



FIRST UNITED CHURCH
OF OAK PARK

EVOTIONAL

What Would (Paul) Do?

John Edgerton

September 8, 2020

I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If one of your kindred in Christ is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.

Romans 14:14-15

What people could and couldn't eat was a divisive question in Paul's time. Some Christians felt that the dietary laws of the Hebrew Bible were still binding. Others felt those peccadilloes were just for those who lacked faith. Paul—for his part—was adamant. Christians were free to eat whatever they chose. Bacon. Lobster. Bacon wrapped lobster. Bon appetit!

However, Paul said, some of the “eat what you want” types were going too far. They were eating foods that some people considered unclean. And they were doing it in front of those same people, rubbing their noses in it to make some kind of point. It was the first century equivalent of bringing a rack of ribs to a vegan's housewarming party. Or of entering a business, refusing to wear a mask, then screaming about “rights”.

Paul's point was simple. If I distress other people because of how I'm living, then I'm making the wrong choices. What I'm free to do and what I ought to do aren't always the same. Being Christian means willingly giving up some freedoms in order to better care for my neighbor.

Paul would not need a primer on microbiology before deciding whether to wear a mask. Paul would wear a mask because if he refused to wear a mask he would cause people distress. Paul would wear a mask because it's the Christian thing to do.

Prayer: Help us love our neighbor at least as much as we love our own freedom.