“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

Excerpts from 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

“All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question”

...

“If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question”

...

“But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you”

...

“Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.”

To summarize:

Paul begins by explaining why it is theologically allowable to eat food sacrificed to idols.
(1 Corinthians 8:1-8).

Then Paul says he will never eat such food if it makes his brother stumble.
(1 Cor 8:9-13)

Later Paul says to eat whatever food is sold in the market and whatever a nonbeliever serves without asking any questions, unless they bring up the topic.
(1 Corinthians 10:23-33)

Paul is saying:

- 1) it is OK theologically;
- 2) if it makes a brother stumble he'll never do it;

Notes:

due to circumstances at the time, it would almost always make someone stumble, be a hindrance, or be a grievance

this passage is sometimes dismissed or explained away by saying something like "if it doesn't cause someone to lose their faith, then it is not causing them to stumble" – that seems to be a much higher bar than scripture sets; Paul is actually setting the bar very low

or, if it is a matter of preference and not a matter of faith, then this passage doesn't apply; however, they often dismiss a brother's thinking without getting to know the other person's perspective – often, these so-called "preferences" are actually matters of faith to that person

- 3) if a nonbeliever offers it he'll eat without asking any questions; but,
- 4) he won't eat it if the nonbeliever mentions it was sacrificed to idols.

Questions:

How does Paul reconcile the different responses to the same topic/issue?

Why did Paul say it was OK to do something closely connected with something sinful (idolatry)?
(1 Corinthians 10:14 says "flee from idolatry")

Why did Paul say he would never do something that was allowable?

Why did Paul say he would do something if a nonbeliever invited him when he just said he would never do it?

Why did Paul say he would not do something he just said he would do if the only difference was the nonbeliever referenced the issue?

Observations:

In each case, the response is determined based on how the others are affected. It is love that governs the decisions (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

Paul did not try to change anyone's mind. Instead, he said the right question is how to build up others. It didn't matter who was the weaker or stronger brother; what mattered was how behavior supports the higher values and principles.

Conclusions:

After Paul addressed the various topics requested in Chapters 7-12, he continues that section by saying: "And I will show you a still more excellent way." [1 Corinthians 12:31b]
[note: this is where chapters and verses may get in the way – 12:31b relates back to 7:1]

Paul then goes on to have a discussion of the importance of love and a description of love ending with: "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Pursue love".
[1 Corinthians 13:13-14:1a]

- Faith is belief/conviction something is true.
- Hope is expectations/world view.
- Love (agape) is behavior/actions/decisions.

After addressing the issues he was asked to address, Paul essentially says there is a better way to address issues and there is a better question to ask.

Paul is responding to the Corinthians by saying instead of asking for a set of rules for all the topics you asked me to address, you should be asking: "How do I demonstrate love for God and others and how do I advance the gospel?"

Instead of asking whether or not eating food sacrificed to idols is allowable, the question should be: "How does what I do and say demonstrate love for God and others?"

We can get the details right, and still be wrong if we violate the higher principles/values that are most important (gospel and love).

If we ignore the weightier matters of the law when we address other matters; have we committed a greater sin even if we get the lesser matters right?

Christians have always struggled with applying these overarching principles of the gospel and love. That is why so much of the New Testament is spent emphasizing their importance.

A good Biblical steward must use overarching principles to guide their decisions and actions.

Framework for applying the overarching principles:

In all our decisions, actions, thoughts, speech, etc., ask ourselves:

"Does this demonstrate support for advancing the gospel and loving God and others?"

Notes for Teachers

Biblical Example of Applying Principles/Priorities: Meat Sacrificed to Idols

[note: this topic is chosen partly because it is not currently an issue in churches but was a significant issue in New Testament times; and, more importantly, it is a good example of how Biblically defined principles/priorities should be applied to real world circumstances.]

Background/context for this topic:

At the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the key question was “how Jewish does a Gentile have to become in order to be a Christian?”. It was determined that Gentiles needed to abstain from 4 things:

- what has been sacrificed to idols, and
- from blood, and
- from what has been strangled, and
- from sexual immorality

The Apostles, Elders of the Church in Jerusalem, and many other key leaders reached this conclusion and it “seemed good to the Holy Spirit”. This should have settled the matter; however, the early church (just like the church today) had people for members and therefore things were not that simple. The topic of meat sacrificed to idols continued to be a topic for at least 50 years and was mentioned in 1 Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, and Revelation.

Paul begins 1 Corinthians with introductions (chapter 1) and then addresses some issues within the church at Corinth (chapters 2-6).

Paul then addresses various questions they asked him (1 Corinthians 7:1a: “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote”). This section continues through at least 1 Corinthians 14a.

After addressing the various topics, Paul says: “And I will show you a still more excellent way.”
[1 Corinthians 12:31b]

There is a better way to address these matters. Paul then goes on to have a discussion of the importance of love and a description of love ending with:

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Pursue love”.

[1 Corinthians 13:13-14:1a]

- Faith is belief/conviction something is true.
- Hope is expectations/world view.
- Love (agape) is behavior/actions/decisions.

Having chapter numbers and verse numbers can make it easier to find scriptures; however, it can sometimes make it harder to follow the larger context and flow by causing us to focus on shorter portions. Removing the chapters and verses can help see how chapters 7-14a fit together.

Full text of excerpts:

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. 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.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— 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. 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. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

“All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.”

Possible Initial Discussion Question Before Starting Lesson:

Is it right or wrong for a man to open a car door for a woman? Why?

Possible Discussion Question:

What are some possible reasons the Bible teaches love is more important than faith and hope?