

1Corinthians 18-06-03a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Greats and Truth Bible Church. It's been a eventful weekend for many of us near and far.

It's great that you're all able to be here and join us, whether near or far. And we will be continuing this morning, our study in First Corinthians, picking up at chapter nine. First Corinthians chapter nine.

For the record, this is the 3rd of June, 2018. And as we continue our study, we'll begin by asking God's blessing on our fellowship and on our time of investigation into this particular portion of a rather lengthy letter that Paul wrote to this group, a church that he founded, something to which he's going to make reference in the portion we look at this morning. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin.

Father, we're so grateful for your grace and your love for us expressed in and through the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue us from a richly deserved fate, delivering us from our sinful state and giving us the opportunity to be not only not judged, but to bear fruit, to reflect your glory, to be in your presence, to be related to you permanently and eternally. We thank you for the opportunity to spend this time together around the study of your word and seeking a better understanding and the opportunity to exploit these wonderful gifts that have been given to us in the Lord Jesus. We pray that as we look at this passage together, that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher and will enliven it and make it clear and pertinent for each one of us so that we'll both be blessed and be a blessing to one another and to the world in which we live and move, that we can shine as lights in the midst of a ever-darkening generation.

And just as the Lord Jesus himself was lifted up to draw people to himself and to you, that our lives can do the same. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we have done in the preceding eight chapters of 1 Corinthians, it's good to get a little bit of context. It's good to see what it is we're about to look at. You'll remember just by way of review that Paul is writing to a group that has some issues with leadership, with his apostolic authority, whether or not he has the right to give them guidance in their personal lives.

He has in the recent chapters addressed two areas. One was marriage for various categories of people, and more recently in chapter 8 concerning things offered to idols. And we have stepped back because we don't typically have in our particular little neck of the woods, we're not fraught with a lot of marriage issues, nor are we living near a great idolatrous temple with a prosperous prostitution ring going on.

And so we tend often to give this particular portion of Corinthians short shrift. But as we have seen, this is really a paradigm or an example that gives us the chance to look at the principles that are involved that Paul suggests for application. So while the Israelites may be in the wilderness for 40 years, when we study that story we don't think, well the next time I'm in the

wilderness this will be a really helpful passage.

We find the principles of application. So it is critical to remember that that's what's happening here. And when the Corinthians are questioning Paul's apostolic authority, what is the parallel for us? Do we sometimes think that maybe the scriptures and the guidance that have come to us, that has come to us in particular in the New Testament, may not really be pertinent to our modern day? They didn't have technology, they didn't have the kind of culture and communication that we have today.

And so do we tend to limit the applicability of scripture to just certain areas of our life? We say, well it's this little moral component over here and I'm not guilty of these particular kinds of sin. But in the same way that the Corinthians pushed away Paul's authority in certain areas of their life, there is the potential for us to do the same. So as we step back and say marriage is the particular story problem here in 1 Corinthians where these principles are emerging, idolatry and fornication and nefarious practices in the idolatrous realm and these communal meals are a story problem where we are seeing the explication and the demonstration and the illustration of these principles.

And so rather than saying, well that was then but this is now, what we want to find are those timeless things that apply. So having said that, let's remember that in the lead-up to this, the Corinthians, why is he even talking about whether it's good to touch a woman or not? Why is he talking about whether it's good to spend any time thinking about whether or not to eat meals associated with idolatry? Why are these subjects presented here? How did that happen? Somebody wrote him a letter. Exactly.

He's been written a letter. So we're in this mode now. I want you to get in this mode of stepping back from Corinth and saying it's now Claremore or it's Dallas or it's where I live.

So what's the analogy to writing a letter and asking a question and getting back an authoritative divinely inspired response? We pray about things, don't we? Don't we send a, I mean, wouldn't it be great if you could actually write a letter and, you know, put the zip code for heaven. It goes up there. Lord, what should I do in this situation? I've got, I've got, it's kind of complex.

I know other people in this situation have done X, but then I know still others that have done Y and they all seem to be, you know, nice people and not criminals or nefarious people with a lack of ethics and morals. So what should I do? I've got a little bit different spin in my situation. Remember in the marriage thing? Well, what if I'm widowed? What if I'm married to somebody who's faithless? What if I'm just engaged and not married? And I look at Paul and he's not leading about a wife.

And so, you know, each little situation is different. Wouldn't it be great when you're facing a decision point, get out a piece of fool's cap, get out your plume and your ink bottle because, you know, going to heaven, you want it to be classical and sort of, you know, timeless for the

ages. And so you get out your quill and you dip it like George Washington and you write a missive and you fold it up and stick it in the box.

And a few days later, here comes a reply. This is what the Corinthians did. They've got an apostle that they can send a letter and he sends them back.

Here's your answer. It's going in the Bible. People are going to be reading this thing for hundreds of years, thousands of years.

I want that. I want the address to send a letter and I get a divinely inspired reply addressing my particular situation. Well, of course, now that we have the completed canon scripture, this basically is the answer to whatever question you want to write.

But it's in a form where we have to figure out which part of this answers our question. So this is a part that has to do with interpersonal relations. That's why we have chapter seven.

That's why we have chapter eight. Now concerning the things that you wrote about, you could interpret this, you could write out of the margin. Now concerning the things you are praying about, right? You had a question, here's a divinely inspired answer.

And we say, well, but my question is not about marriage. My question is not about idols. No, but the answer to these questions is the same answer for our questions.

We just have to, it's not a train that leaves Chicago heading for Boston, but the formula is still going to work. Once I learn it, right? So with that in mind, as we come, keep that in mind now, as we come to chapter nine, you remember, and we have to lead into this just a little bit. I don't want to review the previous two chapters entirely, but back up a little bit.

What is he talking about? We call this the law of love. All things, there's a lot of things I could do, but out of sensitivity to my fellow believers in my periphery, I will sacrifice that right. That's what he was, we just saw that last week, right? So he ends chapter eight by saying, because of your knowledge, shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? It's not going to literally kill him, but in what sense is he going to perish? If you've got a tree, I've been, Patti, bless her heart, has been nurturing along.

I remember those grapefruit seeds I planted, I don't know, eight years ago. And we've just been nurturing these things along. Why am I fooling with them? Why did I plant the seeds? I had some of the best Texas ruby red grapefruit I've ever had in my life.

It was succulent, it was dark, it was just the best pink grapefruit I think I've ever eaten. And so I got the seeds, and I thought, I wonder if these will grow, and put a bunch of them in a little styrofoam cup, and then from seedlings, I planted eight or ten seeds, and the two strongest have survived, and we've got them each in a pot. Now they're trees.

What is my hope for these trees? Why do you plant a fruit tree? You can answer. Fruit, right?

Fruit. Now these things may be the stock, you know, that they graft in, and they're weird.

I looked them up the way a grapefruit tree is supposed to look, and mine's got like mutant leaves. And I never knew that grapefruit trees have thorns. These have got spiky thorns.

I don't know exactly what it is I'm growing. It could be some GMO thing from a laboratory. I don't know what it is.

But what I'm waiting for is one of these days, there'll be a flower, and then there'll be a bulge, and it's going to turn into a beautiful ruby red grapefruit, or ten or twelve. But if it doesn't, the purpose of the fruit tree has not been fulfilled, and it's what's going to happen to it then. It's going to perish.

I don't need a freeze-sensitive tree with spikes and no fruit. So when he says, for the sake of conscience, you don't want a fellow believer to perish, this is in the sense of knocking them out of fruit bearing, of fulfilling their purpose. You've become a distraction.

You have led them directly into subjectivity, where they've got their eyes on you, and their eyes on themselves, and they're making comparisons, and they're not looking to the Lord and living as they should. So, you wound their weak conscience. You sin against Christ.

Why? Why is sinning against a fellow believer sinning against Christ? Isn't Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, and they're down here? How can sinning against a person be sinning against Christ? What are we? Because Jesus is sitting up there next to the Father. What is his presence on this earth? You're looking at it. It's us, and to sin against each other is to sin against the Lord.

Big point coming up on this in a couple of chapters, right? Partaking in an unworthy manner type of thing, sinning against the body of the Lord. This is all in mind. So, you're sinning against Christ.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat food. Now, for you woodenly literal people who say, if it says it, I believe it, and that settles it. If Paul says, if eating food offends somebody, I will starve.

Context, right? If eating a particular kind of food offends a certain subset of believer, then I will never again eat that food in their presence. I am not going to offend their conscience and cause them to perish, right? But you'd be amazed. You know, there are people who vary their literal interpretation of the Bible in weird places.

I knew a guy that said, well, when Paul says he's the worst sinner that ever lived, Paul, Saul of Tarsus, literally was the worst, worse than Hitler, worse than Mussolini, worse than Pol Pot, worse than Ho Chi Minh. You name anybody in history, Paul was a worse sinner. Well, context, context, context.

What is the emphasis? What is the figure of speech? This is all something we need to be sensitive to as we go into chapter nine. If food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat lest I make my brother stumble. When it comes to a matter of stumbling, I will be extremely sensitive when it comes to food around that brother.

Notice it is brother. We don't have to live our lives to try to impress the world, but we do have to live our lives sensitive to the needs of the body of Christ, that which builds up. Now chapter nine, and we need that context because he seems to take a left turn here.

Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense to those who question me, who examine me, who attempt to judge me. Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord and Cephas, Cephas, Simon Peter? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? It's your classic double negative in an English sentence there, but it's double negative in Greek, so that's why it's there.

So is it only Barnabas and I? Now you remember by this time, Barnabas and Paul have had a bit of a falling out, but he's still for Barnabas. They had a and traveling companions and whatnot, but he is still going to use Barnabas as an example of another single apostle who doesn't have a wife and isn't taking advantage of support. Whoever goes to war at his own expense, who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? You got those three examples.

One is warfare. One is plants and one is animals in the agriculture realm. Do I say these things as a man or does not the law say the same also? Am I using human reason or is this not also something that scripture says? Now, well, I'll come back to this.

Let's just finish this section. For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. Is it oxen God is concerned about or does he say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt this is written that he who plows should plow in hope and he who threshes in hope should be a partaker of his hope.

If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless, we have not used this right, but we endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that? And now he's going to add a fourth example. Remember the examples? You have a soldier going to war, needs to get paid.

He doesn't pay himself to go to war. You have those who work in the vineyard. You have those are in the field.

You have those who, uh, you know, plow and thresh. And then you have, uh, these who are now

scripturally part of worship. The priests in the old Testament, those who minister to the things of the temple, those who serve at the altar, they partake of the offerings of the altar.

Even so, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of those things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so for me, be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of.

And this is where you can really get lost in the sauce. It's hard to follow Paul's argument here. We'll straighten this out when we get to it.

Um, if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of for necessity is laid upon me. Yes. Woe is me.

If I do not preach the gospel, if I do this willingly, I have a reward, but if against my will, I've been entrusted with a stewardship, what is my reward then that when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. So it kind of, it's like your headlights fading out in a light fog. As we get toward the end of this section, it gets a little murky.

We straighten out the first part. The last part is going to fall right into line. So let's begin at the beginning.

Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? You remember that the whole idea early on, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, I'm of the Lord. And there was a questioning of Paul's apostolic authority. And we're saying, well, I don't question that Paul was an apostle, but I do tend to think sometimes that I don't have a responsibility to really look for the application of the word of God in this particular area of my life.

It's okay to say, forsake not the assembling and I'll assemble. It's okay to say, you know, pray without ceasing and evening and morning and at noon, pray and cry loud. I'll do the prayer thing.

But there's other areas where we basically don't respect the authority of scripture in our life. It's I'll, I'll apply it in the easy areas, but this area over here, that kind of appeals to me like the Corinthians who had a legitimate observation. Look, my niece is having her one year birthday and they're having the party at the temple.

Remember that those, those communal meals were a commonplace. This was like a reception hall. It was like a place you, you rent and go.

It was like the banquet room at a restaurant. And so it was a commonplace. There was hardly a month that went by that somebody wasn't invited to a reception, a celebration, a seminar, whatever it might be.

It was part of social life. They didn't have television. They didn't have social media.

What did they do? They got together and partied and the standard place to go for all things, including that one-year-old child's birthday party that they've got a papyrus invitation to happened at the temple. Paul says, you can't be down there to that temple. It's an idolatrous place.

And you're going to offend the conscience of, we know that an idol is nothing, but we also know that back of this idol worship, as he's going to say in chapter 10 is actually demonic activity. And you can't go eat at that table with those people who believe in practice those things, and then come down here and eat at this table with these people who believe in practice Christian things. There are certain things that don't mix and you're confusing people who say, well, are you just another religion? I mean, we've got Artemis, we've got Diana of the Ephesians, we've got ISIS, we've got Asclepius.

So you've got this Jesus. So it's just one more temple to go eat things at. And there's no distinction.

Your social club is just like my social club. You go to church for your fellowship. I go to the Elks or the Moose Lodge or the Masons or whatever it is.

It's just another of the same kind. And Paul says there's got to be a distinction here. And there are times when it would be easier to go along and get along and make no waves, but there is a time to take a stand and this is one of them.

So that's what we had in the last chapter and he's going to return to it after he does chapter 9 and part of chapter 10. So am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? Paul is reaffirming and reasserting that he does have apostolic authority to answer these questions and to speak on behalf of the Lord on these issues. Scripture is that for us and it's a reminder.

If it's the guidance from the Word of God, we have a responsibility to figure out how it applies to us and not slough it off, not brush it aside. Some areas of our life, we would prefer to just not really shine the light too brightly on it. Well, you might as well be in Corinth and you might as well be saying, you know, Paul is diminutive.

And the argument here that he's going to address is, you know, I don't think Paul really has authority to speak here because he doesn't look like an apostle. He's not acting like an apostle. Real apostles get paid.

Real apostles, when they want to talk about marriage, they're married. Who are you to tell us all of this marital advice and you're not even married? And you think the rest of us ought to be like you. Well, we're not.

We're engaged. We're widowed. We're contemplating divorce or have already divorced.

And you're giving us all this guidance. Who are you to speak? You don't know the sandals I'm walking in. And so Paul, in affirming his apostolic authority, is going to say, when somebody asks me how I know I'm an apostle or what is the proof of my apostleship, you know what I tell them? Look at the church in Corinth.

You are the seal. You are the seal. Are not you my work in the Lord? The evidence of my apostleship is the fact that I came, you all got saved, this church formed, and it's been going on now for three years.

And we're discussing these things in letters. You are my work in the Lord. You are, even if other people don't want to believe I'm an apostle, you certainly should, because I've been there.

And that's fergizo. This is a seal. This is like the seal of the Holy Spirit on your salvation.

So now if we step back and say, how does this, how would you state this in our case? What do we have in terms of our Christian understanding and our Christian life that we did not receive from scripture? This is what gets me. People that want to debunk scripture, keep appealing to scripture for their facts and, you know, relying on one part of scripture and saying, well, this is a fact over here. And so that means that this over here can't be true.

You know, you can't have it both ways. You can't decide that this over here is true and this over here is not. It's all authoritative and you can't pick and choose where scripture applies.

So am I not free? If anybody ought to be free to decide what happens, this is what happens with cults. You know, they decide that they need a harem and they need substances and they need to be able to dictate policy and they've got a special line to heaven. And, you know, those of us who are old enough remember the Jim Jones cult down in Guyana where they all drank the Kool-Aid because this guy was a complete nutzoid or in Waco with the Branch Davidians and that crowd that immolated themselves in their building.

There is a legitimate respect for the authority that a divinely appointed leader has, whether it's King David or it's the Apostle Paul. Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? And are you not my work in the Lord? So Paul is just as much an apostle as the others. And even if others say I'm not, you should know that I am.

Here is my defense. So the line of attack here is you're inconsistent. This is the bottom line.

Have you ever been accused of inconsistency? Parents are always paranoid about this when you've got more than one child. And am I being consistent? Am I treating this one and holding them to the same standard as that one? And am I being fair? And, you know, I was real hard on the first couple, but, you know, you get past that. Well, you know, I realize it's not that big a deal.

I'll let it slide. And then the older children are like, hey, wait a minute. You know, when I did that, you know, I was on bread and water for a week.

And this is nothing here. The girls, I didn't get to wear lipstick till I was 16. And here's my little sister and she's nine and she's wearing lipstick.

And, you know, being accused of inconsistency, the argument against the apostle Paul is twofold, that he himself is personally inconsistent and that his behavior is inconsistent with other known apostles like Peter or respected figures in the church, like the Lord's brothers. You've got Jude and James and Simon. There's four named brothers of the Lord Jesus, and they were circulating in the early church.

Evidently all of them came to faith in the Lord Jesus. But, you know, James in particular is a well-known figure in the church and to a lesser extent Jude. And then there's two others.

So he's saying, they're questioning my apostleship because I'm not doing what the other apostles and respected leaders are doing. One of which is having a family. Another is receiving support.

And if you're leading about a believing wife, which implies a family, that increases the need for support. It's one thing to support a single guy. Those of us who have been single.

Anybody here been single? See if you're paying attention. You know, it's cheaper to live singly than it is to feed two mouths. I mean, it may not be double, but it always costs more to support two people than it does one.

You use more utilities. It costs more. So if these apostles are leading about a believing wife and being supported, Paul is not only a single guy, but even as a single guy, he's not drawing support.

Right? So hold that thought. In verse six, is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Now, I want to give you a pop quiz at this point. Everybody that was here last two weeks, I reviewed it last week and we covered it two weeks ago.

Here's your quiz. Do you remember in first Corinthians chapter seven? Now concerning what you wrote me, it is good not to touch a woman. Then he gave all of these different permutations to those who are a single.

I say the Lord, not I, I not the Lord. You remember all of that? And we had four principles that emerged out of that because this was our story problem. What was the formula? What was the thing we learned when you're analyzing a situation? There were four things.

What are you looking at? Remember the word *exousia*, their authority. The husband doesn't have authority over his body. The wife does.

The wife doesn't have authority over her body. The husband does. So you look for the principle of submission.

You are submissive in the interest of someone else. You're not just submissive because

submission is a good thing. You're submissive in the context of benefit to others.

So the first principle of application that Paul drew out of this marriage question was when you are related to another believer, whether by marriage or as we're going to see in the larger context of the church or any situation where believers are together, there is a principle. It's not the only principle, but it is a factor. And it is, I should look for ways to be submissive in a way that is beneficial to my fellow believer.

The husband respects the authority that the wife has over his body. And if she's got a number one, can you remember any of the others before I give them to you? There was submission. Secondly, Satan is going to test you.

And what do you need? Self-control. Generally, the path of self-control is going to be the better path. You need self-control.

If you can't maintain your self-control, remember, it is better to marry than to burn. Ideally, you won't. But if your self-control is compromised, then you need to get yourself in a situation where you can maintain self-control.

If your circumstance is such that you're out of control, change your circumstance so that you can have godly self-control. So submission, number one, looking for the authority, the needs and the desires of those who are close to us. Secondly, self-control.

Thirdly, remember when Paul says, not I, but the Lord, there are times when there is explicit command of scripture. Not I, but the Lord. No divorce, except in the case of Pornia.

That's scripture. You don't get a judgment call there. You don't say, well, but if I can work this submission thing, and if I can work the self-control thing, I can go run off with my secretary and divorce my wife.

Sorry, no. There is an explicit command of scripture. Fourthly, remember the case of a marriage between a pastia and an apostia person, faithless and faithful.

If the apostia, if the faithless is willing to remain, to the extent that it is up to you, live in peace with all people. Don't create a rift where this person isn't looking for a rift. They don't want to leave.

They're cool with your new faith, so to speak. So don't separate from them on some principle of touch, not the unclean thing. If they're, Paul says, if they're willing to live with you, pursue peace.

It is the path of peace. And he says, you can't stick with them, hoping that you're going to convert them, nor can you depart from them thinking there's no hope of conversion. He says, you don't know.

You can't know whether staying with them, you know, the wife is going to win him without a

word or whatever. What you know is that the Lord has apportioned the lot. And as God has called, whatever your calling was, if you were a slave, you're still God's freed man.

If you're free, you're God's slave. Respect the divine call. Each as God has called, so let him walk.

And you don't change the status quo unless one of these triggers gets tripped. Unless one of these tripwires gets broken. As long as you're not violating a command, if you can exercise your self-control successfully, if you have an opportunity for submission in the interest of others, if it is a path of peace, then don't change.

And remember his desire at the end of that was, I would that you would be without care, merim nao, sinful worry. If it's a sinful worry situation, there's another tripwire. So submission, self-control, is there an explicit commandment? Is it a path of peace to the extent that it's up to you? And when you've satisfied all those requirements, do you end up without sinful worry? That's the review.

Now think, what's he talking about here? We went through the idolatrous meal practices and it's the same thing. If you're going to offend somebody's conscience, there is no explicit commandment about whether a piece of meat laid in front of a rock for an hour and then it's being offered. Meat in the marketplace is a different issue.

That's going to be addressed in an upcoming section. But these communal meals in the Temple of Isis or Asclepius or Artemis or one of these others, that's a different thing. And Paul says, you're not to do that.

Well, back now to chapter 9, verse 7 and 8, whoever goes toward his own expense, who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit, who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock. There are a lot of rational arguments. Were the Corinthians rationalizing that it was okay to go to the idol temple? They weren't thinking about what is the thing that's most pleasing to God? What is best for the conscience of my fellow believers and the testimony of our group to the rest of Corinth? They were rationalizing, we know that an idol is nothing and that there's only one God.

We know that this is perfectly good food. We know that we're going to the temple, but we're not indulging in the promiscuous behavior that accompanies it. We're not getting drunk or as drunk and we're not running off with these temple women and such.

So they were rationalizing that it was okay. And Paul says, you really have to be careful about rationalizing because reason doesn't always lead you to God's answer. And you can justify a course of action with a lot of arguments and still be wrong.

So let me give you a quick closing problem here. I want you to convince Paul that he should get married and get a check from the church in Corinth every month. The apostle Paul, he's not doing that.

We want him to. We think he should. What arguments would you use? You're an apostle, man.

Look at the other apostles. They're married. Look at the brother of the Lord.

He's married. James, look at Jude. He's married, right? Then you're free.

You've got the pick. There's women who idolize you. They think you're close to God and they're impressed with your humility and your self-sacrifice and they love you.

There's six women in Corinth who'd marry you at the drop of a piece of parchment here, right? You're free. You're an apostle. You've seen the Lord Jesus.

When he talked to you on the Damascus Road, did he say, oh, by the way, celibacy for you, young man? You've seen the Lord Jesus. You're in a class by yourself. We recognize that you're an apostle.

Lots of apostles are married. Peter had a mother-in-law. Jesus healed her, right? You have the right to support.

When he says in verse four, do we have no right to eat and drink? Of course he has a right. He has a need. Of all the people who are essential to the spiritual operation, the apostles are... this is kind of like, well, do we not feed the generals and the colonels? We're going to feed the troops, but the guys that are giving the guidance and making the plans and all that, that we're not going to feed them? Of course they do.

Who goes to war at his own expense? This is spiritual warfare. Put on the full armor of God. We wrestle against principalities and powers.

And should Paul have to support himself while he's doing that? You know, we need... you're our guy. You're the point of the spear. You're getting divinely inspired scripture from God.

If anybody ought to be supported, we support widows, we support the elderly, we support the weak. Why wouldn't we support the apostle? Didn't he say in another place, elders who labor in preaching and teaching worthy of double honor? Of course we should send him a check. Who plants a vineyard that does not eat of its fruit? You're going to do all of this work.

You're going to nurture these grapefruit trees, but if it ever gets a grapefruit, I'll never eat that thing. Somebody else is going to get it. Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? That you don't get something back from the work that you put in.

Couldn't we give all of these reasonable arguments and are they not all valid? These are all righteous answer in the affirmative arguments. Paul says, I don't act on any of those. This tells me, I was having a conversation earlier this week with somebody about philosophy and about being convinced in your own mind of a path to truth or what the truth is based on the path that you took or whatever.

There's reason and there's the Socratic path and the platonic deal and you get all the way down to not just secular philosophy, but down into theological philosophies. And you can build a wonderful tower of Babel and stand on the top and say, I have found the truth. And it can be not right when you put it into practice.

It may be a truth, but it is not the whole truth. That's why they don't just say, you promise to tell the truth? So help you God? I do. What do they make you say? What they used to make you say when you swear in court as a witness? You've seen Perry Mason.

I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth. I promise to tell the whole truth. Yes, I saw the officer shoot the man.

Totally true. The whole truth is, the other man was shooting back with guns in both hands and it was completely self-defense. That's the whole truth.

You only tell part of the truth. It can leave a completely opposite impression. So Paul says, do I say these things in verse eight with human reason? Do I say these things as a man? I've got scripture on my side also.

If you don't think my arguments about vineyards and sheep and the other apostles, if this is all just constructs you, let me give you some authoritative scripture. The word of God itself says, don't muzzle a ox. It treads out the grain.

And he's going to return later to the temple argument. Look at the priests in the temple. How many arguments does it take for Paul to say, okay, Lord, I guess it's your will that I marry and get support from these churches.

He's got, you know, when you're trying to make a decision, you get a piece of paper, draw a line down the middle. Yes. On one side, no.

On the other. And he's got one whole column full of good arguments for having the comforts of, of a marital bliss and getting paid as an apostle. And over here on the right, he's got one entry, the furtherance of the gospel, not hindering the gospel.

And you say, well, so is that my, is that my, my argument? What is the context here? Remember, we're stepping back on all of these things, marriage and idolatry in Corinth, writing a letter to Paul and getting an answer back. Paul representing divine authority in scripture in general. What is Paul's gift? What is Paul's office? He's an apostle.

What is his particular role with respect to consciences and opportunities and potentials? He is the master evangelist. He is the one that has been entrusted with the mysteries. He's a steward of those mysteries.

He's revealing it. He's putting it all into scripture and that's his calling. Are you an apostle? Are you called to unveil the hitherto unknown mysteries of the divine plan? No, you're not.

And I'm not. But in the same way that all of these others stand in for the realities for you and me, what is my right side column entry that might outweigh all of these others? He just gave it to us in the preceding chapter. What is it that is sacrificial to self and beneficial to others in my particular sphere of calling? Were you called as a slave? You're God's free man.

Exercise your freedom in your sphere as a slave to do the very best for others that you can and to never be an impediment to their conscience, to never slow down their growth, never cause them to perish. We can't all be apostles. We can't all be evangelists.

We can't all be pastors and teachers. We can't all be prophets. But each of us is called in a circumstance.

Paul said, my job is to reach these designated target people that God has sent me to, i.e. the Gentiles with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and nothing is going to compromise that mission. Our mission is to be the body of Christ on this earth, to communicate him, to reflect him, to shine his lights in the midst of the darkness, to put the lamp up on a lampstand. And there are a lot of different ways to do that, depending on your gift and your calling.

But nothing can compromise the exercise of that gift and calling, even if it makes great sense, even if you can line up 17 arguments why it ought to be this way. It's the danger of our rationalization. The discussion I was having earlier this week is people can get so convinced in their own mind, I have found the answer.

I found the truth. This is my ethic. This is my moral.

This is my, you know, as long as I do no harm, that's the key to my moral foundation is I just do no harm. I don't harm nature. I don't harm the environment.

I don't harm animals. I don't harm people. Anything that's harmful, bad.

Anything that's harmless, good. Listen, you cannot exist without doing harm. If you ate anything today, something died so that you could eat it.

If it was plants, somebody wiped out acres and acres of wildlife to plant those plants and then pesticide-ified a bunch of insects and killed all of them so that your stuff would make it to the market. You cannot live without doing harm. We are fallen.

The world is fallen, and it's because of sin, and we are a harm just walking around. You don't think you ever sneezed on your hand and touched a shopping cart and somebody else got your cold. You don't think that you ever were the means of communicating the flu to somebody.

We are walking curses, and this do no harm thing is fooling ourselves, and it's easy to deceive ourselves. Paul could have easily deceived himself into diminishing his effectiveness as an apostle using all of these wonderful perfectly valid and even scriptural arguments. That's the point here, and so that's the problem we have to solve.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at the second half of this section that seems so murky as we get toward the end of it, but I will tell you now the key to understanding what he is saying here is what he has already said. He is continuing to apply that standard.

Who are you and why are you here? Your mission in the light of the love of God and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is paramount, and even if you are entitled to certain things, even if you can justify it six ways to Sunday, almost literally, the thing on the other side of the page is where does that leave my fruit before God? Where does that leave me in terms of faith and hope and love, particularly in my circle and my sphere of believers? That's my attachment point. That's why Paul talks in the Ephesians about that which every joint supplies, you know, till the whole body fitly joined together grows up to the standard of a mature man. It's all about the integrity of the body, and one part can't justify some self-interested path, even if it makes sense, even if you can find a scripture that supports it, if it is detrimental to your calling and your effect on the body.

So that's where he's going, and we'll see it when we come back from the break.