

1Corinthians 18-05-27b

Let's return now to our study in 1 Corinthians chapter 8. We've laid the foundation in the introductory portion here. Actually, Paul has laid this foundation and we're looking at it. And you see the theme introduced here juxtaposed.

We're going to be talking about gnosis versus agape, knowledge versus love. And, of course, you have the vocabulary in Greek that identifies several different kinds of love. You have eros, which is one kind of love.

I don't really have to tell you which kind that is. There is philos, which is like Philadelphia, the philos for your adolfoi, that's love for your brothers and sisters. This, of course, is agapao as a verb and agape as a noun.

And so we have these two and agape or agapao is love in its expression. It is love that is active, love that makes a difference in some way. God did not phileo the world.

God did not have eros for the world. God had, he so agapao-ed the world that he gave his only begotten son. And so you have that and it will be, again, a theme throughout chapter 13.

So, if anyone thinks he has arrived at knowledge, has a perfect tense knowledge, agnosceni, he does not yet know. And it's kind of like Matt pointed out on the break, Matt B., that if you say you have arrived, that's the biggest piece of evidence that you haven't. And if you say we all have knowledge, that's a pretty firm piece of evidence that you really don't.

We should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, Paul says in another place. And if you decide that you've pretty well arrived, you most certainly have not. So, what is the criteria for somebody who does have knowledge in the proper sense? The criteria for somebody who does have knowledge in the proper sense is, they love.

If anyone loves, this one truly knows. Unless your knowledge is working itself out in love, you haven't got knowledge. Think about the Pharisees and how much they quote-unquote, knew.

So, that's our introduction. Now, the area of application, it's illustration for our purposes, chapter 7, the arena was marriage, engagement, man-woman relations. Should they persist? Should they dissolve? Should they resume? Should they start? Should they end? All of that was in the marriage arena.

Now, this is going to be specifically in the area having something to do with false worship, idolatry. So, having gotten the introduction here, in verse 4, Paul now begins the discussion, illustration, and exhortation. Verse 4, 1 Corinthians chapter 8, Therefore, concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other god but one.

So, he starts with the piece of gnosis that they cite. It is true, but what they are doing with this

truth is not right. You can be right about the truth, but you can be wrong about what you are doing with that truth.

Abortion is a blight on society, therefore, I've got my sniper rifle, I'm going to pick off the doctors that do it. I detect the presence of sin in my children, so I'm going to murder my children. Some of these wacko mothers have sawed off limbs and done heinous things to their children because they are out of their heads.

You can worry yourself into a weird state where you do unconscionable things in the name of truth. So, this is why we have this wonderful example of balance. And, here's the thing, as I mentioned in the introduction this morning, in chapter 7, Paul said, You can't just cite the present distress, or you can't just cite the truth that it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

If you're nowhere near a woman, you can't commit sexual immorality, right? I guess, in these days, I should say, if you're not around another person, you can't commit sexual immorality. So, if a man doesn't touch a woman, he's not going to produce fornication or adultery with her, right? So, that would be good. And, Paul says, well, that is a truth, but you've got to balance that with other things.

And, he gave us those things, submission, self-control, peace, formal commands of the Lord. You've got to put those into the mix and produce a decision about your specific situation based on those principles. And, this is where I had a very happy thing happen.

This is where common sense needs to prevail. I had a really wonderful thing happen yesterday. I think it was.

Maybe it was the day before yesterday. I think it was the day before yesterday. It was Friday.

I wrote a big check and signed my name to it. The people who received the check went to cash it and the bank refused to do so. Because my signature did not match the signature that I put on a card 25 years ago.

And, nobody writes that many checks anymore in our household because we do all this online banking and credit cards and such. And, I might write one check a year or every other year. Very seldom.

Well, way back in the day when we first had the account that this bank bought out that became this account, I was not that far out of the reserve. And, I'd been signing meal cards and rifle cards. And, I wanted as short a signature as possible.

So, I put S.C. Hull, S.C. Hull, S.C. Hull. And, they said, what's your signature? S.C. Hull. Didn't even give it two thoughts.

Well, this great big check deserved my great big name on it. So, I signed it Samuel C. Hull. Well, it did not match.

And, it was a big chunk. It was a sizable amount. And, the bank, understandably and laudably, I applaud them.

I was 100% in favor of them being cautious about this. And so, I had to then go through some effort to establish my identity. And, there's a point at which it is up to the local branch.

How much money do they have on hand? How comfortable are they? They have the law on their side that says we need X number of days waiting period before we act on a check like this. And, we need you to come in in person and prove that you are the person that wrote the check. You know, redo your signature card, whatever.

Well, all of that is true. And, all of the rules and regulations are on their side. But, this particular branch of the bank in North Tulsa and the lady who was working this problem talked to me on the phone.

And, on my verbal say-so, she cashed this really big check and gave the cash to the people and they walked out with it. She didn't have to do that. All of the law and regulation was on her side.

But, it was common sense. It was sensitivity to people who were not Caucasians. And, recognition that they might think that they weren't trustworthy.

A lot of things went into the mix. And, she made a really great decision. And, a couple of hours later, I went down there and met her and thanked her and updated all of my paperwork.

And, a lot of their authentication methods, you know, they text you to be sure you are who you say you are. Well, the numbers they had on file were from 20 years ago. And, my stuff is different.

And, through a long, boring story, it had not been updated because there are multiple places where they keep your stuff. And, the place where mine was, wasn't in a place that gets updated. Anyway, it's an illustration to me that you have to use more than one criteria if you are going to arrive at a really good decision.

This was a good decision. I was thankful for this lady tempering justice with common sense. And, not just sticking to, you know, you've dealt with people that just stick to the letter of the rules.

And, it doesn't even make the worst kind of sense. But, they've got the rule on their side and you're just stuck. So, this is what Paul is encouraging here.

You've got to balance. We are not under law, we're under grace. And, you say, wow, what a freedom.

I'm not under law. Grace is tougher than law. Because, you can't just go look up the rule and go thou and do likewise.

You've got to think. You've got to be mature. Rules are for kids.

Don't slam the door. Don't run in the street. Eat your peas.

Make your bed. You can't play until you do your homework. Rules.

I don't call up my daughters when they're in college and say, have you finished your homework? Are you watching TV instead of doing your homework? You know, there's a rule about that. No TV until you finish. They're mature.

They figure out. My brain is just laying there like a piece of wet clay. I'm going to take a break.

I'm going to veg for an hour and then come back to my work and I'll be fresh. That's a mature management of time. It's a mature decision based on balancing a number of factors.

Do you normally try to get your work done and then play? But, we also know that all work and no play dulls you. So, it's a function of maturity. Paul is calling the Corinthians here to mature reflection and balancing things.

And when you have multiple factors that have a lever in the circumstance that pertain, which one outweighs the others? It depends. Should we function in accordance with what we know to be true? Yes. But, are there other factors that might outweigh that? All things are lawful.

All things are not edifying. All things are lawful, but I will not be controlled by any. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.

And sometimes, even though something is perfectly right in terms of truth, it's not perfectly right in terms of action. So, the issue here, and we need to clarify exactly what's going on. This has been commonly understood to be marketplace food that was offered to idols.

You go, it's laid in front of a stone image for an hour, and then it's sold. And so, when you read concerning eating of things offered to idols, we need to understand what this is. And this is the second place where this anticipates what's coming up.

You remember chapter 10 and the Lord's Table? Has to do with what you eat and what you drink, right? Well, it begins back here, right here. Because this is not marketplace food being discussed. He's going to talk about that later on.

But right here, look down at verse 10. Now, the Corinthians knew this without having to look at verse 10. We have to look at verse 10 because we're not living in Corinth.

If anyone sees you who have knowledge, you who possess gnosis, eating in an idol's temple, totally different thing. What we're discussing here in chapter 8 is not, this T-bone steak was down at the temple of Demeter, and now I'm buying it and frying it. This is a meal at the temple.

This is meat offered to idols. This is a meal at the idol's temple. Now, how do I know this? First of all, going to the place of worship for meals was a commonplace.

And what I'm about to tell you, just put a little sticky on it to come back to it and think about it with reference to what is commonly called communion or the Lord's Table or the bread and the cup, the cracker and the Kool-Aid. This bears, and that's why Paul is going to bring it up a little bit later. It was customary to eat meals at the place of worship, not like just a potluck at the Baptist church once every three months.

This was a regular and frequent occurrence. There were constantly meals and banquets. It was almost like a restaurant, but it was like a restaurant that reserves a room for people to rent it and have meals there.

You know how a lot of times they've got one in the back and you sit in the booths and back there with the tables. Somebody's rented that for a birthday party or an anniversary or whatever. Well, the temple did this and there were so many people, there was constantly meals going on at the temple.

They had a kitchen, they had food there. You could eat there pretty much any time, but especially by invitation. But this went back centuries and even millennia.

It was customary in Canaan. You can turn to Judges 9.27 for documentation of this. Judges 9.27, Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem, and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

So they went out into the fields and gathered from the vineyards and trod them and made merry. And they went into the house of their god and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. They prepared the meal and went down to the place of worship and ate it there.

This was a custom in Canaan, and there's a bunch of archaeological support for this as well. But it's right there in the Bible in Judges 9.27. It happened in Egypt. Turn back a little bit further to Exodus chapter 32.

And by the way, in Egypt, these meals were accompanied by sexual activity. Exodus 32 verse 6. In the context of the golden calf, this is the god that brought you out of the land of Egypt in verse 4. Aaron sought, he built an altar before it. Aaron made a proclamation and said, Tomorrow is a feast of the Lord.

They rose early the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. This is promiscuous play.

But where did they get this notion? They've been living in Egypt for a couple of centuries. And that's what they saw in Egypt. And so here's the god, the idol that brought you out of Egypt, the golden calf.

Well, what do you do? You eat a meal and have promiscuity going on. So they didn't think this up from scratch. They did what they saw done in Egypt.

Same thing in Moab. You turn over to Numbers 25, and you remember this whole thing with Balaam helping the Moabites to subvert Israel. So in Numbers 25, 1 and 2, Israel remained in the Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.

They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods. See that? This is in the temple of their gods in Moab. The people ate and bowed down to their gods, and they were joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

So this is a temple of Baal, and the Moabites invite them to eat, and they sit down to eat and drink and rise up to play. It's a common feature of ancient Near Eastern culture across borders, across countries. Daniel chapter 5, which you don't need to turn to it, you'll remember what happens in Daniel 5. That's Belshazzar, the handwriting on the wall.

What are they doing? Read the first few verses of Daniel 5. This is a big idolatrous feast in Babylon. It was also a feature in Israel, and of legitimate worship in Israel. Turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 14.

This is going to be Deuteronomy 14, 22 through 26. You shall tithe the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. Eat it before the Lord your God in the place where He chooses to make His name abide.

This is a grain-based meal. This is pre-GMO grain. Dr. Perlmutter wouldn't have any heartburn with this.

You shall eat before the Lord your God in the place where He chooses to make His name abide the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks. That'd be what I'd be eating. That you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

See that? Exodus chapter 24, verse 11. I like riffling the pages of my Bible. Observe what I command you this day.

Behold, I am driving out from before you the... That's 34. I want 24. Driving out those people that are doing those idolatrous practices.

But 24.11 says... This is the elders going up the mountain Sinai and seeing the throne in the midst of the sea of glass. The elders of Israel saw God there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand.

So they saw God and they ate and drank. They must have brought food with them. Maybe they ate angel food.

It doesn't say where the food came from. Maybe they went up and they ate in God's presence.

It was a custom in the ancient Near East.

There's other passages I could give you. 1 Samuel 9.13. 1 Kings 1.25. Hosea 8.13. And more by implication than by statement. Jeremiah 35.2. And interestingly one that you don't have to look up because you know it by heart.

Psalms 23.5.6. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.

That's a meal context. So not hard to imagine that in Corinth it was a commonplace and a social custom. We know from secular Greek writing that guys like Aristides, or Aristides depending on if you went to school in Oklahoma or not.

If you went to Oklahoma it's Aristides. But people in the East say Aristides. The British say Aristides.

Anyway he's describing the cult of Asclepius. And Asclepius I think was a god of healing and what not. He had by the way a prominent temple in Corinth.

One of the biggest temples in Corinth was to Asclepius. And they have found 13 papyrus invitations. It's really cool.

I've got a couple of invitations from my great grandparents from the late 1800s. And they had just built, all the community got together and built a house. And there's an invitation that says this house having recently built and these floors having been just finished and I can't remember the exact, it's very clever wording.

But it says we need to come and dance on these boards to be sure they're down good. So come Friday night and we're going to dance down these boards and make sure this floor is firm. But it's an invitation, it's on a little card.

I've got invitations to the wedding of my great grandparents up in Janesville, Wisconsin in 1884 or something. And it's really cool. Well some of these invitations are actually in the ancient world.

They're on papyrus. And they found 13 papyrus invitations to meals at the temple of Serapis, S-A-R-A-P-I-S. And one at the temple of Demeter and one at the temple of Isis.

So 11 of them are for Serapis. I'll read you one of them. And these are, by the way, Oxyrhynchus papyrus, Oxyrhynchus papyri.

It's O-X-R-I-N-C-H-U-S. Oxyrhynchus. They're very well known.

And I'm tempted to say, but don't quote me on this, that they may be the ones that stuffed these alligators that they found in Oxyrhynchus and they found these stuffed alligators and inside was all this really interesting papyri. Don't quote me on that. I tend to get things mixed

anymore.

But Oxyrhynchus is a collection of very important papyri, let me tell you. They are P-O-X-Y. There were biblical texts included in these.

But this is secular. And amongst the Oxyrhynchus papyri are some of these invitations. And here's one.

It says, Chiramon requests your company at the table of the Lord Serapis at the Serapium, that's the temple of Serapis, tomorrow the 15th at 9 o'clock. It's a little invitation. And there's another one where somebody's little daughter is celebrating her first birthday and they're inviting everybody to come celebrate the first birthday at the temple of Serapis.

And there was also a big temple to Serapis in Corinth. So what you realize is where we would go rent a hall for a wedding reception or rent the back room at some fancy restaurant and we did this at the temple. So it's a big part of social life in Corinth.

It's normal. Everybody does it. You want to have a get-together, your house is not big enough, you do it at the temple.

And in the process, we dedicate this little girl to Serapis and we're so thankful to Serapis that we have this happy occasion Chiramon has invited us to. His crops came in double or whatever. And so there is a component of both worship, because at the church there is usually a prayer and acknowledgement of God's blessing and so on and then you have your potluck or you have a celebration of a wedding or whatever.

Even a more somber occasion after a funeral. You go back and share a meal and reflect on our knowledge of theology and whatnot. So this is what informs chapter 8 and everything that follows it.

Think now. Think about the Lord's table Are you, when your brother who is unsaved and still worships at Demeter or Isis or Serapis or Asclepius says, hey, you know, your niece is having her 5th birthday. Let's go down to the temple and have a big celebration.

What are you going to do? Are you going to still go down there and by your presence here is worship and feasting and adoring and acknowledging this God and sometimes it's kind of an orgy. It starts with a meal and everybody gets happy and clothes start disappearing and everybody gets, not for the little kid's birthday hopefully, but for other occasions. My son just graduated from the University of Corinth and he and his friends are all getting together type of thing.

So now that you're a Christian what do you do? So now you put a book mark there for future reference. That's what he's going to be talking about to them they say in they're Paul has said, you've got to put some distance between yourself in these idolatrous practices. You, as a Christian, can't be seen mingling and celebrating down at the idol temple.

That just doesn't wash anymore. Any more than you could go down and eat a meal at a house of prostitution or something. You're going in and out of there and you say, well, but I'm not actually buying the services of the prostitute.

I'm just down there for the meal. I just look at that magazine for the articles. It's this kind of a thing.

And the word from Paul is, no more going to the temple of Asclepius, or Isis, or Demeter, or Serapis. You're cutting yourself off from a significant part of social life here. Paul says, look, this matters.

You can't continue to be identified with this and what goes on in these things at that place. So when he says, concerning things offered to idols, it's not just the food. It's the meal and where the meal is.

The Corinthians know that. We find it out down in verse 10. If anyone sees you who have knowledge, see, he's back to this knowledge.

You're claiming your knowledge that an idol is nothing and that there's one God and that you've acknowledged Him. And so based on that knowledge, you're saying, well, there's no harm going to the temple. I don't believe in this God, but it's a good meal and a lot of fun and let those people do their thing.

Paul says, yeah, you've got this knowledge and it's right, but you're doing wrong. It's wrong for you to go to the temple, even though you're right that the idol is nothing and there's one God. You see it? So back up in verse 4, concerning the eating of things offered to idols.

Yes, we know that an idol is nothing in the world and there's no other God but one. And verse 5, even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God. Now, you can put another bookmark there by verse 5, because when you get over a few pages, Paul is going to say, when you eat at that table, you're eating food for demons.

And when you drink that cup, you're drinking the cup of demons. You see a little bit of this in 12.2, you know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. And we'll see when he specifically identifies them as demons.

But this is what is at issue. Even if there are so-called gods, and this is a sideways allusion to, there is actually some supernatural activity associated with demons, they are gods so-called. They are not gods, but they are entities.

There are many gods and many lords, yet for us, one God the Father, of whom are all things. And that's what they cited up above. There is no other God but one.

And we are for Him. All things are from Him, and we are for Him. And one Lord, Jesus Christ,

through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

And people that want to start parsing the nature of the Trinity, and is Jesus God, and so on, will come to a passage like this and say, well see there is only one God, and Jesus is not Him, because here Paul is distinguishing that Jesus is Lord, but He is not God. This is not Paul's point. Paul is not pronouncing on the Trinity.

He is emphasizing the term Lord. Remember the invitation? Lord Serapis. I invite you to a meal for Lord Serapis at the Serapium, the Serapis Temple.

Well they are calling these idols Lord, and he says if you want to call something Lord, call the Lord Jesus Lord. If you want to talk about a God, Isis, or Asclepius, then talk about the one God from whom everything derives, and for whom we were created. But he is not saying Jesus isn't God, or that God isn't Jesus, or, I clarified for you last time in anticipation of this, the nature of the Trinity is very simple, it's God incorporated.

So, verse 7, however there is not in everyone that knowledge, for some with consciousness of the idol until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled. If you think you are doing something you should not do, and you are doing it when you should not, when your conscience says I shouldn't be doing this, even if it turns out to be harmless, you are wrong because you have breached your God given conscience. Your conscience was telling you something, and with the word of God and the Holy Spirit informing that conscience, and maybe you don't know enough to know that actually that thing is okay, we think well it was okay because the consequences were harmless.

I didn't know what I was doing was okay, I thought it was wrong, but it turned out it was okay. I was doing 35 in a 25 mile an hour zone, but then when I drove by there the next day I realized that they had changed the sign and it actually was 35. If you went 35 when you thought it was supposed to be 25, you made a decision to break what you thought was a rule, and it's the decision that counts.

It's not the reality. Your conscience either accuses or excuses, and God is looking at the heart. Are you trying to live in the light of your conscience? So if somebody thinks a thing is wrong, and they approve it and do it in spite, they are breaching their conscience, and God says that's wrong.

Now what about the flip side of that coin? What if I think something is okay, and I do it because I think it's okay, but it is actually wrong? He's not addressing that situation here, and it's a separate discussion, but I will tell you in short that this does not cut both ways. This is our unknown sins. This is why we confess what we know to be wrong, what our conscience tells us was wrong, and God cleanses us from all sin.

And if we're starting to get in trouble with things that we don't know, that's what the Holy Spirit is for. We are going to find that we have an instinct. Even if we don't know, we will be troubled

when we're doing a wrong thing, and our conscience is going to start to question that thing.

And if you go ahead and do it anyway because you don't know of any rule that says you can't, and you violate your conscience, you're back on this page. So we rely on the Holy Spirit to inform our conscience when we don't have knowledge, but when our conscience tells us that something is questionable or suspicious or wrong, we need to heed our conscience. And we also need to respect the conscience of others.

I may know a thing is okay, and my conscience is untroubled by it. Take the example of drinking wine. You say drunkenness is a sin.

That's a clear command of the Lord. How about peace? If I get cantankerous when I start to feel alcohol in my blood, well, I'm violating the principle of peace. If I get argumentative, if I get to strutting around and knocking things over with my elbows, that's not good.

If I lose my self-control, if I get too happy, if I say things I shouldn't say, I lose control of my tongue, I lose control of my body, I lose control of something. You get your principle of self-control from chapter seven, right? I find myself resenting authority when I, and I'm not talking about drunkenness, I'm just talking about the reason people drink alcohol is it alters the way you feel. It is a good anesthetic, a light anesthetic.

It is a good relaxant. It is a physical depressant. Why is it used in medicines? Why do so many medicines have an alcohol base? Because it is effective in alleviating some physical discomfort.

But if I begin to think bad thoughts about authority and I'm violating authority, violating self-control, don't tend to maintain the peace, I've roomed with a guy in Okinawa, you give that guy one beer and he's going to argue with everybody in the room. I had to leave a place where I thought the Japanese, he went in and started talking about Hiroshima and Nagasaki in an all Japanese context. We'd gone there for the food and then he had a beer and then he started looking over at tables and saying, Hiroshima, so and so, Nagasaki, so and so.

I said, Bob, I will see you later. I'm out of here. And I left him.

I told him to shut up and he wouldn't. Anyway, self-control, disturbing the peace. You don't have to be drunk for these things to start to take effect.

If any of those things pertain, you should keep totally away, not that it is wrong to drink wine, but if you can't drink it without getting drunk, you shouldn't have it anywhere near you. If any of these other things pertain, it's off. Not because it is inherently a sin, but because of its concomitant effects.

Now, what if none of those pertain, everything is fine, but somebody in your immediate periphery had an alcoholic in their family, or maybe they are a recovering alcoholic, or maybe they are concerned about alcoholism, or they believe from their upbringing in the Bible that that is a sin. And Jesus didn't make wine out of water. He made grape juice.

And the cup that he shared with his disciples the night before he was crucified was some supernatural grape juice that didn't have any alcohol in it. And believe me, there are swaths of people for whom this is absolutely true. For you to sit there and drink a glass of wine in their presence, or for them to come to your house and you've got three or four bottles of Riuniti or whatever it is out, you are now violating a new and fresh principle, and it is the principle here.

I will not cause somebody with a less informed conscience, which is a weaker conscience, to stumble until that person has an understanding. And it's not your place to try to give them the understanding. Don't you know this is all okay? Here, have a glass.

You shouldn't. Love is beneficial to others and is what? Sacrificial towards self. Even though it is okay, I will not do it if it produces some sort of harm or detriment to my brother, because the law of love trumps the truth of correctness.

It is true that there's nothing wrong with it, with all of those caveats. You're not breaking any of these other principles. But even though it's true, it's not right for you to exercise your conduct in that truth at somebody's expense, causing somebody to stumble.

That's what we're talking about here. There is not in everyone that knowledge. Not everyone knows that because there is only one God, and because you belong to Him through Christ, all of this does not pertain and matters not.

And you can go visit a Buddhist monastery or a temple, or you can go visit any other kind of worship facility. You can go into a mosque and look around. You have not sinned.

But if you go to the mosque regularly, and if you sit down and participate in Hindu activities that include recognition of Vishnu and all the rest of it, you can cause other believers to stumble. Because, well, are you saying that there are many ways to God, and all of them are right, and it's okay? There is not in everyone that knowledge. Some, with consciousness of the idol, until now, eat it as a thing offered to an idol.

If they were to go, they would be all messed up. And if you eat it in their presence or in their sight, you're troubling their conscience. And now you're making an issue of yourself.

The focus is off of the Lord. It's off of how to produce the fruit of the Spirit. And it's on, well, look at these practices.

Look at what you're doing. Food does not commend us to God. Neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

The eating itself. There is a different principle. Even though you're confirming the correctness of the truth that there's one God, and so you eat or you don't eat, that's not what makes it right.

It doesn't commend you eating or not eating. What commends you? Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak. Instead of focusing on your

gnosis, you need to focus on your agape.

Am I the biggest benefit I can be to others? Not, am I the most correct in terms of my parsing of the doctrinal scriptures? What is happening with love? Anyone sees you, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? Well, I see Sam doing that, so it must be okay, but he's now conditioning his behavior on what I do instead of what his Holy Spirit and Word of God informed conscience tells him to do. And there are people for whom the answers will be different. There are people for whom the answers will be different.

God the Holy Spirit may tell somebody in their conscience, drinking even beer and wine is wrong for you. Why would the Holy Spirit do that? Isn't it okay? Of course it's okay. Jesus turned water into wine.

The head of the feast said it was the best wine he'd ever tasted, basically. You save the good stuff till last. And that ain't no grape juice.

Why? God the Holy Spirit, being God and being omniscient, knows that for some people, putting a block on any contact with that is the best thing for them. And he'll put it in our conscience, don't even go down that road. That is going to be a temptation above what you are able to bear.

And once you go down that road, it's going to take a supernatural act to get you back. Just don't start. Stay away.

God gives us guidance for our own blessing and our own protection. And in some of these quote unquote doubtful things, or things that may vary among believers, you don't trust somebody else's conscience. Now you're setting them up as your guide.

You might as well start talking to the priest and call him Father. You might as well lift somebody up on a pedestal. I mentioned in the first session that there's this guy that has been fired because of some things that he said that he thought were right.

And you can put somebody up on a pedestal, and then when they fail, him and the pedestal and the whole concept that anything is right or wrong can go by the wayside. You shouldn't idolize people, or look to them for guidance, or make them monuments to any sort of positive thing. We are all people and we have to function on the basis of our own conscience.

That may be good for you, but I'm living my life before the Lord under the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the light of the truth of the Word of God. And I want my life, by my understanding, to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and be honoring and pleasing to God the Father. And that's between me and Him.

It's me and the Father, me and the Son, me and the Holy Spirit. Not me and Bob, or me and Sam, or me and anybody else. You can't implicate people in this.

You can get godly counsel, you can learn, you can grow, your conscience might change over time as you learn. You might realize, hey, you know what, this is really okay. And if God the Holy Spirit confirms that conscience in your own soul, okay fine.

Only you know the answer to that question. You can say, guess what, the Holy Spirit just told me that pornography is great. Nah, I don't think so.

This is honesty and clarity and having that clear eye between us and the throne of grace. And if you're going to deceive yourself, nothing's going to help you. But if you're asking and seeking and knocking and wanting to live the best possible life you can in service to the Lord Jesus, in gratitude for salvation, you're not going to let yourself fool yourself.

And there are some things that for some of us are just never right. There are those same things for other people that are okay under limited provisions. So that's what he's talking about here.

I don't just go to the gnosis and say, this is okay. I look at the effect on my fellow believers and the law of love and the sacrificial nature of love will prevent me from doing a thing that my gnosis tells me is fine. Because of your knowledge, verse 11, shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? For whom Christ died.

How valuable is that person? And we're talking about believers here. We're not saying you've got to live your life to not offend unbelievers. It's a brother for whom Christ died that circumscribes this particular principle.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Notice you've got scondylia in there twice. If it makes him stumble, I'll never eat it, because I don't want him to stumble.

Stumble. A stumble goes beyond frowning. There's some people that there's just no pleasing them.

But stumble means this is somebody walking toward growth, walking toward and making progress in maturity and in faith, and you're tripping them. You're slowing down their progress. If this is a wayward believer that doesn't know up from down anyway, there's no helping them.

What you do and don't do isn't going to matter. The principle here is love for those who are growing, and you are not going to be an impediment to their growth. You're making them stumble in their growth.

Some people stumble no matter what you do. We're not talking about them. Well, that is all of chapter 8. We covered a whole chapter in one morning.

But it is an introduction, and it is a turning point, and it gives us the guideposts for everything that's coming up in these next several chapters. So with that in mind, we'll anticipate looking at chapter 9 and following next time. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word and the wonderful message couched in the words of the Apostle Paul to help us in practical ways to judge our path each and every day. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate these truths and help us see their pertinence and applicability in our individual lives and situations so that we can all move closer to the Lord Jesus in terms of our own maturity and reflect the glory of Jesus to an ever-darkening world. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.