

97-06-22a

Our worship this morning, if you'll turn with me, to Matthew chapter 17, beginning in verse 24. Matthew 17, 24. This is shortly after the events that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration.

When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, does your teacher not pay the temple tax? He said, yes. And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes? From their sons or from strangers? Peter said to him, From strangers. Jesus said to him, Then the sons are free.

Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money. Take that and give it to them for me and for you.

This half-shekel tax, or the drachma, as it was known by this time in Greek currency, was something that had been specified hundreds of years earlier in the law of Moses. We spent a little time looking at this tax when we studied the life of David. And toward the end of David's reign, you remember that very interesting episode where David numbers the people.

And as a result, a great plague comes on the land and on the city of Jerusalem. And it is at the point where the destroying angel stops and hovers between heaven and earth that God answers David's prayer and the plague is stayed. And that is the threshing floor of Arona, which eventually will be the place where the temple is built.

And you would think, well, now, how are those two things connected? Why is it that the plague came upon Israel? Why was it that the numbering of the people created such a disaster? Why did God judge them so severely? And you'll remember that people in Israel were numbered many other times. Saul numbered the soldiers when he was fixing to go to battle and got all discouraged and decided to plunge on ahead before any more of his army deserted and so on. And there isn't an explicit prohibition of numbering the people of Israel.

And our common understanding has been, well, it was David's lack of faith. He was putting his trust in the size of his army. But why would the land be disciplined for that? Why not David? It's not the people of the land's fault that David didn't have enough faith to trust God for the size of his army and therefore all of these people got wiped out.

There's many thousands who die in this plague. And we found the answer in this temple tax because the law of Moses stated that when the people are numbered, this is the time for this tax to be paid. What was the occasion for Mary and Joseph to be in Bethlehem? It came about in the, I don't remember exactly, the days of Caesar Augustus that a decree went forth that all the world should be taxed.

And this taxation was for the Roman Empire. But along with this tax came the tax that supported the temple. And so this issue comes up in Jesus' day.

And of course to finish our thoughts about David and the destroying angel, God incited David to number the people. And this has caused some confusion because in Chronicles it says one thing and in 2 Samuel one place it says God incited David to number the people and in another place it says Satan incited David to number the people. And we think that's just about as big a contradiction as you can get.

And we know that one of those texts is much later than the other and it seemed very unlikely that God would incite David to sin and so someone altered the one that says Satan incited David. There is no mention of Satan anywhere else in the books of Samuel. So the fact remains that God incited David to number the people and then a great plague comes as a result.

And we say, well, so God caused David to sin and then turned around and disciplined the whole land because of it. Not exactly. God incited David to number the people.

Why? Because numbering the people creates the necessity for obedience to the law. The people are already disaffected. They have a superficial loyalty to David.

They welcomed him back after the Absalom revolution and rebellion. But their loyalty and their obedience is very superficial. It kind of reminds us of the superficial reforms that would take place in Israel when they would get a good king, in Judah especially.

They had several good kings and the land would reform. The king would go and tear down the high places, cast out the idols and so forth. And then the people would have a superficial obedience.

But as soon as that king disappeared and his influence, the people immediately went back to their deeper and more fundamental beliefs which was falling away from God. Well, that was the situation in Israel. God knew it and God wanted to bring it out into the open.

So God had David number the people, knowing that when this enumeration took place, the people were going to have to decide whether or not to pay their half shekel tax. And they did not pay it. And this disobedience on the part of the people, which came about as a result of the numbering, was the occasion for which God disciplined the nation.

And so it was an occasion that displayed the true thinking that people had in their souls about David, about God, about obedience to the law of Moses, which was their obligation as believers in the land of Israel and so forth. And there's a wonderful study that we completed on that topic related to the location of the future temple and so forth. All of those things are bound up together.

But that is the same tax that we find here in Matthew chapter 17. And evidently the census takers

have come around and they have counted the Lord Jesus and they've counted Peter. We don't know what the status was for the other disciples, but these two have been noted by the census takers who are in charge of keeping track of the collection of this tax.

And so they ask Peter, well, does your master not pay the temple tax? Now notice Jesus has not gone out and volunteered to pay this tax, nor have the disciples. This is an issue that has been raised by others. And Jesus makes the point here to Peter that in truth he doesn't owe this tax and nor do his disciples because he is not a stranger, he is a son.

And in reality the taxes are collected to maintain the Levitical worship system there, which is a shadow and a foreshadowing and a picture, a prophecy of Jesus Christ himself. And if everyone understood the full truth of these things, they would never go to Jesus and say, well, you need to pay a tax to maintain these shadows that you have come to fulfill. And Jesus points that out to Peter.

Jesus says in verse 26, the sons are free, nevertheless. So Jesus doesn't owe this tax. But he says, nevertheless, lest we offend them, cause them to stumble.

Skandalizo in Greek. Of course, he was probably speaking Aramaic at this time. But he says, lest we cause them to stumble, we are going to pay something that we do not owe.

How is the provision made for the payment of this debt that is not really owed except to prevent the stumbling of other people? God provides it in a supernatural way, doesn't he? Jesus could easily have just reached into his pocket and handed Peter a coin. He could have said, Peter, hold out your hand and a coin would have appeared. He could have told Judas, delve into the money box and dig out a few coins that people have contributed to our support and take that to the tax takers.

Why does a miracle take place here? And why does Jesus pay this tax? Well, that relates to our study, oddly enough, over in Romans chapter 14 and the beginning of chapter 15. Beginning in Romans 12, Paul has begun the exhortation section of his letter to the Romans. He's given a lot of good doctrinal truth all the way through the first 11 chapters, the first ten and a half chapters especially.

And here in chapter 12, he says, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. We spent a little time talking about this idea of sacrifice. What is our obligation? What sums up all the law and the prophets? What sums up our obligation, our calling in this life? Love for God and love for one another.

Everything else that we are called upon for can be found in there. We know that the three great Christian virtues are faith, hope and love. How do we achieve that love that we are called upon to have for God and for one another? It's by faith.

Faith is the means. Why do we bother? Why do we care whether or not we have love for God and have love for one another? We're motivated by our hope, by the expectation of future things that God has promised. God has said there will be an evaluation, there will be approval for those who by faith and patience seek the fulfillment of God's promises.

Paul reviewed that in chapter 2 of this letter. So these virtues are or should be at work in all of us. Faith as the means, hope as the motivation and love as the result and the fulfillment of our calling.

What does that love involve? Well, it involves sacrifice. In order to have love for God, in order to display or to put into effect love we have for God and love we have for one another, this by necessity and by definition involves self-sacrifice, self-denial, the setting aside of the things that we value most. And that's why this section begins with the idea of sacrifice.

What is the theme of this letter? And it will really hurt my feelings if you can't answer this question after 10 these many months. What is the theme? What is the substance, the subject that Paul addresses in this letter? Righteousness by faith. In contrast to the human view of righteousness by works, it's righteousness by faith.

You remember back a few chapters when Paul is talking about yielding our members. Reckon yourself in chapter 6 verse 11. Reckon yourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God.

Do not let sin reign in your mortal body. Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness in 6.13. To sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Here in 6.13 we have an early echo of what Paul is going to state very clearly in 12.1. Present yourself as an instrument of righteousness.

This word is actually weapon. Don't be a weapon for sin, be a weapon for righteousness. To God.

Sin doesn't have dominion over you and so forth. Well, this sounds great as a theological truth, but how does that change me today and tomorrow and the next day? How does that go into effect? How can I fulfill that exhortation to present myself? How can we present ourselves as instruments of righteousness? Well, Paul is in that section of the letter now. It's not just a high sounding platitude, it's something practical.

Here is one of the ways that we do that. To present ourselves is to subsume and treat as secondary our desires, our priorities, our preferences in deference to the things of God, in deference to the people of God. And so in chapter 14 of Romans, the nitty gritty of this, where the rubber meets the road, where it actually comes out in how we live, is being detailed.

And Paul is tying together many of the threads that he has woven through this letter. Look at chapter 14, verse 13. Therefore let us not judge one another any more, but rather resolve this,

not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Well, if we just blithely go on and say, well, I know what I need to do, I know what my priorities are, I need to grow in knowledge, I need to be a Bible class, I need to be true to the things that I understand from the Word of God, and we focus on examining ourselves to see if we're in the faith, and see if we're being obedient, and see if the things that we do are permissible. And we say, yes, what I'm doing here is permissible. There's no commandment.

It doesn't constitute sin by definition or any such thing. And we can have a very myopic view, a very close-in view, near-sighted view, where we are at the center of the universe, and we examine ourselves and make sure that we're not transgressing, and we say, okay, I'm having faith. I'm going to be judged righteous by God.

And one of the things that we can neglect or omit to examine is what effect we are having on others. We don't like to think about that, especially in the particular emphasis and tradition that many of us are heir to, because there has been such an overemphasis in that area, such an overemphasis on our impact and our witness and our ministry and so forth, that by way of correction, a lot of our pastors and teachers, I say our, people who have a strong teaching emphasis, have swung in the other direction trying to correct that, trying to get away from legalism and meddling in other people's lives. And we say there's the doctrine of privacy, and what I do, I do unto the Lord, and what you do, you do unto the Lord, and never the twain shall meet.

And we say, I'm accountable to God, and I'm not accountable to you, and I'm not going to worry about you. You do your thing, and I'll do mine. In some of our churches, we meet, we assemble, we hear the teaching, and we disperse, and there's very little in the way of interaction.

Well, that is actually a dodge. Twenty years ago, people would have said, well, that's a cop-out. That's letting ourselves off the hook, because Scripture, in the New Testament especially, is replete with references to the fact that we have to be aware of, we have to pay attention to what effect we have on other people, what our lives, what our decisions, what our actions do to other people.

We are not each the body of Christ. We are together and collectively the body of Christ, and we are to be unified. We're not to be divided.

And we can do things that are right that divide people. We can do things that are right that cause people to trip, that distract them, that so consume their thinking and so shock them or so impress them that they make an issue out of us and our behavior instead of an issue out of God and His Word. So we are required in that command to love one another.

That, by necessity, means we have to be looking at one another. We have to be aware of one another. We have to be in association with one another.

You cannot fulfill that command in a vacuum. We can't fulfill that command in the back room of the house, listening to a tape, or off in a splendid isolation, spiritually speaking. Half of our obligation.

We can love God and receive the benefits of God's grace and God's mercy, and we can be built up in our soul, but we cannot fulfill the other 50% of our main calling to love one another unless we're around one another, unless we're paying attention to one another. And we can't dodge that and say, well, it's the doctrine of privacy, to each his own. We stand or fall to our master and so forth.

That is a very selective application of Scripture. It's a very selective look at Scripture because over and over again in passages such as this, even in the example of our Lord, who still lived in the Old Testament age, he said, look, we don't owe this tax in Matthew 17. I'm not required to pay it.

I'm a son. I'm not a stranger. But lest we cause offense, lest we cause someone to stumble, we're going to pay the tax.

We don't owe it, but we're going to pay it anyway. And that is a principle that Jesus expressed in his example and that is included in the record of Scripture for our instruction. And we have to realize that this is what it means to present ourselves.

This is what it means to be an instrument of righteousness and not an instrument of sin. This is what it means to fulfill the instruction and the exhortation in this book. We have a lot of theology.

People have pointed out how theological, how deep and how murky the waters are in Romans. My brother Matt and I were talking yesterday and he made an interesting observation. They have been following along in Romans a little behind where we are, but he made an interesting comment yesterday.

He said, because they've also been listening to our studies on the fundamentals of the faith, and you know in our fundamental study we've been going through Hebrews where the author in chapter 6 says that the foundation that is laid, the first thing we learn is change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God, righteousness by faith and not by works. What is the theme of this book? Righteousness by faith and not by works. And whereas Romans has been declared over the centuries to be this deep, profound, way out there, top of the theological pyramid book, in reality it's addressing the first principles of the oracles of God, the first things of Christ, change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God.

And in some cases we have needlessly complicated Romans by trying to see in it things that don't relate, by misdefining and misunderstanding justification, misunderstanding the audience to whom it is written, misunderstanding the judgments. It's actually a relatively straightforward, not to say that there aren't some wonderful and profound truths, but it's a straightforward presentation.

We please God, we fulfill our calling when we trust him.

How does that relate to a fish coming up out of the water with a didrachma in its mouth? Peter had to go out with a fishing pole and a hook and a line and some form of bait, I assume, and cast it into the sea, believing that what Jesus said was true, that to have the provision to pay this unnecessary tax, a miracle was going to take place. Jesus told him what would happen before it happens. In fact, in Matthew 17, we don't even have a record of this taking place.

We just have the record of Jesus saying, it's going to happen. Often Jesus would say, cast your net on the other side of the boat, and he wouldn't tell them what was going to happen. He would just say, cast your net, and they would try to pull it up, and it would be too full to bring in.

But here Jesus tells them ahead of time, go and cast your line in, and you'll pull up the first fish, and it'll have a coin in its mouth. And basically, that's our opportunity in fulfilling these exhortations. We are called upon to think about each other rather than ourselves, to think about what impact our lifestyle, our decisions, our priorities, the way that we live, what effect is that having on believers around me? Is it building up or is it tearing down? Is it something that is an expression of speaking the truth in love, whether by word or by deed? Or is it something that is causing people to be distracted, to misunderstand? And this is a judgment call.

This is the application of a principle, not a rule that can be very simply and superficially applied. We have to take some time and look. We have to think.

We have to watch. We sometimes have to observe over time to see, am I a benefit and a blessing to this person or am I slowing them down? Are they getting so occupied with what I'm doing or what I'm saying or how I'm living that they're no longer focused on the things that will build them up and the teaching and the truth of the Word of God? And if we find that we are somehow being a distraction, we are obligated, we are required by these commandments and these exhortations to make a change, to deny ourselves something that may be legitimate. I think one of the more classic examples of this is, I don't know about you all, but I have been in some churches where grace has been emphasized.

The problems of legalism and tabooism and so forth have been clearly defined and explained. And people in the congregation all came to that knowledge. And so sometimes when the church had a social gathering, well, there would be a bar, a little place there, and alcoholic beverages being served.

And let me ask you, is there anything the matter with an alcoholic beverage in and of itself? Absolutely not. Jesus and the disciples, some people don't like to think about it, but the first communion, the first Lord's table, something we'll observe this morning, was celebrated with alcoholic wine. When Jesus turned the water into wine at Cana, it was alcoholic wine.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with it. But suppose that you are a church who claims to be

pursuing the truth of the Word of God and you declare the emphasis, you believe that this is what Scripture teaches and so forth, and then think about believers who are on the edge. Many believers who attend churches of this type have come out of denominational churches where the teaching of the Word of God wasn't prominent or wasn't accurate or didn't feed and didn't fill and didn't nurture and didn't nourish.

And that is an ongoing process, isn't it? Many people are still waking up and realizing that they're hungry in their church and they're looking for a place to go. Where can I get closer to God's will? Where can I get closer to God's Word? Where can I be built up and make progress? I feel like I'm stagnating. I'm not getting anywhere.

Those people are going to look around and think, where can I go? Well, what sort of mental challenge is it going to be if they look at a church who does have a grip on that priority and that truth, who does strive for that understanding and has that teaching, but also has a bar at their fellowship gatherings? How easy is it going to be for a Baptist or a Methodist or a Presbyterian or someone else who's looking for the truth to overcome that obstacle and say, well, you see what I'm getting at? That may be perfectly fine, and nobody may be getting drunk and there may be no sin involved as far as personal sin, but at the point that it causes someone to stumble, at the point that it creates an obstacle for other believers, it becomes wrong. Jesus exemplified that. Here are these tax takers.

Who knows if these tax takers and people who are watching the tax takers are ever going to come to an improved understanding of God and His plan or who Jesus Christ is or anything else, but Jesus said they have made an issue out of this for Peter and for Jesus. Notice another detail in Matthew 17. Jesus did not say, all of you disciples, come here.

All of you go and cast a line. All of you get a fish. Pair up and each of you will get a drachma and you can go down and pay the tax.

Who is it that needs to pay the tax? Who is it that gets the provision to pay the tax? Peter and Jesus. Why is that? For whom has it been made an issue? Who has raised the issue? And for whom has it been raised? The tax takers didn't come and say, Jesus, how come your disciples don't pay the tax? They came to Peter and they said, how come you and your master don't pay? And so those for whom it has been made an issue are provided and they make sure that it's not an issue, even though they don't know it. Peter and Jesus pay the tax.

It doesn't say anything about the other 11 disciples. And that's the case with us. We need to look around and see, are these things going to be an issue? Has someone made it an issue? Has someone sort of thrown this up in our face? Has someone either verbally or just by their actions made this into a point of contention or has made it into an issue? Sometimes it will be very obvious because someone will come and ask the question, well, how come you have a liquor locker in your house? And if that becomes an issue, then we may have to change our policy.

We may have to change the way we live out of observation of this principle, which has been called the law of love or the law of supreme sacrifice, a combination of the two. It's not a supreme sacrifice. The only supreme sacrifice was made by the Lord Jesus.

But the law of love says all things are lawful, but not all things are edifying. And if something is going to create an issue, however minor, that may cause another believer to slow down, to trip, to be thrown off track, is it really worth it? Should I gratify myself at the expense of a brother? That's this principle in a nutshell. So that's what Paul has talked about in the last half of chapter 14 here.

And we want to remember, it's so important in Romans to keep in our mind and be aware of the context. Why is Paul talking about this? He talks about this over in Corinthians and other places. Why does he include it here in Romans? Because it is the logical outworking of everything that he's argued.

This isn't just get away from legalism, get away from righteousness by works. It's also what is righteousness by faith. And to do this means that we have to trust God.

When Peter went out there and threw the line in the water, he was trusting what Jesus said, that the first fish was going to have a coin in its mouth, and that it was right for him to take that coin and pay the tax takers. We tend to think, well, if I deny myself... Sometimes these aren't just in the area of pleasures. Sometimes it's in the area of things that we consider to be a little bit more essential.

And we have to trust God when we deny ourselves these things. When we deny ourselves something financial, or when we deny ourselves something that seems fairly important in the landscape of our minds. When we alter our actions and we think, well, I don't know what this is going to do to me.

And it's an occasion for faith. And God is going to see that faith, that we're trusting Him for provision in that area, or for compensation in that area. And this goes back to our point in Matthew 17.

Why did God use a miracle to make that provision? Why did the coin come in a miraculous fashion instead of out of the treasury box? It's a reminder to us that when we observe this principle of denial of legitimate things for the sake of someone else, out of love, God is going to act. God is going to provide in an unusual way. And we can count on it.

It's an article of faith. We can trust God for those things. I have mentioned before, but I am always impressed when I think in this area about people who are Christians who are in business.

The business world today is a dog-eat-dog, do-whatever-you-can-to-get-ahead type of world. And for a Christian businessman to function with integrity and with character often means allowing someone else the advantage. An irate client or an irate customer may come in and demand a

refund that they don't deserve, that you don't owe them.

May want to return something that's perfectly good or that they themselves have messed up and now they're making a claim on your guarantee that it's not legitimate and that you are not in truth obligated to honor. What does the law of love say? Especially in the case where you are known to be a Christian and where you're known to be seeking to honor God in your business, here's a case for faith. This may cost me money.

This may cost me time. This may cost me something. It may cost me peace of mind because this grinds me that I don't owe this.

I don't deserve this. I shouldn't have to do this. But we think about what would happen if we stand our ground.

If we preserve our rights and our rightness and cause someone to stumble, if our good winds up being spoken of as evil, we've won a battle and lost the war. And God says, here's an occasion for faith. Trust that paying something you do not owe in order to not cause someone else to stumble, God will fill that deficit.

God will meet that need. God is not unaware. But here's a big occasion for faith, especially if this is your sustenance as a businessman, especially if you say, I don't know how I'm going to survive.

If I make this a regular policy, I'm going to get killed. People are going to take advantage of me right and left. Well, we obviously have to be prudent, but at the same time we have to recognize that this is righteousness by faith.

Here's where all of the platitudes and fine-sounding words come down to, how am I going to live my life? Do I really have faith or do I just have faith when it doesn't cost me anything, when it doesn't really matter in the scheme of human circumstance? Well, do we trust God or not? You may have an occasion, as some of us have, of working in a place where you suddenly discover that unethical things are happening, and you're a believer, and people know you're a believer, and you're continued once you find out about this and it becomes an issue. If you stay, you're party to this. Silence is consent.

And yet to separate from it means unemployment. No check at the end of the month. How am I going to pay my bills? And we have a crisis of conscience.

Well, it seems to me that God provided me this employment, and if I'm just a faithful servant, and this person that's making the decisions there, the ones that are going to stand or fall, and we can rationalize and so forth, well, there's a time when we have to take a stand and say, this is a wrong thing. I now know about it, and if I stay here, I am party. I'm an accessory after the fact.

And to leave and to say, I'm sorry, but I can't, before the Lord, continue to work here. I'm a

Christian, and this is a wrong thing, and I can't help you out with this. I'm leaving.

Is to cast ourselves on God's faithfulness, on His promises, on His mercy. This kind of thing will happen, and does happen, and has happened, and will continue to happen. And this is where Romans ceases to be a theological book and starts to be the expression of the principle by which we live our lives.

Even in minor areas, it's not always going to be a big crisis. Sometimes it's going to be an easy thing to maintain our rightness because we prefer it, and yet it's going to hurt, it's going to hinder, it's going to cause someone else confusion, it's going to cause them to stumble. And we think about this a little bit, and we say, well, gosh, how am I going to know if I'm causing someone to stumble? How am I going to know? We'll know.

And that's another promise from God. God wants us to understand these things. He wants our senses to be exercised to discern good and evil, doesn't He? There's going to be enough information.

Wouldn't it be something if you're... Remember in school, all of us have had a little bit of math, and you remember story problems where two trains leave at the same time. One leaves from Boston, the other leaves from Chicago, and they're traveling at so many miles per hour. How far will the first one go before it meets the second, and what time will it be, and so forth? You have these things where you have to solve a problem, and you're given some information.

Well, we all know, if we've had any algebra at all, that when you're solving for an unknown, you have to have enough of the knowns to do so. And even in the case of two unknowns, then they'll give you enough so that you can do, what is it, parallel equations or something where you can solve for two unknowns at the same time. But there's always enough information to solve the problem.

It would be pretty silly to be writing a math book and put in a problem where there's not enough information to solve the problem. I say two trains leave at the same time from Chicago and Boston. Where will they meet? Well, how do I know? I don't know how fast they're going.

I don't even know if they're on the same track. God will give us, when we're tested in this area, when this occasion comes up, we can have faith and we can have confidence. There is enough information to answer that question.

All we have to do is look for it. We can go to God and make this an article in our prayer. If we're not sure, then go to God and say, Lord, I know that I need to make a decision here with regard to this fellow believer, this person in my periphery and my lifestyle or my priorities, my decisions, my actions.

I'm not sure what to do. I need to understand the facts that pertain so that I can make a good

decision. I want to do the right thing.

I don't want to cause someone to stumble. God will answer that prayer. If we ask for bread, we don't get a rock.

And there will be enough information to make that decision. God doesn't want us twisting slowly in the wind, not knowing what to do. So there will be enough information to make that decision.

And we will know whether this is an occasion to make a change and to not deny ourselves something on behalf of another. It will be clear. It's clear in this case of Peter and Jesus.

It's clear in Romans 14 with meat offered to idols. It's clear, if you turn over with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul addresses this in some detail in 1 Corinthians. Verse 4 of chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians.

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. This is what we know. We understand that just because somebody laid a piece of meat in front of a rock doesn't mean you can't eat it.

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, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we live. However, verse 7, there is not in everyone that knowledge, for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now they eat it as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food does not commend us to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple... Now, here's the thing. What we do in the privacy of our home is one thing.

Let's go back to the example I mentioned earlier about the church with the bar in the church. It is an entirely different thing if people who attend the church in the privacy of their home share a glass of cheer in the evening. They don't get drunk, they're not abusing it, and they're also not making an issue out of it as a part of their church identity or as a part of their personal identity.

They're not out flagrantly doing this in front of other people and disregarding what anyone may think. There are things that we may pursue as a matter of private lifestyle that don't fall under this principle. But notice what this person is doing in verse 10.

Where do they see this person eating the meat? In an idol's temple. In Corinth, banquets were held in the temple itself. The large outer court where people would gather and mingle, they would set up tables.

When we were on vacation here a couple of weeks ago and we were down in Galveston or Houston when they started setting up the banquet in the museum. We were in Houston and we were looking at a museum. They had dinosaur bones and gemstones and all different fossils and things you could look at in there.

It was getting toward the end of the day and all of a sudden they began setting up tables and we could smell food. They were kind of shooing people away and roping off certain areas of the museum even though it was well before 5 o'clock. They were getting ready to have a banquet in there.

A museum is not a restaurant but they were having a banquet there for some reason. I have no idea what. They used to do the same thing in these idol temples.

There were people who were believers who said an idol is nothing, a temple is nothing, the meat sitting in front of the idol is nothing. Someone has invited me, I've got a ticket. I'm going to go down there and have me a big feast down at the idol temple.

Well, that's different than going down to the market and buying meat that was purchased by a retailer from the temple's kitchens after a portion of it had been sacrificed and the rest was released for resale. Somebody might buy it and maybe it had originated at the temple but they buy it and bring it home and cook it up for supper. This is a different thing.

Here they're going down to the idol temple sitting down in the Diana temple with a bunch of Diana worshippers and having a big feast. You say, well, you know, we don't care anything about Diana but the food's sure good down there. Well, if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? Why is this person suddenly deciding that they can eat that meat also or that they can maybe even go down to the temple and eat also? It's not because they have come to a new understanding from the teaching of the Word of God.

It's because they've seen somebody else do it. They say, well, that believer, they're way ahead of me. They've got a lot of knowledge.

They're doing it, so I guess it's okay for me. And it's not coming out of conviction. It's not coming out of recognizing where lifestyle that pleases God comes from.

It's imitation. And we've discussed this before. This is the big flaw in discipleship and mentoring and this do-as-I-do sort of Christianity.

What we do has to come from conviction. It has to come from what we understand. We understand this principle of self-denial.

We understand the principle of righteousness by trust and that when we deny ourselves

something, when we refrain from something, it's for this reason, even if it costs us something. Because of your knowledge, shall the weak brother perish, in verse 11, for whom Christ died? What is the value of that individual in their relationship with God? Well, it was important enough that Jesus Christ died for them. That's the extent of the sacrifice, the extent of the putting out of oneself that Jesus went to for this person.

Here, Christ has gone and died for them, but we're going to mess them all up because we want a good meal, is the idea. Jesus sacrificed his entire life. We won't even sacrifice a tasty piece of beef for them.

We won't deny ourselves what we consider to be a right and a privilege. Jesus gave his entire life for that person. When you thus sin against the brethren, notice the action itself is not the sin.

The eating of the meat isn't the sin. It is the disruption of the conscience of another believer that is a sin against the brethren and wounding of their weak conscience. And it is a sin against the Lord Jesus Christ.

A far more serious thing. The whole issue of whether or not it's sinful to eat meat offered to an idol disappears in the face of sinning against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat food, lest I make my brother stumble.

Skandalizo, the very same word used in Matthew 17, the very same word used over here in Romans 14. So, what's the upshot of this? We have to be aware of what effect we're having on other people. We're not in a vacuum.

We don't live on an island. And we can sin against Christ if we fail to pay attention in this area. What we do counts with regard to other believers.

And it's a big part of our responsibility as members of the body of Christ to be aware of it. Let's pause and take our break, and when we come back, we'll pick up in Romans chapter 15.