

Matthew 22-11-06a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday Morning Services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 6th of November 2022. We just did the big daylight savings time jump and we're ready to resume our look at the Upper Room meal and the attendant words and actions of the Lord Jesus with His disciples on that occasion.

We've spent an extended period of time looking at the bread and the cup, so significant, centrally important in terms of the truth that it conveys. And this is a truth that is picked up and used by the Apostle Paul for application in 1 Corinthians. And so that is where we were last week.

It's where we will be this morning and we'll conclude our study of this set of truths that are communicated by the Lord Jesus and communicated again by the Apostle Paul. So we'll be in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 this morning. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin.

Father, what a wonderful privilege it is to spend this time together and seek the active ministry of Your Holy Spirit to improve our understanding of the words and the works of the Lord Jesus, to have the power and presence of Your Word in our souls, to transform our minds, to judge our motivations, to clarify our thinking and our perception of the world around us. There are opportunities, decisions, actions, all of which are our responsibility. And to be enabled and empowered by Your grace, Your provision through the Lord Jesus is our great privilege, our great opportunity.

We pray that as we look together at these portions of Your Word that the Holy Spirit will minister them to each of our hearts, help us to understand it and to have its transforming effect on us in the hours and days that remain to us before the Lord Jesus returns to take us to Himself and present us before Your throne. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last time you will remember in 1 Corinthians 10, beginning at verse 14, Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. This is a very significant introduction to the next several paragraphs that Paul is going to compose and present to his Corinthian fellow believers. Stop and think about idolatry.

What does the Bible define as idolatry? Covetousness. Covetousness, which is idolatry, right? Immediately when we start talking about idolatry, no matter how you turn it in the light, it has to do with immaterial truth. It isn't that we actually expect a carved image or a molten image to have intrinsic power.

It is representative. An idol is representative of something. It is representative of placing your faith in a set of beliefs, in an imaginary deity of some kind.

But the idol is just a physical representation. It is similar to, and I think this is a great example. It's not unique to me, but I've heard it several times in several places.

Somebody can hold up a photo, usually now on their phone. You say, oh, are you married? Yeah, I've got a wife and two kids. Oh, well, have you got a picture? And so somebody will hold up the phone and they'll say, this is my wife and kids.

Is that his wife and kids? It's a picture. It's a representation of what the wife and kids look like. The phone, the pixels, the image that is represented thereby are intermediate means of communicating, identifying, and illustrating some reality that isn't on the phone, right? This is my wife.

This is my husband. That's a representation. An idol, nobody really expected, you know, they get mocked for sawing a log in half and making a fire with part of it and making an idol out of the other part.

But everyone understands that there is something behind it, that it is representative. It is a representation. So this is what Paul communicates when he gets down to verse 19 of 1 Corinthians 10.

What am I saying? Is an idol anything, or what is offered to idols anything? Rather, the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons. There is a demon. There are dark spiritual forces involved in idolatrous worship, in pagan worship that denies God and looks elsewhere for supernatural influence.

Demons. So the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.

The idol isn't anything. What is sacrificed to the idol isn't anything. It is the association.

It is the connotation. It is the symbolic value. Now, why do we care about this? Why is Paul bringing it up to the Corinthians? If an idol is nothing and what's sacrificed to an idol is nothing, then why worry about it? You can do what you want with an idol.

Do what you want with that which has been laid in front of an idol for a short period of time and is now in the market to be eaten. This is really what he's going to be talking about, is eating meat offered to idols, eating food that has been offered to idols. What's the problem if it's laid in front of a carved rock for a little while? Still perfectly good food.

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, Paul is going to quote it. So what is the problem? Now, here's the point. If we get this, we have got the upper room in mind and we've hit the center of the truth.

We're on the bullseye. This is about what our behavior communicates and how it affects those around us. If God evaporated all of the unbelievers out of Corinth and the church

walked through the empty streets, they could pick up any food they wanted, they could pass by and touch any carved image, they could walk into the temple of Athena or Aphrodite or Diana, any name you want to use for these various deities, and it would be completely harmless.

What is the problem with the Corinthians having fellowship with idolatry and idolaters? If their belief is such that they know there's a God and this stuff is fruitless and meaningless and wrong-headed, it isn't going to affect them to touch an idol or to eat something sacrificed to the idol. Everything hinges on their behavior, their attitude, their words, and their actions as it affects those who are not yet in the fold, who don't have their understanding, who don't know God and know that these things were God's before someone appropriated them to make an idol or sacrifice it to an idol. These things belong to God.

He authored them. He created them. They are His.

Everything hinges in this section on idolatry on how does your behavior communicate to others? What does it say to them? How does it influence them? Because we are here to be communicators. God leaves us on this earth as the body of Christ and the body didn't go off in the wilderness for weeks on end, never to be seen. He is interacting with the crowds.

He is interacting with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the chief priests and the scribes, the tax collectors, the sinners, the people in the crowd of every shape, size, and description. It is Jesus' words and works in their observation and in their presence that is at issue. We as the representative body of Christ now have the same responsibility to pay attention to what we do and what we say as it affects those who do not have our understanding.

This can be fellow believers who are not as far along, weak in the faith, needing milk and not solid food. This can be an agnostic, unbeliever, actively pursuing a different faith. It doesn't matter.

We in the circle of faith and hopefully some level of maturity, we can understand each other and speak the truth to one another in love and say, you know, this does or doesn't matter. This is or is not important. This should or should not be a priority.

This is going to be a goal or not. We do this in our families. Believers of like mind, we have an internal intramural channel of communication where we know what we think.

We are in the faith. We are of the faith. We are in and of the truth.

We can operate in a unique way, sort of like Jesus did with His disciples. He and His disciples could do things that Jesus did not do with the crowds at large. This is really important.

The issue in idolatry is how does the behavior of these believers, Paul's not afraid that they're going to turn into idolaters. He says, what you do in connection with idolatry communicates and you've got to be careful about the effect of your words and actions on those around you. So this is why he says, you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

You cannot partake, this is verse 21, of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Partaking of the table is fellowship, acceptance, intimacy. You don't sit at table with crowds.

You don't sit at table with strangers. These are your intimates. These are your family and close friends and you cannot enter.

The table is like the idol. It is a representation for close fellowship. Inner circle, come into my house.

Jesus uses it this way in Revelation 3.20. You're well familiar with it. I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the will be intimate fellowship between he and me.

The table, supping at the table, represents is a symbol for fellowship, intimate fellowship, close personal interaction. You cannot have close personal interaction with God and the people of God and also have close personal interaction with those who are opposed to the faith, who have chosen willfully and in some fashion dedicated themselves to the opposite, to reject God and to embrace something else. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons.

We have to be careful about what we let into our intimate inner circle. Fine to have converse and concourse. Fine to go to the store and the checkout clerk.

We don't have to find out if they're a faithful believer in a church going Baptist or whatever. We don't ask any questions. We just move about unless and until someone makes an issue of their idolatry.

If someone makes an issue out of it, that changes things. So verse 23, this is leading up to our bread and cup portion, and it's so critical to get this context. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful to others. He's continuing this emphasis on you've got to judge your actions by their effect on others. What do you communicate? What are you saying? What are you implying? What are you connoting by your actions? All things are lawful for me, but not all things build up, edify.

This is others. Let no one seek his own, but each one the others. Well-being is in italics there, but that's the implication.

Remember Philippians chapter two, looking at not only for your own interests, which you have a responsibility to do, look to your health, look to your safety, look to your peace, look to your ability to function and fulfill your God-given opportunities and responsibilities, right? But let no one seek his own, but each one the others. The priority is let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus, who in the upper room broke the bread and said, this is for you. This cup is a covenant with you.

Jesus before the crucifixion, the most agonizing experience personally anyone can imagine is not asking for support, encouragement, rally around me boys. My cup of sorrow is full. Jesus is thinking about his disciples and trying to put that last push into their souls, the last and fullest truth that he can teach them.

He is thinking about them on the night before he is arrested, tried and crucified. He's thinking about them. The issue in idolatry here and what you do with respect to idolatry is what is its effect on others.

I cannot emphasize how important it is to get this straight in this context. So verse 25, eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience sake, because the earth is the Lord's and it's fullness. It is all God's.

You remember Peter's three-fold vision in Acts, the sheet is let down. What God has sanctified, let no man call common. That's the truth.

That's the reality. And I, under many circumstances, am free to apply that truth in my own experience. But if any of those who do not believe, this is a lot of words for a single Greek word, it is the *apistas*, the one without faith, the *alpha privative*, and then *pistos* is the word for faith.

It's the faithless. Now this could be anyone from a believer that doesn't have the divine understanding, the divine truth in their soul that makes this clear to them. Maybe they're early in the faith, young in the faith.

They're not very far along. Do not make them stumble. Do not cause them a problem.

Or it can be someone without Christian faith entirely. But you don't know if they might come to the faith. You do not put a stumbling block in front of someone who is not yet where you are.

And Paul doesn't distinguish between unchristian lack of faith and Christian lack of faith. It's just someone who doesn't have the faith you have. I was thinking about this a day or two ago.

We always talk about how the merit of faith is in the object. We don't get credit for having faith, but when we put our faith in something substantial, that truth, that Savior, that God the Father, that's where the merit is. The merit of faith is in the object.

But the merit of love is in the subject. The merit of love isn't in the qualities of the thing that is loved. It is the character and the spiritual status of the one doing the loving.

This is why John says we love because he first loved us. God's love has value and merit because it is sourced in God. Our love for him and for one another depends on how far along we are.

To what extent has Romans 5.5 taken place for us? The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and it makes us capable of a supernatural kind of love that depends on the subject and not the object. We can love the unlovely always with discernment. God's love is discerning.

God does not universally apply all facets of his love. He has expressed general love to the world, but Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated. Why? You know God loves Esau.

God saw to it that he was born and that he was Jacob's twin and that he was Isaac and Rebekah's son and that he was given all kinds of opportunities as the firstborn twin. God loves him in that sense, but it is one of these truths that has two sides of the coin. God loves everyone, but God doesn't love everyone.

God loves them in the abstract, in principle, and in opportunity. The rain falls on the just and the unjust, but God does not and is not able to express his love to the unjust because they have taken themselves out of the place where God can do that. No man has seen God at any time.

If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. No one has seen God at any time, but the Son has revealed him. Well, so can man see God or not? Yes and no.

The answer is not as easy as a simple yes or no. Well, in the same way, when it comes to what is right and what is wrong in terms of our personal behavior, it can be right and okay for us, but it can be wrong and not okay if it has a deleterious effect on someone in our periphery. So is it right or is it wrong to eat that has been sacrificed to idols? Well, it depends.

Has anyone seen God? It depends. Does God love everyone in the world? It depends. In some cases and from some perspectives, yes.

In other cases and in the light of other truths, no. Does God love Esau? Yes. Does God hate Esau? Yes.

Does God love Jacob? Yes. Does God discipline and judge and send into captivity and exile and into military defeat and awful death, famine, all kinds of judgment? Israel? Yes. Does he love them? Yes.

Whom the Lord loves, he chastens. He scourges every son whom he receives. Well, that

doesn't feel like love.

Well, love takes many forms, and sometimes the best thing love can do is completely withdraw and not express itself in any way. That's the biblical truth, and Paul is expressing it here. If any of those who are apistas invite you to dinner and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience sake.

But if anyone says to you, this was offered to idols, do not eat of it for the sake of the one who told you. Is it any less legitimate and okay to eat the meat just because someone told you where it came from? For you personally, it makes no difference, but for them, it makes a difference. Now, we don't have this problem today.

There's not food from idol altars circulating in our markets. What would be a modern day equivalent of refraining from doing a legitimate thing for the consideration of the conscience of someone else? I'll give you a personal example. Suppose you have a habit of watching a particular news outlet that reflects your general view of the world.

It could be conservative, it could be liberal, it could favor Republicans, it could favor Democrats, but you typically watch the same news program, and most people either watch the liberal media such as MSNBC, CNBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, and so on. I find this when I go. I'm in many homes tuning pianos, and there will be a news channel running almost always.

People tend to leave their TVs on running the news. It's amazing. You think you're the only one doing that.

You're not. If you do that, there's just a lot out there. Well, suppose you have a friend or a family member who comes to stay with you, and you typically watch CNN, but your visitor is a conservative, and you know that they favor Fox News.

So when that person comes to stay in your home, do you keep your CNN running, or do you just shut the TV off or hand them the remote and say, if you'd like to watch some news, pick your channel? You change what you think is acceptable and right and helpful and proper for you in the light of the presence of someone else, because that is love. Love looks out not only for your own interests. I can watch my channel later.

I can get my information at another time and in another way. I do not want to afflict, harm, or otherwise disturb the peace of the conscience of someone who is a guest in my home or someone where I am the guest in their home. If they're watching the opposite kind of news to the kind I like, am I going to make a fuss? Am I going to vibrate? Am I going to say, well, I'm going to leave and I'll go listen to the radio in my car? What do we do around people we love? We flex.

We want to be considerate. We want them to be comfortable and to not create conflict over non-essential things like that. So that's what Paul is talking about here.

There are many, many examples of this where what we might normally do for our own pleasure, our own benefit, our own predilections and ideas of what is right and wrong, we set those aside in the interest of others. Love is sacrificial to self. It's not a big sacrifice, but it is sacrificial to self and beneficial to others.

This is what is in view, right? Let no one seek his own, but each one the other guy's, the other person's. What will be peaceful and comfortable and non-disturbing? You think, well, but it's a witness. I want to witness with my values and I want to witness with my habits and I want to witness with what I know to be right.

What is Paul saying? You are not the one to pick and choose how to make an issue in front of this person. Whose job is that? Who addresses the conscience of someone who is a pistos? And this doesn't have to be fully and universally a pistos. It could just be an area.

Maybe there's an area of life where this person doesn't have the understanding that we have, or our understanding differs. Maybe they've got an understanding that's better than ours. It doesn't have to be blanket lack of faith.

It can just be a lack of understanding or a weakness in a particular area. What about the presence of alcohol in the home? Maybe I don't want to do that. I want a tea total, but somebody else likes to have a glass of wine in the evening or whatever.

Am I going to vibrate and come all apart and make an issue out of it or not? Well, I can just avoid making that an issue. Maybe I'm a person who drinks wine, but what if I'm around somebody who has chosen not to or thinks it's not healthy and not a good idea? I work with people, I work for people who believe that any form of alcohol is an absolute sin. And Jesus didn't turn the water into wine at Cana, and He didn't have wine in the cup in the upper room.

It was such wonderful grape juice that people thought it was wine, but it didn't have any alcohol in it because Jesus would never make something that would cause people all of the heartache that alcoholism and the attendant drunk driving and all of the other horrific things that happen when people are under the influence. Scripture says, You can't imagine Jesus handing somebody wine and giving them the potential to be drunk. This is how people think.

So what's the best course? How about we just don't make an issue of it? Unless someone makes an issue out of it, what if you know someone is sensitive about alcohol? Maybe they've had alcoholism in their family and they don't want it anywhere, but then there's a dish that someone is serving. They say, well, you know they made that with alcohol. And maybe they don't know that when you cook with it, the alcohol boils away.

Out of sensitivity to their conscience, what does Paul say we should do? Well, then let's

not partake. Not because I know that it doesn't matter one way or the other if there's alcohol in the dish or in the dessert or whatever it might be, or that it's scotch-flavored ice cream. Well, you know that's bourbon-flavored, that's whiskey-flavored, and you can tell that this is a problem for that person because of its association with alcohol.

What do you say? Well, let's see if they've got some vanilla. Let's see if they've got some dark chocolate cherry chunk. Let's look for something else.

And I will go along with their concern instead of making an issue out of my flexibility and my quote-unquote superior knowledge, which I may or may not have superior knowledge. But the issue that God is looking for, what I will stand accountable for at the judgment is, was I sensitive to my fellow believers' conscience or someone who is without faith in that area? That's my concern. So if anyone says in verse 28, this was offered to idols, do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, for conscience sake.

Conscience, verse 29, not your own, but that of the other. I know that my liberty isn't judged by someone else's conscience. Why should I make an occasion where they have to make a judgment? This is really important.

Verse 29, why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? Why should I have to refrain because it hurts this other person's conscience? Because they are without faith. They are apistas. And I am going to avoid an occasion where I force their conscience that lacks faith for making a judgment on my liberty because that judgment is going to turn into a stumbling block.

Why put a stumbling block in front of their conscience when you know their conscience isn't bolstered with sufficient faith? Just don't. Don't do it. Therefore, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Anytime you eat, anytime you drink, whatever you eat, whatever you drink, uppermost in your mind should be, where's the glory of God? And the glory of God is reflected in Philippians chapter two, when the Lord Jesus, possessor of all things with ultimate freedom to choose, emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, found an appearance as a man, humbled himself, and was obedient to the death of the cross. This is the reason God has exalted him. This is the reason he sits at the right hand of the Father, reflecting God's glory.

The Lord Jesus did everything he did for the glory of the Father, and so should we. It's not my happiness about what I eat or what I drink. It is my conformity to this principle, who's in the periphery, looking out not for my interest, but the interest of others.

That is humility. That is love. There is no love without humility.

Humility looks out for the interest of others. Jesus humbled himself. We should do likewise.

It isn't about the substance when it comes to food offered to an idol. It isn't about the substance of what is or isn't in the cup, or what is or isn't in the bread that is broken at the Lord's table. All of this throw-and-sweat grenades about, is it turning into the actual body of the Lord, and is it the actual blood and transubstantiation, and people actually being slain over their refusal to accept transubstantiation by the Catholic Church.

How wrongheaded can you be? Where's your copy of Corinthians? It's not about the symbol. It's about the principle behind the symbol. You can apply this principle in a lot of areas that have nothing to do with eating, that have nothing to do with what is offered and what is accepted, what is eaten or what is drunk, what is the substance of it, what is the nature of it, even what is the occasion of it.

That's strapping a phylactery to your hand and to your head. That's nailing the mezuzah up. This is external, material consciousness without sensitivity to the principle and the truth that is involved.

We should be looking out for each other's interests, especially if we believe in our somewhat limited perception that maybe someone's got a weakness in their faith, maybe a lack in terms of they just haven't had a chance to grow or study or learn on that particular subject. You don't take a fourth grader that's working on multiplication and division and hand them trigonometry and say, well, you know, cosine and tangent and cosecant, here's a slide rule, figure this out. We don't put a challenge in front of someone that they're not prepared to take.

God doesn't do it to us. No test comes to us that we're not able to solve the problem because God doesn't give us that test unless we've got the ability to handle it. We should do the same for one another.

Well, there is much more in this chapter to see and we'll see it when we come back from the break.