

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1–13**

**Sermon: Just Because We Can**

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, I Won't."

Paul is setting forth that principle in our text for today: 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." Later on, in chapter 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."

How about today? Did you know that in the United States today, one out of six Americans are problem drinkers or alcoholics? Of course, this drinking problem extends into families and relationships with friends and co-workers.

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 water or juice or soda 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.

Some people have trouble with spending money. They can’t keep their credit cards in line, and they are in debt. 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.

Have there been times when we have 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.

He goes 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. By his sacrifice, he forgives us.

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 are not to assert 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