

# OpenTheo

## 1 Corinthians 8:1 - 9:15



### 1 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In his examination of 1 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of considering the impact of one's actions and avoiding stumbling blocks, even if one has the liberty to do something. Paul distinguishes between stronger and weaker believers, reminding Christians that their behavior can affect the perception of outsiders and weaker believers. Love must be the primary motivation for behavior, even when one has knowledge, and there is only one God and one Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul defends his apostleship and encourages others to follow his example in laying aside their rights for the sake of the gospel.

### Transcript

Today, we're beginning at 1 Corinthians chapter 8. It's a very short chapter and I'm kind of aiming at getting through chapter 8 and 9. Actually, even that would not be the completion of a thought. For the most part, Paul deals with whole thoughts in single chapters, as he did in chapter 6 and in 2 Corinthians. In chapter 7, and in chapter 5 also, he dealt with in chapter 5 the issue of a notable case of fornication in the church.

In chapter 6, the issue of lawsuits. In chapter 7, questions related to marriage and singleness and divorce and so forth, and widowhood. Now, in chapter 8, he begins another subject, but it takes him three chapters to cover it.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10. All one extended discussion on a single subject. Then, in chapter 11, he'll talk about two subjects in one chapter.

That's really being brief. In chapter 11, at the beginning of that chapter, he talks about women and head coverings in the latter part of that chapter, about behavior at the Lord's table. And then, in chapters 12, 13, and 14, he'll talk about women and head coverings in the latter part of that chapter, about behavior at the Lord's table.

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another three-chapter long discussion on one subject, which happens to be there, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, followed by one last subject, raised in chapter 15, and treated, which is the resurrection of the dead.

So, many times, the chapter divisions reflect whole thoughts, or whole subjects that Paul's dealing with, although some of them are so long, and they could not have been included in one chapter, or even in this case, two, but it takes three chapters to cover the subject of meat sacrifice to idols, which to us is not an issue at all, probably. We have to understand that outside of Israel, all nations in the world, in Paul's day, worshipped idols, and their worship of idols had many parallels with the way the Jews worshipped God. They had a temple, they had altars, they offered sacrifices, they had priests.

Animals were sacrificed, and a portion of the food was eaten by the priests, a portion was eaten by the worshippers, and then there was usually some remnant of food left over from those sacrifices, and since only the best animals were allowed to be offered as sacrifices to the gods, it follows that the meat that was left over was prime meat. The priests and attendants at the idol's temple would eat whatever they could, and yet there would still be plenty of meat left over, and the remnants of these animals that were sacrificed to idols were then put up for sale in the marketplace, and usually because of the quality of the meat, had no problem. Now, not always was it indicated in the marketplace whether a piece of meat was a remnant of an animal sacrificed to an idol or not, and the Jews, in order to avoid defilement of eating blood, or things strangled, or meat sacrificed to idols, we're not talking about Christians now, but Jews, the Jews have always had scruples about these things because of their law, they always made their own internal community arrangements for butchering of animals, even to this day, kosher Jews will do this, they'll have their own kosher butchers that will drain the blood properly because Gentile butchers don't do this in a way that is adequate in their thinking, and in Corinth and other pagan cities, of course, the Jews made sure that they purchased their meat from Jewish kosher butchers to make sure that they did not eat any meat sacrificed to idols.

The Christians, some of them at least, were wondering whether they should follow this course also, either provide their own butchers, or buy only from kosher butchers, or whether it was safe to just buy meat from the general marketplace, and take your chances that such meat might have been sacrificed to idols. Now, I think we've seen already that in Corinth there were people, some with stronger and some with weaker scruples. Now, by weaker, that's Paul's term, I think we mean by that somebody who's got a more tender conscience, somebody who doesn't allow himself as much liberty as another.

Now, Paul allowed himself a great deal of liberty, as comes out in his discussion, and he did not approve of people being legalistic about these matters, but at the same time, he did not approve of people being too liberal. He did not wish for people to be too libertine,

or for people to go beyond what is loving to do, even in matters where they have liberty in Christ. And there were apparently both problems in Corinth.

There were some people who were ascetic, as I mentioned earlier, people who kind of would not allow themselves even legitimate and lawful liberties because of their tender conscience about certain matters, and there were also Christians there who were very libertine and believed that they could do everything, eat everything, and even, unfortunately, they felt like they could even commit fornication, and Paul had to clarify that in chapter 6, that although eating food is not an issue to God, it doesn't matter to God a great deal, what you eat, perhaps quantities might matter to him, it is possible to be a glutton, but as far as meat that is fought by the Jews, for example, to be defiled because it's not kosher animals or because it's the remnants of something sacrificed to a false god, eating those kinds of things didn't matter to Paul, and shouldn't necessarily have to matter to Christians. On the other hand, fornication, of course, is a different matter, and that's a moral issue, and though the stomach was made for food, and food for the stomach, and therefore eating food is no big deal, yet the body, he said, was not made for fornication. Now, we remember that there was a letter drafted by the Jerusalem Council, with James as its head, telling the Gentile churches that they did not have to keep the Jewish law, generally, but they did request that they would abstain from certain things, that they'd abstain from fornication, and that they'd also abstain from blood, and things strangled, and meat sacrificed to idols.

This letter was to be carried by Paul and Barnabas to the Gentile churches where they ministered, and the Gentiles were to be incensed. The letter was to be informed that the Jewish brethren would prefer for them to abstain from these things. This was largely to avoid stumbling.

They're Jewish neighbors, and they did not want Christianity to get a bad name among the Jews. Obviously, the Christians in Jerusalem were concerned about Jewish evangelism, and if Christianity appeared to release Gentiles not only to not be circumcised, but also to participate in idolatry, or what appeared to the Jews to be idolatry, eating meat sacrificed to idols, or in things like fornication, it would be a bad name. It would clearly give Christianity a bad name among the Jews, and polarize the Jews and Gentiles more, and make the Jews less susceptible to evangelism.

That is no doubt the sentiment that led to the writing of the Jerusalem Council's letter, and those restrictions. Now, when Paul came to Corinth, he must have had that letter with him, because it was after the Jerusalem Council that he first evangelized that city. Therefore, in their presence, he must have communicated with them what he was required to communicate with them about the Council, that they should abstain from these foods and from fornication.

As I made, I think, a point of when we were in chapter 6, I think what Paul probably did

when he was with them was say, although the Jerusalem Council has kind of required this, I just want you to know that as far as God is concerned, eating stuff doesn't make a whole hell of a difference. It doesn't matter to God what you eat. Jesus is the one who himself said, it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, and therefore, Jesus, as it were, proclaimed all foods to be clean.

In another place, Paul considered it to be a doctrine of demons to impose dietary restrictions on Christians about things that are not anything more significant than what you eat. I'm talking about 1 Timothy chapter 4, beginning with verse 1. Paul says, Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, that is, doctrines generated by demons, speaking lies and hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, obviously some form of asceticism, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing can be refused if it is received with thanksgiving.

For it is sanctified, that is, every animal that you would eat can be sanctified, can be holy. Nothing is unclean. It's sanctified by the word of God, probably referring to the fact that Jesus himself said, it's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you, and therefore, his own word sanctified it, and by your prayers over it, I guess.

Now, Paul indicated that a time would come when people would impose dietary restrictions on others as a means of righteousness, and he considered this to be outright demonic. He considered it to be heretical to impose false standards upon the church that were based on the assumption that certain meat could defile you. Now, on the other hand, Paul did not mean to say that they should go out and flaunt their liberty by going out and publicly scandalizing people by eating meat sacrificed to idols among those who would find it offensive.

Obviously, Jews would find it offensive, and some Christians found it offensive. Some of the Christians who had come out of idolatry still had problems with it. It's like maybe rock and roll music.

I mean, secular rock and roll music. I never had a background in drugs or in partying or in any of the things that rock and roll music sometimes means to some people, and when I hear rock and roll music, sometimes I like it, sometimes I don't, but it almost never draws me into some kind of a worldly lifestyle from my past. For one thing, I never had that lifestyle, but to me, I would have liberty to listen to it.

Not all things are edified, and therefore I don't listen to it. All things are lawful, but not everything edifies. Secular rock music doesn't edify very often, so I almost never find me interested in listening to it, but I'd be at liberty to listen to it.

However, there are those who, because of their past and the images and thoughts and memories that are brought up in their memory because of listening to certain songs and so forth, would be very much stumbled. Their thoughts would be corrupted by listening to it. It's clear that they would be in a different place spiritually toward that than someone else like myself would be.

And with reference to eating meat as a sacrifice to idols, some Corinthians were like that. They came out of idolatry. Probably all of them came out of it.

Some had gotten more liberated from it than others. Some still, when they ate meat, if they knew it was a sacrifice to idols, it brought back memories of their worship of the gods. And those memories were defiling kinds of memories.

It sort of made it hard for them to do those things without thinking of themselves as slipping back in some measure into the old idol worship they used to be a part of, and so they couldn't do it, and they basically felt like other Christians shouldn't do it either. Now, here we have two camps in Corinth, and it's quite obvious from what Paul says that there were these camps. Those who felt the liberty to eat meat as a sacrifice to idols, as Paul felt the liberty to do, and those who did not have that liberty.

Those who had that liberty, Paul considered to be people who were strong in their conscience, and those who did not have that liberty or could not allow themselves to do it were people who were weak in their conscience. And Paul discusses this not only here, but it comes up to the Roman church as well. Apparently there were similar parties in the church of Rome, because Paul discusses this in Romans chapters 14 and 15.

Same kind of thing, and talks the same way about it, makes the same kinds of points. Now, it would appear that those who had the same liberty Paul did, that is, they knew that they could eat meat as a sacrifice to idols and it didn't matter to God, some of them were going a little too far with this. It would appear from what Paul says before the end of chapter 8 that some of them were actually going into the feasts conducted in the temples of idolatry.

Archaeologists have found actual invitations from that period where people would be invited to, it was like a written invitation, to come and participate in a feast at the temple of such and such a god. And these feasts were somewhat public affairs, and if you were invited to go eat it was good food and great social time. And yet, those feasts were held in the temple of the idol.

Now, while some, like Paul, felt he could eat meat as a sacrifice to idols, he didn't feel like there was some kind of boogeyman attached to it that would make him demon-possessed if he ate the stuff, he didn't feel like it was appropriate to actually go into the temple of the idols and participate in the feast where everybody else was there outright worshipping the idol. But there were apparently some Christians who felt they could,

they said, well, you know, an idol, that's nothing, it's just a piece of wood, it's just a piece of metal. We are enlightened people, we are not like these pagans who think that idols are real gods, we know there's only one God.

We're enlightened enough to know this, so that we can go into the idol's temple, we're not afraid of anything in there, there's not some kind of a boogeyman going to possess us when we go in there, and there's only one God and we can just go in there and enjoy the food. We're at liberty to do that, even if the food has been sacrificed to idols. The idol is just a piece of wood, so it doesn't matter, it's just like any other food.

And Paul indicates that's true. It is just like any other food, but going into an idol temple and participating in an idol's feast with participants who are there worshipping the idol is definitely risky business for a number of reasons. One, it gives the impression to outsiders that you are worshipping the idol, that they are worshipping it.

After all, that's what people go to those feasts for. So it seems to be, to somebody who doesn't know you any better, an endorsement of idolatry. Secondly, it may encourage others who really can't safely do that to follow your example.

There are, after all, people who are weaker than you, and they may be strongly tempted to go to such feasts. It was a part of their life before they were Christians, and the food was good, and it's maybe a privilege to be invited to one of those things. And it's hard enough for them to resist the temptation, even if no Christians are going there.

But if they see some Christians going to those things, then they might say to themselves, well, why not? If they can do it, I can do it, and yet they can't. You may be strong enough to go there and not worship an idol while doing so, but they may not be, and they may follow your example and succumb back into idolatry. And a third reason that allows the idea to go into these idol feasts is because you may succumb, and Paul says to them, those who think that they won't, in 1 Corinthians 10, which is at the end of this same discussion, he says, therefore, if anyone thinks he stands, let him take heed lest he falls.

So there's three problems with taking your liberty in this matter too far. One is what it communicates to the outsider. They don't know you as well as you know yourself, and they therefore imagine that you are corrupting yourself, that you're participating in idolatry with them.

Secondly, it may stumble another believer who isn't as strong and who really shouldn't go to such places at all, and yet your example may embolden him, Paul says, to do that, and if so, that person may fall and perish, one for whom Christ died. Paul actually says it's possible for you to destroy one for whom Christ died in chapter 8, verse 11. That's pretty scary, pretty heavy responsibility to stumble someone like that.

And then the last reason is that you may think you're stronger than you are. You may flatter yourself. You may think that your knowledge that an idol is nothing will hold you in good stead, even in the most tempting and the most potentially compromising situation.

But if anyone thinks he stands, Paul says he's a little arrogant there, he better be careful lest he actually will fall. So this is the counsel he gives in this lengthy discussion in chapters 8, 9, and 10. Now, essentially what Paul's going to argue, I'll give you his train of thought and we'll go through it point by point.

Paul's going to concede, initially, to those who say, what's wrong with eating meat sacrificed to idols? After all, an idol isn't anything. There's only one God. The idol can't hurt you.

And Paul's going to concede the point. He's going to say, yeah, that's true. That's true.

Many of us do understand that. But he goes on to say not everyone understands that. And to those who do not, there is a dynamic involved in participating in these idol feasts that can actually draw them back, draw their hearts back into the worship of idols.

And after all, he says in chapter 10 and verse 20, there is something behind the idols, demons. He says that in chapter 10 verse 20, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons. And I don't want you to have fellowship with demons, he said.

In verse 21, you can't drink the cup of the Lord in the cup of demons. That is, you can't sit at the Lord's table and participate in communion with the body of Christ and then go sit at the devil's table and participate in his feast. Who? Even though you say that in your heart you're not participating, outwardly you are and it's communicating something that can stumble others and who knows, might stumble you more than you anticipate in going in.

Now, that's Paul's main point. That your knowledge is great, but there's something more important than knowledge. Your knowledge that demons are nothing might incline you to think you can play fast and loose with idolatry and not be singled by it.

But there's something greater than knowledge. In fact, knowledge just makes people proud. That insight may make you a proud person, self-confidence and so forth.

But he said there's another thing more important than knowledge and that's love. And he says, I don't care how much you know. If you're stumbling your brother, you're not acting in a loving way.

Now, later in another discussion in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 13, Paul says in verse 2, And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and

though I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I have all knowledge of all mysteries and understand all kinds of things, have plenty of spiritual insight, more than anybody else, but if I don't have love, my knowledge is absolutely of no value whatsoever in the sight of God. Because there's only one thing that matters to God, and that's love.

Now, what Paul's telling the Corinthians in chapters 8 through 10 is that your knowledge may set you free, but love will motivate you to voluntarily bind yourself to behaviors that do not stumble brothers and hurt other people and so forth. And you've just got to decide whether you're going to walk in the knowledge of your superior revelation or in love for your brothers who don't share that revelation quite as well. And that's what Paul really presents as the options for these people and makes it very clear which one they have to choose if they're going to be Christians.

Now, concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up or makes people arrogant, inflates the ego. But love edifies.

Now, the word edify means builds up. The word edifice is a word that we have in English for a building. An edifice is a building.

The verb to edify means to build, to construct, to build up. And in the Bible, the word edify is used to refer to fortifying or building up somebody spiritually. Now, we maybe should make clear at this point because it comes up again in chapter 14, the word edify is not synonymous or even close in meaning to the word glorify.

A lot of people who are not familiar with the older English sometimes mix the word edify with glorify. I've heard people say, oh Lord, we just want to edify you in our lives or whatever. Well, God doesn't have to be built up.

It's right to glorify him, but to edify, it's people that need to be edified. People need to be built up spiritually. And I can have knowledge and get puffed up, or I can have love and use it to build up other people.

If I love one another, I will wish to build them up, not puff me up. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. Now, what he means by that, the word, if anyone thinks he knows anything, the word in the Greek means has full knowledge, a perfect knowledge of the thing.

No doubt, because of the Greek culture at this time, knowledge was really put on a pedestal. The knowledgeable person, the man with knowledge and wisdom was respected by no one more than by himself. He respected himself, and that's why he was puffed up.

But if a person thinks himself to be in possession of full knowledge of anything, he doesn't know anything yet as he ought to know. Now, Paul's not saying that if you think



you know that two plus two is four, or you think you know that you're saved or something like that, that you don't know anything. What he's saying is the person who considers himself to be superior in knowledge, complete and perfect in knowledge, that person may in fact know some things.

What he knows may even be true, but he doesn't know it as he ought to know it. That means he doesn't possess that knowledge combined with the correct amount of humility and love. You can know things without love.

But if you do know something without love, knowledge without love is not really knowing as you ought to know. Because a Christian ought to know things with his knowledge, he needs to hold it in perspective with love, which is why he says, if I know all things but have not love, I'm nothing. This is, of course, a call to humility on the part of those who claim to know a great deal.

Paul says your knowledge, or at least your self-perception of knowledge, is likely to be nothing but self-inflating. But love is not self-inflating. It attempts to build up another.

It edifies others. And if the person views himself as a knowledgeable person, the person views himself as one of superior insight and so forth, well, he's fooling himself. He may in fact know some true things, but he doesn't know anything the way he ought to, because all that knowledge is worthless if it's not held in proper tension with love and governed by love.

But if anyone loves God, this one is known by him. So there's a contrast. If a person thinks he knows something, well, he doesn't know so much.

At least he doesn't know it properly. But if a person loves God, the contrast is between being a person with knowledge and being a person with love. If a person loves God, he is known by God.

Now, this expression, known by God, is one that Paul uses from time to time. He talks about Christians being known by God. In fact, in one place, I believe it's in Galatians, he mentions, now that you know God, or rather, are known by God.

He actually corrects himself and emphasizes the fact that not so much that we know God, but that God knows us. It seems like almost a strange point to make, because God knows everything. I mean, he certainly knows everybody.

But to say that we are known by God suggests more than that God just is aware of us. God is aware of everyone. In fact, he's aware of everything that's in everyone's heart.

But to be known by him like an acquaintance is what he's talking about, that we are acquainted with God, that we're friends with God. If I told you that I knew who Billy Graham was, if you showed me a picture of Billy Graham and said, I know that guy's

name, his name's Billy Graham, you probably wouldn't be too impressed. But if you found out that Billy Graham knew my name, that'd be real different.

Not so much that I know him, but that he knows me. I mean, everyone knows him, but how many people does he really know by name? How many people does he consider himself acquainted to? Obviously, it says a lot more in my favor to say that Billy Graham knows me than that I know him. Now, of course, that doesn't really say much in my favor, because he's just a man.

But as far as making an impression on people that I know somebody important, everybody knows Billy Graham, but how many does he know? Now, likewise, everyone knows there's a God, but how many people does God really consider himself acquainted? How many people does he call by name? How many people does he consider himself a friend of? That's what Paul's saying. If a person loves God, this one is one of God's friends. This one is known by God.

And that's a lot more important than having knowledge such as would impress people. If there's anything to really put your boast in, it's not that you can impress people with your knowledge, but with the fact that God knows you, and knows you as a friend and an acquaintance, that he's one of your associates, one of your acquaintances and friends. Therefore, concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there's no other God but one.

Now, an idol is nothing in the world and there's no other God but one is possibly a quote of what some of the people who were taking greater liberties than others might have been saying, and Paul was acknowledging that as a true thing. Again, as I've said in other cases like this, we can't prove that Paul is quoting these people. Often it's the consensus of commentators that he is, but we hardly know, and it doesn't matter.

The point is whether he's quoting something they say, which is their rationale for going into idols' temples. An idol isn't anything. There's only one God.

It doesn't make any difference. Paul could be agreeing up to that point. He doesn't necessarily agree with their application, but that's certainly a true thing.

An idol is nothing in the world, and there's no other God but one. For 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's only 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. The statement that there are many gods and many lords has sometimes been wrenched from its context by certain cultists, usually as part of an overall argument against the deity of Christ.

Here's how they use it. For instance, if you're talking to the Jehovah's Witnesses, you

say, well, the Bible says that Jesus is God, therefore Jesus is Jehovah God. They say, well, no, there's one Jehovah God, but there's lots of other gods.

There's lots of little gods with a small g. And even Paul says there are a lot of little gods, and therefore in saying that Jesus is God, it's not really much different than saying that Satan is the god of this world, or that Moses was a god to Pharaoh, or that the judges of Israel were called gods, or whatever. I mean, sure, it says Jesus is God, or in their Bible he was a god, but to them there are many gods, but there's only one Jehovah, and Jesus is just one of these many gods, and they quote this verse, there are many gods and many lords. However, Paul doesn't allow for this application.

That's certainly not the point he's trying to make. He's saying that idols are not gods, although they are often recognized as gods. All the gods and lords he's referring to in verse 5 are false gods and false lords.

Yeah, the devil is a god of this world. He's a false god. Moses and the judges of Israel were not false gods.

They were called gods as a concession. They were certainly not said to be divine or deities, for as Jesus clearly is, in him do all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, it says in Colossians 2.9. There's certainly no parallel between the way that Jesus is called God, and the way that Moses or the judges of Israel are called God, and certainly not in the way that the idol for Satan himself is called God. The Bible in the Old Testament frequently speaks of the idols as the gods of the heathen, but that doesn't mean that they possess deity, that they are really divine beings.

Anything that is an object of worship might be referred to as a god, but anything other than the real God that is an object of worship is a false god. And so Paul makes this point. Yeah, there's a lot of gods out there.

There's a lot of lords out there, but we're smart. We know that there aren't any real gods out there except one. There's just one God and one Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the way he says that in verse 6 is giving some people the impression that he's not affirming Jesus to be God. He says there's one God and one Lord Jesus Christ, as if God the Father is the only God and Jesus is something else. Well, Jesus is something else, but that doesn't mean he's not God.

Certainly Paul is one who, as much as any other New Testament writer, refers to Jesus as God. There are times and contexts where it is the writer's desire to emphasize Jesus' deity, and on other occasions to emphasize his subordinate role that he voluntarily took on to his father. Both statements are true.

Both are affirmed in Scripture. This happens to be one where Paul is seeking to affirm that Jesus has a particular role that he plays, even separate from his father, toward us.

He's our Lord.

But he is not here denying that he is also God, else he'd have to deny what he himself said in a number of other places and what other biblical writers said. Some have felt that what Paul may be doing in verse 6 is quoting or alluding to some early faith statement of the early church. It's often hard to know whether this is happening or not, but there's many times in Paul's writings where scholars believe what he's doing is quoting what was to them a well-known saying of the church, like the Apostles' Creed prior to its existence, an earlier creed, or a hymn, or something like that.

Examples of that abound in places like 1 and 2 Timothy, where you'll find in 1 and 2 Timothy a number of the portions of those books are set in verse form. That is, not Bible verse form, but poetic verse form. That is because many people, many commentators believe that Paul is there quoting something.

An example would be 1 Timothy 3.16, where it says, Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. It says, God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed in the world, and received up to glory. Scholars believe that that is an old hymn of the early church that has not survived, of course, except in that form.

Likewise, in 2 Timothy 2.11, Paul says, This is a faithful saying. He's obviously quoting some saying that was known to them. And he quotes it, For if we die with him, we shall also live with him.

If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful.

He cannot deny himself. You'll notice in the New King James that whole section is put in poetic verse form, suggesting the belief that this was a quotation of a creedal statement, an early creedal statement or hymn that Timothy was acquainted with, that all the early Christians were. And there are other places where it's not so obvious, but where it's possible that Paul is alluding to or partially quoting a well-known creedal declaration of the early church.

In chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians, verse 6, maybe one of those. The Trinity, as we understand it, was a doctrine not really fully hammered out and codified in the way that we now know it until the 4th century. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the debate about the Godhead was over whether Christ was God or not.

In the 4th century, that was finally settled at the Council of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea that met, I think it was 325 or thereabouts AD, was there to settle a debate in the church as to whether Jesus was God or whether he was something less than God. Because there were two views.

There was the view that's very much like the modern Josephinist view called Arianism, taught by a bishop named Arius. And then there was what we now call the Orthodox view, that Jesus is in fact divine and that he's actually God in the flesh. And that was championed by a guy named Athanasius, as well as others.

And at that council, Athanasius won the debate and forever afterwards, the churches officially understood that Jesus is God. But even at that point, in 325 AD, it had not yet begun to be discussed officially whether the Holy Spirit was part of that picture. Whether he, I mean, of course belief in the Holy Spirit was around much earlier, but as far as trying to formulate a Trinitarian description of God that included the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as all one God in three persons, that was something that began to hammer out after the Nicene Council.

The big issue in the early centuries was whether Jesus was God. Once they got that settled, they went to work on the question of whether the Holy Spirit is God, so that the whole idea of the Trinity, as we understand it, while I believe it is true and I believe it's biblical, it is not formulated anywhere in the Scripture and it had to be formulated by theologians in order for us to have it. Well, in Paul's day, I suppose that although they probably held a Trinitarian idea like we do, I mean, we assume that that is true, deduced from the various things that are left in writing from them, they didn't have, well, they may have had some Trinitarian formulas, but they also may have had Binitarian formulas, which is like Trinitarian, only with two.

We have frequent reference in the Scripture to God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son, without any reference to the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that they didn't believe the Holy Spirit to be part of the Godhead, it's just to say that some of those things hadn't really been worked out and formulated into creedal statements in the early days. And some believe that in verse 6, we have Paul essentially quoting from an early creedal statement, a Binitarian statement, that is two members of the Godhead mentioned in it, rather than the three.

Because it says, we have only 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. Just the way that's worded sounds more like a formal statement of faith than just something someone would say off the top of their head. At least it does subjectively to some, including myself, I think that that's probably the case here.

Verse 7, however, there is not in everyone that knowledge. Now, he's been confirming what the knowledgeable ones are saying about themselves and about what they know. Yes, I agree.

There is only one God, true. It's true an idol really isn't anything. It's true that eating meat sacrificed to idols really is not something that necessarily defiles a person.

I mean, the meat doesn't have some kind of spiritual demons attached to it, or it jumps into you as soon as you eat it, and so forth. I mean, we understand that. But not everyone has that knowledge.

Now, back in verse 1, where he said, we know that we all have knowledge, it is believed that that too is a quote back at them of what they say. And it is probably the case, because here in verse 7 he seems to correct it. No, not everyone does have that knowledge.

You see, it's possible that those that were excusing themselves for the grossest form of libertine behavior were saying, well, you know, everybody knows that an idol is nothing. Everybody knows that. We all have knowledge about that.

And Paul may be quoting that to them initially and saying, well, even if we do know such a thing, knowledge can pump us up. There's something more important than knowing. But then he actually modifies it in verse 7. Not everyone does know this.

He says, however, there is not in everyone that knowledge. For some, with consciousness of the idol, until now, eat it as a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak, is defiled. Now, the defiling of the conscience is something that has got to be avoided at all costs.

Christians should never allow themselves to do anything, first of all, that defiles their own conscience. Later on, Paul says, we're going to defile your neighbor's conscience, if you can avoid it. But let's talk about your own conscience first.

And Paul said in Acts 23, in verse 1, Acts 23, it says, Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. This, Paul stresses, is his boast before God, is that his conscience has remained clean. He has not defiled it.

In the next chapter, Acts 24, in verse 16, Paul says, This being so, standing before Felix, he says this, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Now, this is what Paul always strove for in his own life, to keep his conscience undefiled, or without offense, toward God, that has to do with his own relationship with God, and toward men. He tried to avoid doing things that would hurt his relationship with men, and where in his conscience he'd have to feel in any sense that he had wronged somebody.

He wanted to make sure that his own conscience didn't condemn him for his behavior, either in the sight of God or in the sight of men. If you look over at 1 Timothy 1, verse 5, Paul said, Now the purpose of the commandment, and by that he means his own teaching, what he has commanded the church to do. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.

The purpose of God's instruction is to produce in us love, which comes out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and a sincere faith. A good conscience is more than a little central to the issue of being able to fulfill one's obligations to God and live the life before God that one is called to live. In 1 Timothy 1, verse 19, Paul says, Having faith and a good conscience, which some, having rejected concerning faith, have suffered shipwreck.

Some people, their faith suffers shipwreck because they neglect a good conscience. They neglect to keep their conscience pure. That's why Paul said he endeavors and makes it his goal and strives to keep his conscience clear before God and man.

So having that as our background for Paul's understanding of the conscience and how important it was to him, we can see how much force there was in his statement in 1 Corinthians 8, 7, that if you do a certain thing, or some people do a certain thing, their conscience, being weak, may be defiled. One thing you want to avoid at all costs is having your conscience defiled. You might say, well, my conscience is strong.

Well, well and good, but not everyone's is. And if what you do defiles your brother's conscience, you might say, well, what the heck does that matter to me? That's his problem. Yes, it is his problem, that's right.

But if you love him, you don't want him to have problems. That's what love is all about. I mean, it's due to your neighbor what you'd have him do to you.

If you would want your conscience to remain undefiled, then you should be equally concerned that your neighbor's conscience remain undefiled. And therefore, he says, we need to be aware that although you have knowledge, and this knowledge is such that you feel at liberty to do certain things, and Paul, by the way, shared that knowledge and shared that liberty in his own view of things, but he says you need to be aware that some people are weaker than you are. Some people don't know these things.

And when they eat meat that was sacrificed to an idol, it brings back all those sentiments. It brings back all those memories. It, to them, puts them back in a state of mind that is like when they were really worshiping idols.

And what is the worship of idols but a state of mind anyway? So, I mean, that person is actually, just by eating the food, being carried back, as it were, to a state of defilement of actually, in his heart, worshiping idols. Now, maybe he's not venerating idols in the sense of falling down before them and offering sacrifices to them, but he can't disconnect in his mind the practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols from the whole complex of worshiping idols. After all, it was part of that complex in his earlier life, and he can't separate it now.

Therefore, if he happens to eat meat sacrificed to idols, then he ends up doing

something that is spiritually defiling to him and wrecks his conscience. Now, up to that point, Paul hasn't made me responsible for that guy's conscience. He just has told me some people are that way.

Some people, if they do it, it's not a clean thing for them like it is for you, if you have this knowledge. Not everyone has such an enlightenment. Verse 8, 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. Now, he said, it doesn't commend us to God to eat. You might say, but I've got liberty to eat.

Fine, but is God more happy with you for eating than if you don't? Does it hinder your relationship with God if you don't eat this stuff? He's referring to eating particular foods, in this case, in the context of meat sacrificed to idols. Those who have the liberty to eat it, do they not also have the liberty not to eat it? Will this hurt their relationship with God if they decide not to? Does it somehow enhance their relationship with God for them to eat it? That's what he's asking. He says, obviously not.

It doesn't commend us to God to eat meat. We're not better off for eating it, or worse off for not eating it. Which, of course, translates into an argument of, even though you have the freedom to do it, you don't need to.

It's not something that is spiritually uplifting. It's not something that is edifying. It's not something that makes you better off.

Therefore, of course, he's moving on to the subject that, therefore, why don't you voluntarily not do it? You're not going to be the poorer for not eating. It's not going to hurt you any to give it up. He says, but beware lest somehow this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak.

Now, this is a subject that comes up a number of times. Here, in Romans 14, also in Galatians 5, Paul says we are called to liberty, but do not use your liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but rather by love, serve one another. Liberty and love are two things that exist in tension.

Not in competition, but in tension. This is how love and liberty are in tension. We have liberty in the sense that all things are lawful to me, but that liberty is governed by something else that's kind of like an anchor that keeps it from going berserk, and that is love.

There's a lot of tension on that rope between the ship and the anchor. The waves of temptation of the flesh would incline me to use my liberty toward all kinds of behavior that would be inappropriate, but love prevents it. The verse in Galatians I mentioned



earlier is Galatians 5 and verse 13.

He says, for you, brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. Now, it's selfishly, but through love, serve one another. So, Paul says it in 1 Corinthians, he says it in Romans, he says it in Galatians.

Basically, liberty is something Paul really pounds on. He loves liberty. He wants them to not become entangled in a yoke of bondage, but love isn't bondage.

Well, it is of sorts, but it's a delightful bondage. To bind your behavior because you love somebody is not really bondage at all. It's at least not an externally imposed bondage.

It's clear that if you love someone, you are in bondage by your own heart. There's certain things you can't do. I could not murder my children.

It's not so much because the law forbids it. The law forbids it, and yet some people do murder their children. The law doesn't stop people from doing that.

I mean, it stops some people from doing it, clearly, but not everybody. But even if there was no law restricting me from murdering my children, I couldn't do it. I simply could not.

My will is not that free because love constrains me. I could never do such a thing to my children. In fact, I don't think I could do it to anyone because love is that way.

Love does no harm to his neighbor. So love imposes, self-imposes, restrictions on behavior. And so Paul says, Beware, lest your liberty, taken without the restraint of love upon it, become a stumbling block to those who are weaker in the matter than you are.

Now, verse 10, For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, now see, there we see, that's apparently something that either was happening or being contemplated by those who consider themselves to be knowledgeable, to be enlightened. Now, we don't know for sure that they were eating in the idol's temple, but Paul contemplates that as a potential scenario. Some were at least maybe in the process of discussing doing so, and contemplated it.

So if possible, some were actually already doing that. So Paul has to address it as something that Christians need to think about. Is this something we can do or not? He says, If anyone of you who have knowledge is seen in an idol's temple, if anyone sees you, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? Now, what he means by that is, your example of liberty, though you may genuinely have liberty and you may not be worshipping idols as you eat this meat, the person who can't do it without injuring his conscience, he may still be strongly tempted to do it, and your example may encourage him to do it.

You may not intend to, but whether you want to or not, that's what weak people do. They

find excuses to do the things that they know are wrong. They know they're wrong and can't do them with a clean conscience, but they're still tempted to do them.

And if they say, Well, these Christians are doing it. I mean, what's good for them is good for me, I guess. I can do it too.

But they can't. And so you, by your example, lead them into behaviors which they cannot really do safely in their own hearts, he says. He's suggesting that.

Now, verse 11, And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died. But when you thus sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore food makes my brother stumble.

I will never again eat meat lest I make my brother stumble. Now, does Paul have liberty to eat meat-sacrificed idols? Sure he does. But he doesn't have to.

In the Christian life, there's one thing and only one that stands above all other obsessions, and that obsession is with love. Doing the thing that's loving toward my brother. If anything else preempts my doing the thing that is loving, that other thing has become my religion.

And we might even think that our very liberty to do things that are questionable is the proof that we are irreligious or that we're not bound up in religion. But as a matter of fact, anything that replaces love as an ethic becomes a religion. It may be a libertine religion, it may be a carnal religion, it may be a pagan religion, but it's religion nonetheless.

Because it replaces relationship. And that is just the thing, I think, that sets Christianity, genuine Christianity, apart from everything else in the realm of religion. That Christianity is simply a walk in the Spirit, a walk in love toward people and toward God.

And where we neglect this, but still have some concepts of religion, whether a libertine sort or a more legalistic sort, it's still a variety of religion that replaces the simplicity of walking in love. So Paul, his religion permitted him to eat meat, sacrifice idols, but he wouldn't because that wasn't a very loving thing to do. He wasn't so in bondage to it.

Now here's the thing. Suppose Paul knew that it stumbled brothers and sisters from eating meat, sacrificing idols, but still did it. It would mean one of two things.

It would mean either that he didn't love the brethren as much as he loved food. Really, that's one possibility. Either he loved food more than he loved people.

Because he didn't want to give up the food in order to benefit the conscience of other people. Or it would mean that even if he did love people and would be glad to give up the food, he couldn't. He's in bondage to it.

Now neither option is really very desirable. If I smoke cigarettes, which to my mind is not in itself any more sinful than a lot of other things that Christians do, that they don't consider scandalous. It happens that in our culture, in evangelical circles, smoking cigarettes is considered a sin, whereas eating tons of chocolate isn't considered a sin.

But probably neither of them is. I mean, they're in the same category as far as if they're wrong things to do. It's because they're both in poor stewardship of one's health.

But the fact is, culturally, smoking is looked down upon by Christians. Maybe they shouldn't look down on it as much as they do, or maybe they should just look down on a lot of other things, too, as much as they do. But whatever things should be, there is what is.

And what is, is smoking is looked down upon in our culture. And if I was smoking cigarettes, and somebody informed me that there were a number of people who were really stumbled by that. For one thing, some people who really used to be in bondage to smoking are using my smoking as an example to embolden them to go out and have a cigarette once in a while, and then they get bound up in it.

Or on the other hand, others are not following my example, but they're standing in judgment of me, and it's hurting our relationship. And it's stumbling them, and so forth, causing them to become judgmental when they shouldn't be, and all. I mean, it's really not spiritually enhancing their love and their relationship with God and with me.

If I knew such things, I would clearly give up smoking. Unless I love cigarettes more than people, or even if I wanted to give up my cigarettes, I couldn't, because I'm in bondage to them. I might, in fact, love people more than cigarettes, but I'm in bondage.

Now, which of those choices would you prefer? Would you prefer to be in bondage to a thing, and that's why you don't give it up, even though people are offended by it, or would you prefer to simply love the thing more than you love the people? Those are the two options. I can't think of a third. Now, of course, there may be this third that is claimed.

People might say, well, even if it offends people, I still have to do what is right. We think of Peter at Antioch, in Galatians chapter 2, and Peter was eating with the Gentiles until Jewish Christians came along, whom he knew would be scandalized if they saw him having table fellowship with the Gentiles, so when they came, he withdrew from the table of the Gentiles. And there's a sense in which it may seem like he was being all things to all men, like Paul did, but there was something else at stake here, because the very act of doing so was going to enforce a bondage upon the Gentiles that was already problem enough in the church.

There were already Jewish Christians who were trying to keep the Gentiles under the law

and trying to make that part of the requirements of Christianity, and Peter, as an official spokesman for what was right and wrong, by withdrawing from table fellowship, in order not to avoid his Jewish brethren, he was actually communicating a corruption of the gospel to them. He was actually implying that the law is important to the Christian. And so, in that case, it was wrong for him to make the decision he did, even though it was ostensibly to avoid a stumbling people.

Paul said in Galatians 2 that Peter had done it out of the fear of man. And clearly, there were people who were offended that Paul would preach the gospel. Many Jews would have liked him to stop, but he had to do the right thing.

He must obey God rather than man. However, it's quite clear that preaching the gospel is something that a person is not at liberty to not do. How could Peter stop preaching the gospel just because he defended the Jews when Jesus had commanded him to preach the gospel? I've never heard of Jesus commanding anyone to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

Now, he did command Peter on the rooftop to eat unclean animals, in that vision he had. And, of course, Peter should have been willing to do that. But there is not a general command out there that Jesus has given to Christians, you must eat unclean animals, you must eat meat sacrificed to idols, you must eat this or that.

Meat, in fact, is not anything that Jesus is making any specific command about. It doesn't matter to him. Therefore, a person who could abstain from eating meat, but does not stop eating meat, even though it offends others, clearly is not walking in love.

And Paul puts it in very sharp terms in verse 11. He says, Now, look at the implications of verse 11. He says, Now, this has ramifications, I guess, on a couple of the points of Calvinism.

Because, on the one hand, Calvinism teaches that Jesus only died for the elect. He didn't die for everybody, he only died for the elect. That's the doctrine of the limited atonement.

And, yet, it also says that if you're elect, you'll be saved and you can't perish. You'll be saved and you will persevere. The fifth point of Calvinism is perseverance of the saints.

Therefore, those two points together of Calvinism suggest that a person for whom Christ died can't perish. Because Christ didn't die for anyone except the elect. And the elect never perish because they're irresistibly drawn by grace and irresistibly persevere and persevere.

Yet, Paul knows nothing of this doctrine. He either rejects one or the other point, if not both. Because, he says, here a brother for whom Christ died, that is somebody who is in fact covered by the atonement, perishes.

He doesn't persevere. Now, that either means that Paul believed in a limited atonement, but didn't believe in perseverance. So that even though this man was elect, he didn't persevere.

Or else it means that he believed in universal atonement, but not in perseverance. This man, like all people, Christ died for him. But perseverance was not a factor, it isn't the case.

But the man is a Christian, presumably, because he's a weak brother. But he can perish, even though Christ died for him. And he says the big sin here is sinning against the brethren by wounding their weak conscience, in verse 12.

You wound a person's weak conscience, you sin against them. And it's always difficult to know where to draw the line about some things. I think I mentioned earlier in the year when we were talking about relationships, about issues like hair length in the 70s.

To me, hair length was a big issue. Probably for reasons more vain than anything, but I had myself convinced that it was for outreach purposes. That I needed my hair long because I was in a rock band, and it looked silly with short hair in a rock band in those days.

Rock and rolling long hair were synonyms, almost. So if you had short hair and played in a rock band, anyone could tell at a glance you weren't a genuine rocker. And therefore, they wouldn't even stay around.

I mean, there was some truth to this, but that was maybe a false justification. I'm not saying that having long hair is wrong. I'm just saying that probably what I thought was a matter of doing it for the Lord's sake was more a matter of vanity.

But I sincerely believed it was for the Lord's sake. In fact, so much so that I was disinclined, let's put it this way, to submit to my parents who wanted my hair short. I finally did submit to them because the Lord pointed out to me that the Pharisees, although Moses said, honor your father and mother, the Pharisees said if a person has something by which his parents could be profited and doesn't give it to them, because he claims it's for the Lord, he's a hypocrite.

So that informed me that I should submit to my parents on it. But what I'm saying is, issues like appearance, hair length, and things like that, we have liberty. I believe we do.

I have liberty before God. My conscience would be clear before God if I had my hair down to my waist. But I know that there'd be some places I would worship, and places I'd go, and people I'd fellowship with, who would have serious questions about that or worse.

They'd simply judge it as sin. There is, after all, a scripture in 1 Corinthians 11.14, which stumbles a lot of people over this issue, about how it's a shame for a man to have long

hair. Now, I understand that scripture is perhaps different than most people do, or its application, but nonetheless, it's there, and it gives Christians cause to stumble over that matter.

So I just found it easier to cut my hair. I mean, as far as I'm concerned, I wear my hair short now. It's shorter than I prefer, and shorter than I'm used to.

And I do so for one reason. Not because I don't like hair longer, and not because I think God is against long hair, but simply because it's easier not to have to explain myself, you know. I have Christians constantly come up, well, have you ever seen 1 Corinthians 11.14? Yeah, I've seen it, I've seen it.

Well, what do you do with the long hair stuff, you know? Well, you got an hour, you know. I've got a tape on that, you know. But to have to explain yourself all the time, puts you in a defensive mode that it's just not a very edifying state to remain in.

It's much nicer not to have to be explaining away your behavior, and explaining why your behavior is okay, in spite of the fact that a whole bunch of people think it isn't. Now, maybe it is okay, but it's just a pain in the neck to try to constantly maintain relationships with people who don't think it's okay. It's easier just to get rid of the hair.

It's easier just to stop doing the thing. Stop smoking, stop drinking, stop eating meat, sacrifice idols. You don't need to do it, and if you do, you're in trouble.

If it's something you can't stop, that's even a stronger reason for stopping, because if you can't stop, you're in bondage. And Paul said, all things are lawful to me, but I won't be in bondage to anything. And that's a good argument against doing anything that stumbles others, because if you find yourself not wanting to stop, or not able to stop, then you are in bondage, and you're just kidding yourself and saying you're not.

Now, Paul continues this in chapter 9, and it might seem strange the direction he goes at chapter 9, verse 1, because it almost sounds like he's defending his apostleship. In 2 Corinthians, he did strongly defend his apostleship against, apparently, critics who said he was not an apostle. And commentators at this point think that maybe Paul had to do that here, that already there were some saying he wasn't an apostle, criticizing him.

And so he has to affirm his apostleship. I don't see him, at this point, necessarily trying to defend his apostleship. I see him in chapter 9 trying to give his own case as an example of one who does not use all the privileges that he could use as a Christian.

And an example to the Corinthians, who have liberty maybe to eat meat, sacrifice idols, but for the gospel's sake should lay down some of their rights. Should be willing not to do certain things if it hinders fellowship, or if it hinders your brother's well-being, or if it hinders the gospel. And Paul gives an extended, I say extended, verses 1-23 of chapter 9, description of his own conduct and his own rationale for his conduct.

He does affirm his apostleship, but I think he does so in order to say, listen, as an apostle, I clearly have certain rights that I'm not taking advantage of. And if I want to take advantage of the rights I have, can't you lay down a few of your rights too? After the entire discussion, he says in chapter 11, verse 1, which is really where this three chapter long discussion ends, he says, imitate me just as I imitate Christ. That's the bottom line.

He says, I will set an example for you in this matter. You are loath to give up any of your rights just because it bothers somebody else that you do it. But think of me, he says.

I do this all the time. I got heaps of rights that I that I don't take advantage of because I'm concerned more about the gospel. I'm concerned more about people than I am about my rights.

And it is in chapter 9, verses 123, that he elaborates on this in great detail. Let's just get into it. 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'm not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you.

For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this. 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 and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas or Peter? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? 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? Do I say these things as a mere man or does the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle the ox while it treads out the grain.

Is it oxen God is concerned about or does he say it all together for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt it 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 that we reap material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless, we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister in the holy things eat of the things of the temple and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings at 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 these things, nor have I written these things that it should be so done to me. For it would 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, for necessity is laid upon me.

Yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel, for if I do this willingly, I have a reward. But if against my will I have 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. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win them all.

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without law as without law, not being without law toward God, but under the law toward Christ, that I might win those who are without law.

To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

I read the whole thing because there's really no clean break in the discussion. As I said, his bottom line is, although he lists all these things he has the right to do, his bottom line is, for example, in the middle of verse 12, nevertheless we have not used these rights, but we'd rather endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. And also in verse 15, the same point.

But I have used none of these things, for I have written these things, excuse me, nor have I written these things which should be done so for me now. These are not rights that I'm claiming for myself, and I'm not even making reference to them now so that you'll feel ashamed to start giving me money. I don't want that.

And he says in verse 23, now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be a partaker of it with you. Now what's it mean that I may be a partaker of it with you? Well, he's already a partaker of it, but he wants them to partake of it with him. He doesn't want to be a partaker of the gospel by himself.

He could claim, well, ah, just me and God, I just answered to God, it doesn't matter, I don't care how many people are offended. I'm still going to do what I'm going to do because I answered to God alone. Fine, well, you partake of the gospel, you'll do it alone.

Paul says that's not my attitude. I could use my liberty all I want. Now, I couldn't care, I could run roughshod over the sensitivities of other people.

I'd still be within my rights, but I'd be lonely. But I do all these things, that as I lay aside these rights for the gospel's sake, so that I can partake of the gospel not alone, but with you, so that you will be one. You and others like you.

So, all the way through here, Paul is essentially saying, I'm willing to do the very thing I'm suggesting to you. You have liberty. You have liberty to go into idols' temples, you think.

You have liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols. You don't care what anyone thinks. Well,



you're not very much like me then.

He says, I have liberty too. I have a lot of liberty that I don't take advantage of. I'm an apostle.

I'm a free man. No one can put restrictions on me about what I eat or drink, or whether I have a wife or not, or whether I take pay for what I do. Even the other apostles do that.

They receive money, but I work instead. Why? Because I'm not interested in my rights. I'm interested in the gospel.

I'm interested in the success of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the other things will be added to you. Now, let's just go through this verse by verse.

There's a limit to how much we can do with it today, but let me try here. First of all, let me point out that Paul, in stressing that he's an apostle in verse 1, says that he has seen the Lord. Some people think that that's a requirement for being an apostle, that you have to have seen the Lord.

Well, maybe so. Maybe so. Paul had seen the Lord, of course, after Christ's ascension.

The other apostles had seen him in his lifetime. Some people say there couldn't be any apostles today because they have to have seen the Lord. However, Paul didn't see the Lord during his lifetime, and Christ appeared to him, and he was an apostle.

So presumably, I guess someone could be an apostle today if Christ would appear to him in a similar fashion. On the other hand, I'm not really sure that Paul is saying that he's an apostle because he has seen the Lord. This is something that is assumed by many teachers I've heard.

But he may be making several separate affirmations. He may not be saying, I'm an apostle because I've seen the Lord. He does make a number of separate affirmations by himself to establish the point that he has far more privileges and does have a status in the church that could command more respect than he is demanding for himself.

That he's an apostle is one point. That he's free is another. That he's seen the Lord.

Well, that certainly puts him ahead of people like Apollos and others that people might be comparing him with unfavorably. And he says, are you not my work in the Lord? Now, they weren't there when he saw the Lord, so they couldn't prove that. But the very presence of a church in Corinth was proof of his apostleship.

He had planted it. Their very existence as a church are his work in the Lord and therefore the proof of his apostleship. So he says in verse 2, if I'm not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you, for you are the seal or the proof of my apostleship in the Lord.

If I'm not an apostle to others, it's possible that, as Paul understood it, he wasn't an apostle to everyone. And needn't be. An apostle is one who is sent.

But even one who is sent is not sent to everyone necessarily. Paul was specifically sent to the Gentiles and that was acknowledged as Galatians 2 tells us. The pillars in Jerusalem, Peter, James, and John had extended the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and Paul and had affirmed that as Peter, James, and John were sent to the circumcision, Barnabas and Paul were sent to the Gentiles, the uncircumcision.

And there might be some Jews who could say, Paul's not an apostle to us. And Paul might say, you're right, I'm not. I wasn't sent to you.

I was sent to the Gentiles. But certainly, if he's not an apostle to everyone, the Corinthians could not claim to be outside of his sphere. They were Gentiles for one thing and they were his converts for another.

Quite obviously, if anyone should acknowledge his apostleship, they should. And he says, my defense to those who examine me is this. Do we have no right to eat and drink? Now, this statement in verse 4, no doubt, is an allusion to eating and drinking whatever he wants to, including, if he wished, unclean foods, meat sacrificed to idols.

He's got liberty. That's the very liberty that he's asking them to lay aside. He says, listen, I have the right to, but I won't exploit it.

I won't take advantage of it, as he later says. Do we have not the right to take along a believing wife? Notice that Christians do not have a right to have an unbelieving wife. But he assumes that a Christian does have the right to have a believing wife.

Marriage to an unbeliever is not permitted, at least entering into such a marriage. You're already married to someone, and then you become a believer, and they don't. That's another story.

But he indicates that apostles, traveling ministers, do have the right to take around with them a wife. He doesn't mention children, and that raises questions that I don't really want to get into in detail, because we don't have time to really resolve them. But I find it interesting, although today it's very common for whole families to go on the mission field, I find it interesting that you never find an example in the Bible, in Acts, or any reference anywhere else in the Bible, to a family with children going on the mission field.

Now, if they did go on the mission field, I think they should stay together as a family. I've never approved of families going on the mission field and sending their kids off to boarding school so that the parents could do the work of God on the field. But it seems to me that although certainly some of these married people who were on the field must not have been childless, there's never any mention of them taking children with them on the field, which may suggest that they didn't go on the field until their kids were grown.

The fact is that Peter and others did not leave Jerusalem for several decades after Christ gave them the Great Commission. Some people have pointed to that as a negligence on the part of the Twelve. Don Richardson, who wrote *Eternity in Their Hearts*, actually has a chapter in the back called *The Hidden Message of Acts*, and he personally believes the Twelve were negligent because they stayed around in Jerusalem a long time after Christ gave them the Great Commission, and that God called Paul because of the negligence of the others.

I don't think so. Paul never suggested that, and neither did the other apostles ever acknowledge that to be the case. They felt that they had a calling, and Paul had a calling, of different sorts, but we do find that even the Twelve did go on the mission field eventually, some 20 or 30 years after Christ ascended.

We don't know why. Maybe just because the infant church in Jerusalem needed their oversight for that long, although it seems like 20 or 30 years is plenty of time to raise up some elders to take care of things, or maybe because they weren't free to travel yet. They knew that their destiny was to travel to all the world and preach the gospel, but they had other responsibilities that were clearly at home, possibly children.

We don't know. But one thing is clear. We never read of a family with children in missionary work, with their children.

I'm not saying that it's wrong, but I would say it does challenge maybe some things about the age that we think missionaries should be. Nowadays, of course, we're eager to send out the most youthful, the most energetic, the most zealous, before they cool off, get them on the mission field while they're still excited about Jesus. In the early church, they only sent out the tested, the leaders of the church, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, men who had been strongly, thoroughly tested in the local church, who were already leaders in the local church, and who were the best that the church had to export.

They didn't export a bunch of guys who were untested. Now, I'm not saying that to do it differently is sin or wrong. I'm just pointing out something that we sometimes may miss, that the missionary policies or the missionary assumptions of the early church might not have been the same as ours.

Anyway, Peter and others took around a believing wife with them, whether they had children in tow or not is not mentioned, but we never read of children in tow with missionaries. It's possible that they stayed home until their kids were independent, and then the wife and the apostle went on the road. Of course, some ministers follow that policy even today.

They wait until their children are grown and then they travel. But he said that he had a right to be married, but obviously that's one of the rights he didn't use. He felt it would hinder the gospel, probably just because it would be an added expense and distraction

and keep him from preaching as much as he could otherwise.

And he brings up a third thing in verse 6, and it's about working. Barnabas and I seem to be the only guys who work, who do not seem to have the right to forbear or to refrain from working. What this actually means is that the other apostles did refrain from working, that is, working in secular employment for their support, which suggests, of course, they were supported by the ministry, wholly supported by the ministry.

Obviously, there's nothing wrong with that, but Paul did not choose to do that. Some people might have found fault with Paul on that matter, but he says, well, there's a reason for that. Now, it seems like he goes off on a tangent, in fact, he does, about this issue of having the right to be paid for the ministry.

He doesn't go off on such a tangent here about having the right to eat or drink or have a wife, but once he gets to the issue of having the right to refrain from working and why he and Barnabas don't seem to have that right, he's implying they do have the right. They do have the right to refrain from working, they just don't use it. They work anyway.

And in order to point out that this is not something that they're required to do, but this is volunteering their part, this is a laying down of what is a true right from God, he establishes by many arguments that Christians in ministry do have the right to be supported for their labors. And here's the way he argues it. First of all, he shows there's a basic precedent for this for people in other vocations, people who go to war, people who plant vineyards, people who tend flocks.

Obviously, they don't do it without pay. What they're doing is work. What they're doing occupies all their time.

It's a commitment that doesn't allow them to get involved in other pursuits, so they have to be supported by the work they're in. Who goes to war is on charges. And yet, I think in 2 Timothy 2, Paul said, you know, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

No man that goes to war entangles himself in civilian matters. In other words, warfare is a full-time occupation. You're not in the army and work a job on the side.

If you're going to be in the army, you're going to have to be supported by it, or else you're not going to be supported at all. You go to war not at your own charge. You go to war as a full-time vocation, and since that's all you've got time for, you have to be supported in it.

Likewise, tending a flock or vineyard, it's full-time work, and therefore it's only reasonable and fair, and everyone takes it for granted that those who work in these vocations are going to derive their living from it. And there's a sense in which all of those secular vocations have a parallel in the ministry that Paul's in. Paul's spiritually at war.

Paul is spiritually tending a vineyard, the church. He's spiritually tending a flock. What he is doing spiritually has its counterpart in many familiar earthly vocations, and all of them support those who are in them.

So why shouldn't his ministry support him, he's arguing. He says, Do I say these things as a mere man? Verse 8. Am I just using some human reasoning here? People might say, Well, that's different. That's secular work.

You're called of God. You shouldn't charge anything, so you don't really have any rights that you're giving up here. He says, No, it's not just human reasoning.

Even the law of God says the same thing. And he quotes it in verse 9. He's quoting Deuteronomy 25.4, which is written, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. Now, obviously this law seemed to have only an agricultural application, but Paul saw a spiritual lesson intended in the law.

We're not under the law, but the law does communicate to us truth. Paul said in Romans 7.14, The law is spiritual. And here is a case where Paul saw spiritual meaning in the law, which was God communicating a principle and a value that should be observed.

You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. And what that actually meant literally was an ox should be able to be unrestrained in eating while it works on the grain. It's working.

It should be able to eat. Don't muzzle it in order to prevent it from doing so. And Paul says, Is God so concerned about oxen? Is it oxen he's concerned about? Well, animal rights people today are, but Paul raises the question, Is God really concerned about animal rights? Is it the oxen's right to eat that has inspired God to say this? No.

He says it for our sakes, he says. So that he who plows, speaking spiritually, the person in ministry who's plowing God's fields should plow in hope. That is, he should plow with the hope that he'll be able to eat also.

And he who threshes, which is the process agriculturally of separating wheat from chaff, another thing that he's doing, spiritually speaking, he threshes in the hope of eating and he should be a partaker of the thing he hopes for. He should get paid. He says, If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? Now, what he's saying here is there's something else here.

It's not only that a person who works should be able to eat, but there's a certain indebtedness there that makes it only appropriate. If you're receiving spiritual food, then the person who's giving you spiritual food should be able to receive material food, his material food for that. And actually in that exchange, the person receiving spiritual things is better off.

Because Jesus made a contrast in John 6. He said, Do not labor for the food that perishes, but labor for the food that endures unto eternal life. The man who gets, in this trade, who gets physical food in exchange for spiritual, he's receiving that which will sustain him for only a day. But the food he's giving others sustains them and blesses them forever.

So actually the person who's receiving spiritual thing and surrendering material things in exchange for it is really getting the... is on the good end of that trade. And there's a certain indebtedness there, he says. Verse 12, If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Now what he's saying there is apparently some of the ministers in Corinth were actually requiring some kind of pay for their ministry.

And he says, Others are doing this. If anyone deserves it, we do. But he says, Nevertheless, we've not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

Now he's arguing strongly for the fact that he has the right to be supportive, but then the bottom line is he doesn't want to be. And he goes on to further establish the fact that he has this right. He thinks of more arguments for it.

Do you not know that those who minister the holy things, eat of the things in the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? That's true in the Jewish temple or in any temple, in the pagan temples. The priests eat the food that's offered on the altar. That's how they live.

That's how they support themselves. And Paul's saying, Obviously I'm in a comparable work. The priests are supported by the altar because it's a full-time job.

It's a full-time job for them. That's why the Levites got to receive tithes. They didn't have any farmland or time to farm.

They were busy about the work of God. Therefore the rest of those to whom they ministered ministered to them in finances. And so Paul makes a comparison there to a man in full-time ministry.

Verse 14, Even so the Lord has commanded, and by this he means Jesus, that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. Now where did Jesus say that? In Matthew 10 and in Luke 10. Both chapters are Jesus giving instructions to the disciples who are going out to minister.

Matthew 10, 10. When Jesus is sending out the 12, he says, well, verse 9 and 10, Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor staffs, for a worker is worthy of his food. Now, of course, they're not to provide their own food, he says, because they're working.

They're doing spiritual work, and they're worthy to be fed. And, you know, they're preaching the gospel, therefore they should be able to live of the gospel. I think Paul is paraphrasing it where he says, Even the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should be able to live of the gospel.

When? When he said the worker is worthy of his food. Interestingly, that that statement in Matthew 10, 10 and the statement about a muzzling of the ox from Deuteronomy, Paul quotes them both together again in 1 Timothy 5 when he's talking about supporting people who are elders in the church who rule well. In 5:17 of 1 Timothy, it says, Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine, for the scripture says you shall not muzzle the ox while it treads out the grain, and the laborer is worthy of his wages.

Now, that quote there, the laborer is worthy of his wages, is clearly from Jesus in Matthew 10, 10. And the other is Deuteronomy 25, 4, both of which are referred to in 1 Corinthians 9 also. One thing interesting here, though, is that in Timothy 5, 18, he refers to both of them as scripture.

Deuteronomy 25, 4 and then, of course, Matthew 10, 10, which we looked at. Paul quotes them both in 1 Timothy 5, 18, and he refers to them both as scripture. Now, that might not be surprising except that the gospels weren't written yet, or if they were written, they were not collected yet as scripture, and yet it shows that the sayings of Jesus, whether in some earlier written form that they may have existed or even in oral form, were considered scripture to the early Christians even before the gospels as we have them now were written.

Anyway, so, Paul argues from the law, he argues from what Jesus said, he argues from the example of temple attendance, he argues from the example of people in secular vocations, he argues from the principle of indebtedness on the part of those who have received spiritual benefits. All of these things are bolstering one point, and that is that people who receive spiritual ministry should feed those who are feeding them, as it were, and that a person like Paul in full-time ministry should be able to expect support from such, and it's no injustice to them if he does expect it, but he says he doesn't. He says in verse 15, But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me, for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

Now, we're going to have to cut off there and pick it up next time. After this, he talks about what his boasting is. His boast is that he does it for free, even though he has the right to charge, and he goes into that a little more in verses 16 through 18.

We simply cannot finish it here, so we'll consider ourselves halfway through this passage and take the rest of it hopefully next time.