

**GREY 2: DOES IT SHOW LOVE?**

**1 Corinthians 8:7-13; 10:24**

**I. INTRO**

- A. You would **think** that the best, freest time in life is when you graduate from high school. At that juncture, you don't have your parents, the school, a boss—**anyone**, really, telling you what to do and what not to do.
1. What I find strange is how willingly we give that up. To some extent, we give up that freedom for university, or for a job—but that stuff doesn't usually affect our personal life. When we **really** mess with our freedom is when...and if...we get married.  
  
-Think about it. Before that, you pretty much go where you want to go—without reporting in. You stay out when you want to stay out. You spend your money on yourself without feeling at all guilty about it. You leave your room messy if you **want** to leave it messy; you clean it up if it **fits** your schedule.  
-When it comes to cars? If you can afford it, you buy it—even if you have to mortgage the next half of your life. When it comes to what you wear? You can be as **what-NOT-to-wear** as you want! You can wear downright weird stuff, bizarre stuff—with no one to act embarrassed around you. Like a spouse.
  2. Why would **anyone** ever give up this kind of freedom—where suddenly you have to check with someone else about what kind of car **they** want; where your mess seriously ticks someone else off; where what you wear becomes a **serious** issue?  
-Love makes us do things we'd **never** do on our own!
  3. And **some** people get even more radical in limiting their freedom. Get this—some have **kids!** Yep, that's right. They **voluntarily** invite this little squalling creature—who looks a little like Winston Churchill—into their home. And this little *fuehrer* pretty much dictates life, schedules, homes. I mean, perfectly normal people trade in Corvettes for Chrysler mini-vans. Their bodies get seriously deformed; they start making weird sounds they never made before; they get sleep deprived, stop going out to restaurants, quit jobs, change homes, get up at ungodly hours to take them to hockey or soccer or daycare. This lasts at **least** 18 years! And the **cost...?** You don't want to **know** about the pricetag on this.  
-Why? Something called, simply...**love**. People limit their freedoms, go without, make **huge** sacrifices—and lay their lives on the line...for love. Even when there doesn't seem to be an immediate pay-off.
- B. As His followers, Jesus asks us to limit our freedom to just do what we want...out of love. He sometimes asks us to set aside our rights, limit our spending, and **not** do things we **feel** like doing...out of love. And not just love for a spouse or a child or a friend—but love for someone we may struggle to even **like**. An enemy.  
-When we choose to follow Jesus—loving others in self-sacrificing ways is at the heart of our calling. See, that's what Jesus did—and making us like Jesus is at the heart of what God is doing in us.  
-The principle for the gray areas of life—the areas the Bible doesn't specifically speak to is: **Does it show love?**

## II. LOVE BRINGS OUT THE VERY BEST IN US

A. Let me briefly bring you up to speed on the situation Paul, an early church leader, is speaking to in this church in Corinth. He had advised them previously to not participate in the feasts at the local pagan temples. The people took exception to his advice--mainly because they felt it was no big deal—and because these events were **the** key social connecting points in their culture. It would be a little like someone telling you not to go to the supermarket.

1. So, they said, “Sorry Paul! We **know** better.” They said, “We **know** that idols aren’t real. We **know** that there is only **One** God. We **know** God created everything. We **know** Jesus declared all foods clean. **What’s the big deal?**”  
We **know!**

-Paul actually agrees with all the things they’ve said. But he says, “Love and knowledge are **very** different—and I’m not sure you know the difference. And then he contrasts knowledge and love:

**...While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3 NLT)**

-Sometimes—maybe a **lot** of times—knowledge has been the driving force behind the church and followers of Jesus. And when knowledge replaces love, people get all swelled up with self-importance and pride. And that **always** leads to doing the wrong thing.

Because, see, the driving principle behind everything Jesus is up to in this world is **love**. Knowledge isn’t a **bad** thing—but without **love**, it can be deadly.

2. Does this show love? Is this the **loving** thing to do? is the single greatest principle behind everything Jesus taught. Jesus said, “You know, if you love God with all you are and love others like you love yourself—you will **never** go wrong!”  
-These people in Corinth were bright, talented, gifted people—but they somehow missed this principle in living out their faith, and they almost destroyed their church. And their arrogance and loveless-ness showed itself in situations like this. When they in essence said, “**We** know all this stuff about spiritual reality—what’s the problem?” Paul defines the issue:

**However, not all believers know this. 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. It’s true that we can’t win God’s approval by what we eat. We don’t lose anything if we don’t eat it, and we don’t gain anything if we do. But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble. For if others see you—with your “superior knowledge”—eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol? So because of your superior knowledge, a weak believer for whom Christ died will be destroyed.**

**And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ. So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:7-13 NLT)**

- a. Here's the core of what Paul is saying here. "The only people you're thinking of are yourselves! You think you're right—and that justifies your actions. Meanwhile, you could be leading others away from God—to the point that they totally destroy their lives. **Loving others sometimes means setting aside your rights!** How could you even *think* of destroying the soul of another person—just so you can get a great meal and network? The ultimate sin against Christ is wrecking the soul of another person that He loves and gave his life for!
- b. Now, the whole idol temple thing is a little hard for us to get our heads around, isn't it? Let me try to connect the dots. Here in Canada, most people don't have a problem with having a glass of wine or a beer. The Bible warns about drunkenness, but tells us that Jesus drank wine—and once made 120 gallons of it so family friends, who ran out at a wedding, wouldn't be embarrassed.

-But we **also** know that if a person has been addicted to alcohol, a single drink can put them on a path that destroys their lives and everyone around them.

Let's say you've gone out to a restaurant with them. Would it show **love** to order wine—or drink a couple of beers in front of them? Gray area. Who you're with makes a difference. **Love** says, "Know what? Having a beer or a glass of wine is not that big of deal. Hey—if it will take them where they shouldn't go—I don't need it!"

Paul put it like this:

**So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:13 NLT)**

-By the way, when we serve communion here we use grape juice, not wine, for that very reason. If it caused a problem for **one** person—it wouldn't be worth it!

3. When I was a kid, there used to be a Christian song called, **Just Jesus and Me!** But it wasn't right. Following Jesus is **not** just about Jesus and me. There is an accountability to following Jesus. When we sin against another believer—whether it's by telling them off, by cheating them, by damaging their reputation, by making them feel small and unimportant and left out—we are sinning against Christ. In another letter that deals specifically with the freedom we have through Jesus, Paul says:

**For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."  
(Galatians 4:13-14 NLT)**

- B. The principle I see coming out of this for making decisions in the gray areas of life is this: ***Does what I'm doing show love for God and others—or just me?*** Now, let me tell you where we struggle...and why. We are quite narcissistic. Like, we ***like*** looking in the mirror. We ***like*** the sound of our own voice and our own opinions. We get quite offended when other people don't think we're as wonderful and fascinating as ***we*** perceive ourselves to be.
- Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves—so it's obviously okay to care for yourself and look out for yourself and like yourself ***in the right way***. The challenge is Jesus' command to ***love others*** as you love yourself.
- Paul says:

**Don't think *only* of your own good. Think of other Christians and what's best for them. (1 Corinthians 10:24 NLT)**

1. What's it called when you become obsessed with your own stuff, and you won't share it with other—or use it to help others? When kids do this, we say, "Don't be...***SELFish***."  
-When a person is obsessed with their own appearance, their own career, their own dreams, their own plans, their own needs, we call them...***SELF-centered***.
2. How's God with all that? Well, if you take a look at the ten commandments—the guardrails God has put in place to keep humans from wrecking their lives—it's clear that most sin has to do with me putting myself before God and before others.  
  
-Choosing to love and serve yourself before God and others is relationally ***unintelligent!*** Do that, and you'll destroy your relationships and destroy your life. Narcissistic, self-pre-occupied, selfish people make the worst bosses, the worst employees, the worst friends, the worst spouses, the worst humans—and the worst followers of Jesus.
3. The really ***strange*** thing about all this is that we live in a world that has placed its official blessing on ***self-interest***. Atheists describe their basic moral principle as ***enlightened self-interest***. I.e., be selfish, but don't be stupid about it. People think selfishness is quite normal and honorable. Has anyone every seen a person get an ***award*** for selfishness or self-interest? I haven't.  
-We honor people who ***set aside*** their egos, rights, stuff, lives, reputations, interests, opinions, insights and political views—for something higher. And when people do that—it's called ***love***.

### III. GREY...IN THE GRID OF LOVE

- A. In the world of Canada, 2008--***everything's*** considered gray, right? It's called ***relativism***. In other words, as long as what you do doesn't hurt others—do whatever you

want! This isn't new. In the 1960s and Episcopal priest by the name of Joseph Fletcher came up with a moral philosophy called **Situational Ethics**. According to what he said, **love your neighbor** is the only rule for life.

1. Sounds good, but before Jesus gave that principle, he gave another one. Anyone remember what it was? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Loving God involves obeying Him. Respecting Him and how he's told us to live. Jesus said that we show our love for Him by doing what He says.

-The Bible speaks to **many** issues with **unmistakable** clarity. Murder, for instance, is non-negotiable. So is stealing, lying, rebellion, laziness, hatred, malice, greed, drunkenness, witchcraft, lust, sexual immorality, gossip and slander. These, friends, are **not** gray areas. Out of respect and love for God—we obey Him and put Him first in all we do. Remember what we talked about last week? We do **not** have the authority to paint something gray that God says is black and white.

2. Now, here's where we struggle in living out this principle of **Does it show love**. Good people have **very** different opinions on a lot of things that range from worship to food to entertainment to TV to shopping to politics! This creates conflict.

-I've found that legalism—**I'm right-ism!**-- never dies, it just morphs into newer, cooler things to be **right** about—for others to be **wrong** about. This gets into environmental issues, politics, how to spend money—where people have **very** rigid ideas on how to live out their faith. And there can be a **lot** of pressure from others to try to sway you in their direction. And some people are **very** convinced and **very** dogmatic about these areas..

-Know what the temptation for some personalities is? To fight! "Let the blood run! **We'll** see who's right!" How many of you think that contradicts the **love principle**? How many of you don't? How many of you want to **fight** about it?!

-Others of you don't **like** to fight—so your temptation is to just agree with someone else's list of do's and don'ts to please them. You don't actually agree; you just don't want to light their fuse!

Here's the question: What does fighting over issues accomplish? What does proving **you're** right and **others** are wrong do—for Jesus' kingdom and for relationships? Nothing good that I've ever seen—except create walls with barbed wire at the top. Do you see how what Paul is saying fits? **You don't HAVE to be right! You don't HAVE to win!** So—love, **don't fight!** And don't give away your freedom to please people who **like** to fight!

3. So. What do you do when you have a difference of opinion with another believer? Does showing love mean grinding down your life to follow their rules and fit their expectations? If something you do is going to show carelessness on your part and hurt them spiritually, be really careful. Be willing to give up your rights for their sake.

-But if they're a strong believer—and just being cranky and dogmatic—and they just want you to be like them and follow their list, the answer is—**no!** The Early Church ran into this a **lot**. A lot of priests and Pharisees became followers of Jesus, and they could give chapter, verse and commentary on why people should follow the OT law. For men who had just come to Jesus, they said, "Why don't you come down to the clinic—we have a minor surgical procedure we'd like to perform..."

-Paul never tried to convince these people to set aside their convictions—but he **did** nail their attempts to recruit and intimidate others. In fact, he told one group of people, "You know these people trying to recruit you into their convictions? They're not doing it out of love!

They're doing it ...**so they can boast of their success in recruiting you to their side. That is contemptible! (Galatians 6:13 MSG)**

4. How many of you have some issues in life that you feel **very** strongly about? How many of you have **good** reasons—convincing reasons for what you do—and for what you **don't** do? That's good! Here's where the line is: You have no right to coerce, preach at, guilt trip and judge those who **don't** do have convictions about living out their faith like **you** do.

-Paul, in another passage dealing with some of these same gray issues says:

**Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval. (Romans 14:3-4 NLT)**

5. Again, I think conflict usually comes from the need to be right. Anyone here who **doesn't** love being **right**—and others being **wrong**? Know why it feels so good? It appeals to the basest, ugliest part of us. Our ego. Our pride. And that stuff will junk up everything if we're not careful.

**While knowledge may make us feel important, it is love the really builds up the church. (1 Corinthians 8:1 NLT)**

Love is the bottom line. When we stand before God some day, He won't ask how much we knew, or how much we read, or how many people we convinced to hold to our values.

He'll ask how much we loved. And He'll know whether we left a trail of blood—or blessing!

- B. Love is the foundational principle behind the entire universe and everything in it. Know how I know that? Because God is a relational God—and God **is** love. You have never met a person God does not love and seek a relationship with. And that's why the question, **Does this show love?** is so powerful.
- Paul will go on to say that when everything shakes down in all of God's creation—**love** will be the final question asked. Yes—you spoke **amazing, inspirational** words. But did

you love? Yes—you saw the future so clearly—and spoke into it so powerfully! But...did you love? The sacrifices you made on behalf of others were astounding—moving to all who saw them! But...was it about love, or was it about you? Love never fails. If what you do and say isn't bathed in, saturated in love—it's **nothing**.

1. It's interesting—love provides the **specific** shift you see between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the OT rabbinic tradition, the law, the **Torah** meant, "there's a law, a rule for everything." That's what was behind some of the ridiculous examples you hear about. Especially surrounding the Sabbath. "Don't do work on the Sabbath!" But...what does that mean, Rabbi?" People needed a **rule**. Wear sandals that are sewn, but not sandals that have iron nails—because taking steps, lifting the iron nails—would be working on the Sabbath. A person can bandage a wound, but not put oil on it—cause oil would promote healing, and healing would be work.

-Then Jesus comes and teaches, "Everything you're supposed to do in life can be summarized by the word **love**. Love God with everything, love others as you love yourself—and you'll please God." He teaches love, shows love—then sends his Spirit to give us the power to love.

-You've heard the saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; **teach** a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime. Teach a **woman** to fish, and you feed a village for a lifetime." Actually, that last one isn't in there.

-It's like Jesus said, "Give a person a law, a rule, and you've equipped them for a single situation they face. Teach a person to love God and love others, and you've equipped them to make good decisions for a lifetime." There are many, **many** specific situations that are not addressed between the two covers of the Bible. But the principle of love—and the love of Christ **in** us gives us the discernment we need.

2. One of the problems we may face in learning how to love in this way is dealing with our culture's definition of love. We hear the word all the time in movies and songs and the conversations of everyday life. Most of these definitions of love totally contradict how the Bible defines it. M. Scott Peck, a psychologist who wrote a book on love called, **The Road Less Traveled**, said, "**Of all the misconceptions about love, the most powerful and the most pervasive are that falling in love is love.**"

-Think about language like that: **Falling in love**. It's like love is this hole you lose your balance and fall into. "Help, I've fallen and I can't get up!" And because we're victims of love, we can do stupid, irresponsible things—and it's okay!

-Love is **not** doing what makes you feel good—because love is **not** about you! Love is doing what is **good** in spite of how you feel. Love is the choice to recognize someone's value with your attitude and your actions. Larry Crabb, a Christian psychologist, says, **Love is other-centeredness**.

-Something we think--but would never say is--"I think I could love with other-centered love if people weren't so difficult and arrogant and stubborn and selfish and....**dumb!**" I love **God**—I mean, I really, really, **really** love Him, but a lot of people just annoy me!"

3. In his book, *Love Beyond Reason*, John Ortberg tells the story of his sister's favorite doll, Pandy. Pandy wasn't much to look at. She had lost a lot of hair and one arm was mysteriously missing.

-At one time, she was apparently a beautiful doll—but his sister, Barbie, loved Pandy with a love that was too strong for her own good. Whether it was going to bed, eating lunch, taking a bath--Pandy went with her. John says, "Barbie's love for that doll was, from Pandy's point of view, pretty nearly a fatal attraction." In that condition, Pandy really didn't have much value at all—at least to anyone else. But Barbie's love for Pandy, in her ragged condition, never faded.

-And then John makes this statement, "To love Barbie was to love Pandy. It was a package deal." The whole family found this out one day when they went on a trip. When they were almost back to Rockford, Illinois—having traveled to Western Ontario, Barbie came to the horrifying realization that, like the move, Pandy had been *left behind*. The only option was to drive back to the motel in Canada and search for her doll. They finally found her in the motel laundry room. To love Barbie was to love Pandy. It was a package deal.

- a. There are two truths that come out of this story. We are *all* rag dolls. That's the truth about me—and, I'm guessing—you. I'm a flawed person. Parts of me are broken and worn and stained—and not very attractive. You may be like that too. Pretty shabby—important pieces missing. Can anyone relate? We weren't *created* ragged. There was something noble and great about us; we were made in God's image. In fact, God looked us and said, *very good!*

-But our brokenness doesn't make God want to discard us. Not at all. His plan is to make us new. He starts on the inside—and one day the job will be complete. It's not like we're worthless—and He loves us anyway. Unlike our culture, He sees the awesome value in us—under the raggedness of our exterior.

- b. But there's a different word used for God's love for us—and the love He calls us to. He doesn't love those who are more beautiful and can do more for him. He doesn't love and admire those with high IQs more than he does those who are mentally challenged.

- c. He doesn't love thin more than thick. He doesn't love those with hair more than those who are follically challenged.

-The love God calls us to is way, *way* deep. Paul goes on to say that you can *tell* it's God's love because:

\*It's patient—you know, with those who are slow and weak and thick. It's not rude. It's kind and gentle and good—even when others aren't. Love is not about winning, not about being right, not about controlling others or getting them to do what I think they should.

\*In fact, love does **not** demand it's own way. It's not irritable or short-tempered. Love is never mean or harsh or unforgiving. Love doesn't keep score of how many times it's been wronged. It's never glad about injustice.

\*And, for the record, love never gives up. Never stops. Never loses faith. Is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love **never** fails. Because it is the foundational principle in the universe, love is way more powerful than we'd ever dream. Knowledge makes **us** feel important; love builds others up and makes them feel valued and important. And **that's** we have to ask the question—especially in the gray areas of life, ***Does this show love?***

4. The first truth is...we are **all** rag dolls, frayed around the edges—not all that lovable and admirable if people really knew the truth about us. But the **second** truth from this story about Pandy is, “Love me—love my rag dolls.” That's God's bottom line. Jesus' disciple, John, puts it like this:

**If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters. (1 John 4:20-21 NLT)**

-The opposite of love is not necessarily hate; it's apathy. It's looking right through people as they're either not there—or they don't matter. It's ignoring people's needs as if they're no big deal. And Paul's challenge to us is, “If they matter to Jesus—so much that He'd give his life for them, shouldn't they matter to you?”

-And that's our challenge in our decision-making. How will this decision affect others? Does this decision primarily show love for me, or does it show love for God and for those He's created? Is what I'm doing selfish—or selfless. God says—“If you love me—love my rag dolls!”

5. Know where my mind almost **immediately** goes with this issue of loving? To others. Not in the sense of how **I** am called to love them—what I can do to show extra-ordinary love for them. No. Wish it was so. But my mind **naturally** moves toward judging how well are **they** doing at loving? Particularly **me**? Sick and pathetic, isn't it?

-The Spirit of God doesn't reveal this love principle so we can pass judgment on others; it's for **me**. It's for **you**. God hasn't called me to taste-test other's love—and see if they have the right mixture of love for the poor, the disadvantaged, for God, for those far from God. It's so I can keep **my** compass straight. And if I do that well—it doesn't leave any time or energy for me to be judging and criticizing others!

#### IV. CLOSING

- A. This love principle can affect **everything** we do—even the really, really light gray stuff. When we go to the grocery store: ***Did I show love?***

-When I'm on a date—do I show love for **me**, or the other person? It even comes down to how the kind of condition we leave the bathroom...or kitchen in when we're done in them. Selfishness leaks into every area of life; and that's why love has to make it to every area.

-What about here in this place? Remember the principle, "If you love God, you have to love his rag dolls!" The easy question is, "Did someone make me feel loved and accepted—like I belong?" The harder question is, "As I was in church today, did I make one other person feel that they are loved; that they belong?"

-And that's the question wherever we find ourselves, what ever we do. **Does it show love?** My checkbook and bank account. **Does it show love?** My schedule, my work, my emails, **Does it show love?** Everything I do. **Does it show that I love God and others?**

- B. Love is the most powerful force on this planet! And when we **get** that—what we find is that love is more rewarding than being right! Love is even more powerful than being safe. Watch this video—it will warm your heart!