



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

“Christian Liberty – Use and Abuse”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, I think it's time for us to begin. We'll begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn to Thee with thanksgiving and praise. We thank Thee for the gift of the word of God, and we thank Thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in explaining it to us. We thank Thee for the forgiveness of our sins. We thank Thee for the presence of the Holy Spirit won for us by the blood that was shed on Calvary's Cross. And we thank Thee for the glorious future that is set before us according to the Scriptures. We look forward to the day when we are in Thy presence. And we look forward to the future because we know that not only are we with Thee, but Thou wilt be with us in a very special way.

And as the Scripture say, his servant shall serve him, and we shall have joy of serving Thee through the ages of eternity. We pray for each one present. We ask Thy blessing upon them. We pray particularly for [name redacted] who has just given birth to a baby, [name redacted]. And we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt ease the pain in her back, which has been hurt. We hope not seriously. We pray for the family. We ask for others too, Lord, who are in need of our prayers. We especially pray for those who have requested our prayers. And we remember them, and we ask that Thou art minister to them in a way that will ease their pain and difficulty and trial and glorify Thee.

We thank Thee now for the time of study of the Scripture. We pray that Thou art be with us through it.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Well, we are turning tonight to 1 Corinthians chapter 8, and we are looking, I hope, at the entire chapter 13 verses. And our subject is “Christian Freedom: Use and Abuse.”

This is the third question that the Corinthians posed the Apostle Paul. They had requested prayer, or they had requested information concerning the matter of marriage. They had asked for information concerning virgins. And now the third of the questions begins with the characteristic expression now concerning things offered to idols.

This one has to do with a very thorny question. And the thorny question was probably often debated, not only among the Christians but among the Jews as well. Perhaps you may remember that if you read the Old Testament, the sacrifices that were offered were public sacrifices. That is offered by the children of Israel, given to the priests who carried out the sacrificial work. Well, in the town such as Corinth, the sacrifices were carried on in the temple areas or the synagogue area or wherever the Jews happened to meet.

And when the sacrifices were offered, part of the sacrifice was reserved for the priest and for those who were in the service of the temple or the synagogue. And then some of it was given to others and finally what was left over was sold in public marketplace. And so the question arose among the Jews, to what extent may we eat the meat that is sold in the public marketplace? They were particularly disturbed because it would be served, it would be bought and sold by those who were worshipers of idolatry. And so, consequently, if for example, the meat was that which had been dedicated to an idol, then the Jews were very loathe to buy, use that kind of food, because it was tainted with the idolatry. It could not have been supposed, too, that the heathen paid the proper tithes for the meat that was to be slain or was to be used.

And finally, if it was meat, it was supposed to be slaughtered in a proper way, according to the Jewish people. So you can see with such a close connection between the Christians and the Jews and many of the Christians were Jews, these questions would arise. What about the sacrifices? Can we eat the meat that is sold in the market which has been offered perhaps to a heathen god? And so the question, I’m sure, was one that puzzled and disturbed a good many, because some would have been saying things like, We are not under the law any longer and so consequently we can eat any kind of food. Then others would say, Well, we have a scruple about eating meat that has been offered to idols, because if it’s been offered to idols, it’s tainted to some extent. And so the question was probably discussed a great deal among the Jewish people and among the Christians. And so the apostle now deals with it.

He says verse 1 through verse 3,

“Now concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies, and if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet, as he ought to know. But if any one loves God, this one is known by him.”

Now, you’ll have to pardon me tonight if I blow my nose and put this up on my nose, because I have been troubled by sinus ever since I came from Ohio. The winds were high, and evidently I was a victim of it. And you can probably tell from my voice that it’s not the mellifluous voice [laughter] that I usually have. And I just have to leave it with you and let you recognize the fact that I may be blowing my nose from time to time. Very embarrassing, but, nevertheless, have to do it.

Now, Paul is going to expound these things. And first of all, in the three verses that we’ve read, the apostle declares a principle or principles with reference to this. He says, “Now concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge.”

Well, now look down at verse 7 and I read this, “However there is not in every one that knowledge.” So I am immediately faced with a little bit of a question. “We all have knowledge, but nevertheless there is not in everyone that knowledge.” What does the apostle mean by that?

Well, when he says, “we all” -- if I’m trying to harmonize these statements -- obviously they were no problem to Paul. Here they are in the same context. It’s possible that when the apostle says, “We all have knowledge,” he may intend himself and those who follow him in matters like this, “We all have knowledge.” Verse 7 would refer to believers generally, some strong who would believe the things that the apostle did, and others having weak consciences susceptible to scruples. I’m using the term “strong” and “weak” because this is the term that was used by Paul in Romans chapter 14. He talks about those who recognize their freedom from the law as being strong. And those who are weak are those who have scruples about legalistic kinds of things. We might have thought it was the reverse. But with Paul it’s the strong person who realizes his freedom from the Law of Moses. It’s the weak one who doesn’t and therefore has scruples.

Now, that’s one way we could harmonize these two things. We could say in verse 1 when he says, “we all have knowledge.” He means, I and those who follow me in this teaching that we are free from the legalistic requirement of the Law of Moses. Now, in verse 7, he would refer to believers generally in which there were strong and weak. And so, consequently, there is not in everyone that knowledge. He may be, on the other hand, distinguishing between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. And he may say we all have knowledge. That is, we all know what the Scriptures say on this point. But so far as the application of it is concerned, we have differences of opinions. I don’t know how to solve that. Either one of the other may be true. I’m sure the apostle is not contradicting himself.

Now, after having said that, he turns to the relationship of knowledge and love, notice what he says, “Knowledge puffs up,” verse 1, “but love edifies. If anyone thinks

that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know, but if anyone loves God then this one is known by him.”

Now, what he wants to do, it seems to me, is to deflate the self-esteem of the Gnosticizing party in the church, those that really are bragging relatively about the great knowledge that they have of things. And so he wants to point out that Christian life is not simply knowledge, that the knowledge is to be put into practical effect in every believer’s life and that manifests itself in Christian love. What he says is that knowledge is selfish, but love, on the other hand, is selfless. Knowledge blows up a person, he says, “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” Possessing and preening oneself over the knowledge that we have -- that’s very common you know -- it is something that the apostle does not think very much of.

There are believers who hear some teaching of the word of God, recognize it as the word of God, rejoice in the fact that they have a form of knowledge that seems to be superior to others, and it’s not long before they are doing something like that spiritually. They are preening themselves on the fact that they know sound doctrine, but their everyday Christian life is not a real commendation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pride characterizes them, carelessness with reference to the Christian life, and an uncaring spirit with reference to others, we all know that. We have seen that happen perhaps in our own lives. You hope that it doesn’t but, nevertheless, it’s true that we are susceptible to these things as well.

Job has a statement in chapter 12 of his book in which he is rebutting Zophar, and it includes these words, “No doubt you are the people and wisdom will die with you.” Well, I know some Christian friends who impress me occasionally with having that same spirit. And I’m sure I have impressed a lot of people by having that same kind of spirit that I know doctrine and therefore they sense in me a kind of pride in that and not the proper response of Christian love.

Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, these words are found as “Who should say, I’m Sir Oracle and when I ope my lips let no dog bark.” I’ve got some friends like that who feel that way about biblical doctrine. They are very strong in biblical doctrine, and they do know a great deal of doctrine. But oftentimes the loving spirit the apostle is talking about is not really found in their lives. And it’s something for all of us who do know some biblical doctrine to realize that the doctrine that we hold is something that should make a difference in our lives. And one of the products of it, perhaps the greatest product, is true Christian love.

The 3rd verse is very interesting because he says, “If anyone loves God, this one knows him.” Did it say that? No, it didn’t say that. That’s the way it might have seemed it should have been said. If anyone loves God, this one knows God. Doesn’t that make good sense? If anyone loves God, this one knows God. Well, in one sense it does make good sense. It’s Scriptural. There are some other places that indicate that the one who knows God does love him. He works all things according to the counsel of his own will; all of the things that happen in our lives are planned by the Lord God. “And the things that he does are particularly for those who love him,” the apostle states in Romans chapter 8.

But now this interests me because it says, “If anyone loves God, this one is known by him.” Now, let me translate that literally. What it is -- and watch the time sequence -- “If anyone loves,” present tense, “If anyone loves God.” Let’s say, “If anyone of us at this moment loves God,” “This one has been loved by him,” that verb the second one is known is “has been known by him.” In other words, the “Has been known by him,” precedes the loving God at the present time. Well, what does that tell us? It tells us that no one loves God unless he has first been loved by God. If anyone loves God, this one has been loved by him. In other words, the love that we express toward God, as believing Christians, is put in our hearts by the previous working of God in bringing us to the knowledge of him through the new birth, through the forgiveness of our sins, through

justification by faith. Through all of those things that happen when we believe in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Chafer used to say, “Thirty-three things happen the moment a person believes in Jesus Christ.” I had a friend in Houston, he said, “No, that’s wrong.” He counted them all up, and there were thirty-four. Well, actually, I looked at the list of Dr. Chafer’s years ago and there was a lot of the kind of listing that people would make if they were just making lists. There are lots of things that happen when a person is born again. We know that much. How many? Well, really the Bible doesn’t tell us. It’s purely an inference. It may be thirty-four, it may be thirty, it may be twenty-seven but we know that when a person believes in Jesus Christ he is, for example, redeemed, he’s saved, his sins are forgiven, he justified, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell him. All of those things do happen the moment we believe in Him. So if anyone loves God, he has been known by God. God has come to know him.

Now, what does it mean when he says, “Has been known by God.” Well, over in Romans chapter 8, there’s a text that may bear on this because there we read verse 28 of Romans chapter 8, the passage I referred to a minute ago. “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purposes for whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son that he might be the first born among many brethren.” Foreknown.

What does foreknown mean? We don’t have to expound this in great detail because if you’re interested in further detail you can look at the tapes on the Epistle to the Romans here, and there are probably others that have spoken on it, too. You can probably get four or five tapes, but essentially they will probably try to say the same thing, that when the Scripture say that we have been foreknown, what is meant by that is that God has set his love upon us in an intimate way and has determined that we are to belong to him. Foreknowledge, foreknown, is a reference to divine election. Those who have been foreknown have been foreordained to be the sons of God.

Now, when we say foreknown, we mean that God has entered into a personal relationship with us. For example, in the Old Testament we read in Amos chapter 3, verse 2, Amos speaking with reference to Israel giving the words of God, “You only have I known of all the nations on the earth.”

Do you think our God is so limited in heaven, he only knows one nation. Did he not know about the Egyptians? Didn’t he know about the Parthians? Didn’t he know about the Romans? Didn’t he know about all of the other nations? Well, of course, he knew. Well, in what sense could it be said, “You only have I known of all the nations upon the earth,” only in the sense that he has made Israel a special nation, his chosen nation. They are the elect people of God. That’s spelled out in other passages like Deuteronomy 7, for example. So they were foreknown; that is, they were known before they came into existence by the eternal foreknowledge of God and foreordination to be the people of God.

Now, “If any one loves God, he has been known by him.” He has been elected. In other words, only elect people love God in the biblical sense. Only elect people love God. The elect people manifest their election and their new life in their present loving of God. Now, of course we hinder the fullness of the expression of that, and Paul talks about this here, but fundamentally if anyone ever loves God it’s because he’s been first loved by God, chosen, made a member of his people. I think that’s so interesting. If anyone loves God, this one has been known by him first, first.

Now, some people don’t like to think about that, but I love to think about it. The reason I love to think about it is because it reminds me that I have been upon the heart of the eternal God from eternity. And when in 1915, September the 13th, I came into existence. Well, God had known me for the ages of eternity. It wasn’t an accident. It was planned, planned that I should arrive on the scene. And if you belong to the Lord, you can put your date in there. I’m sure it won’t be before 1915 that was, of course, the

best time to be born. It means you are closer to heaven, but, nevertheless, you have a date.

And if you belong to him, that’s simply the manifestation in earthly form of the effect of the divine choice made in ages past. I know people say, Dr. Johnson, why do you keep talking about that? Do you know why I do? Because our Lord talks about it, and because Paul talks about it, and because Moses talked about it, and because the prophets talked about it. In fact, our Lord tells us to rejoice in our election, and so I’m trying to do a little bit of that. And I have to do a whole lot because I have to do it for a lot of my friends who don’t rejoice enough. So I’m trying to rejoice enough for you.

Now, the problem arises here in verse 4,

“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. 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 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, 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. But food does not commend us to God for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are the worse.”

Now, you understand of course this is spiritual. If we eat, we are the better. No, we are not the better, we are the worse, if we eat and eat too much. And if we don’t eat we’ll be worse, too. But he’s talking about spiritual things.

Now, before eating, the Jewish people and the Christians, who knew about this problem, would ask, What about the meat that we have bought in the marketplace? Has it been offered to an idol? And to those whose consciences were weak, why then of

course they would have doubts. They would not like to eat meat that had been devoted to the idols. And so they would affirm one should not eat meat that has been devoted to an idol, meat offered to an idol.

Others who were strong would say, Well, don’t you know, that now that the Lord Jesus Christ has come, the cross has taken place, the veil of the temple has been writ in twain from top to bottom, that has signified that the Mosaic system has been done away with, and now the Spirit has come to indwell us and guide us in all of our activities, and we are free to eat food. We don’t have to observe the Mosaic laws concerning food. Some of those Mosaic laws were very good, of course, in the sense that we were based on things that were very worthwhile and probably many of you observed them now, but others, they were without any particular significance healthfully or otherwise. And so, consequently, the Mosaic law being done away with made certain things available for eating.

Now, very interesting in the understanding of the strong here in verse 4 through verse 6, “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 the kind of argument that would be used by a person who had knowledge of the Scriptures as they had them. So they would say, Well, after all if the meat has been offered to an idol, the idols are nothing. The gods that they represent are nothing, so how can that affect the food? And further, the law has been done away with. They had a very strong case, there’s no question, but that Paul was one of the strong. But he has a great concern for the weak, those who have scruples because they don’t yet understand the things of the Mosaic law being done away with as they should.

So in verse 4, “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.” Now, it is very interesting that in the 10th chapter when he takes up this subject again -- because this subject will appear in 8, 9, and 10 -- he says actually in chapter 10 that there are gods, but

those gods that are referred to are really demons. They are not gods in the sense that our God is a God. They are demonic. “But even if there are,” here he calls them, 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.”

Now, I’d like to just point out a few things about this. I think they need to be pointed out. He says here an idol is nothing. What he means by that is that the idol has no real existence. In the days of the apostle, there were those who thought a great deal of Jupiter, those who thought a great deal of Juno, his wife, a great deal of Mars, great deal of Mars. They thought they were other heathen idols, gods. And Paul says with reference to them, “These are just so-called gods and that such idols are nothing in the world. There is no other God but one.”

Now, he goes on to say, “Yet for us there is one God the Father.” Now, why did he add Father? Why didn’t he just say one god? Well, one God would be suitable for the Jewish people, wouldn’t it? They’re not Trinitarians. They’re not Binatarians. They’re Unitarians. The Muslims are Unitarians. And I’m not suggesting in any way, of course, that the apostle had anything to do with the Muslims, they except by anticipation because Mohammed arose later. But what he is talking about is the Nation Israel. And so he is careful to say, “Yet for us there is one God, the Father.” In other words, Israel with its great doctrinal statement, “Here, O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord, their great Shema Yisrael.” This is their great doctrinal statement. “Here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” It’s very interesting that it’s possible to make out more that one God in that very statement, because different terms are used with reference to God, but we’ll pass that by and save it for some other time. But the fact that he says here that there is no God but one and then he says, “Yet for us there is one God, the Father.” It’s as if he were, as someone has put it, Christianizing, Christianizing the Shema Yisrael. Here are Israel the Lord our God is one Lord, yes, one Lord all right. But the God who is our God is a

Father. And if he’s a Father, then of course he has a Son. The very fact that he’s a Father means that there has to be a son. So here Paul, someone has said, is Christianizing the Shema.

So, “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom we are all things and we for him and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we live.” What a magnificent statement of our dependence upon the Father and upon the Son. We depend upon the Father, one Father of whom are all things, and we for him. One Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

Christianity is entirely different from the religions of the world. It’s not a religion, as matter of fact. What it is is divine revelation to start with. It’s something that has come down from heaven. It’s not something that we have thought up. It’s different. H.A. Ironside, in a comment he makes, says, “There is a science, a very recent one, known as the science of comparative religions. I think it had its origin largely in the World’s Fair held in Chicago in 1893 when there was a great congress of religion and teachers came from all parts of the world to exchange thoughts on religious concepts. From that time on men began comparing one religion with another. There is a science of comparative religions, but Christianity is not one of them.” Christianity is not a religion. It is a revelation. *One God*. Christian theologians today do not even believe in one God the Father.

Paul Tillich who made big waves in the 1940’s in the United States in the liberal churches of this country, Methodist churches, a few Presbyterian churches, relatively few Baptist churches but some of them, and the Christian churches, Christian denominations, he made big waves. Paul Tillich believed in no personal God as we believe in a personal God. For him, God was one’s ultimate concern. So whatever your ultimate concern is, is your God. But in the Bible, it’s as Paul puts it, “For us there is one God the Father of whom we are all things, we for him, one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things.” Isn’t that interesting? Through whom are all things.

Martha and I sit down and eat supper often at 6:30, turn on one of the educational channels and frequently listen to Marty Stouffer telling us about nature. What a great evolutionist he is. Everything is the product of evolution, everything, no reference to God, nothing. Very interesting things, I love to see those snakes eat those animals and the fox fight with others and all the kinds of things that happen there. Nature read in tooth and claw. Isn’t that an expression with reference to nature? That’s exactly what it is. Everybody’s feeding on everybody else, just like Wall Street.

But what’s interesting here is it says, “One Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and through whom we live.” In other words, everything doesn’t come from what we call natural evolution. It comes ultimately from God. And it comes through the Son of God for he was the agent of the Father in the creation. All things have been made by him, without him was not anything made that was made. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one through whom all things come.

Now, that would be for the strong. That is, we don’t have to worry about meat sacrificed to idols because those things have been done away with. The Mosaic law no longer affects us. These idols are nothing. They’re not gods. They are nothing. Just as he said, “An idol is nothing in the world, and there is no other God but one.” So we don’t have to worry about meat sacrificed in honor of some other deity.

But now what do we do about those who don’t understand what we understand? And Paul has to deal with them too. So verse 7 through verse 8, he talks about that, “However, there is not in everyone that knowledge. For some with conscience of the idol,” I think it’s better to render this conscience. Conscience is what we have that is in a sense replaced the law. Paul talks about it in Romans chapter 2. So, “However, there is not in everyone that knowledge for some with conscience of the idol until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled.” So what he means is there are people who are eating meat sacrificed to idols. They buy it in the marketplace. They know it’s been offered to one of the Gods, but they go home and eat it, but they

don’t want to eat it. But they go ahead and eat it. Their conscience tells them don’t eat it, but they eat it. So when a person’s conscience tells him don’t do it and he does it, what does he do? He sins. He goes contrary to his conscience. John Calvin called the conscience that we have, God’s monitor, to guide us in many of the things that are not specifically set forth in the word of God, some of these little things.

So 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.” There are believers who do not have the knowledge that other wiser ones have and the weak, and they are weak, defile their conscience by eating the food. However, food doesn’t commend us to God one way or the other. So there are other things to keep in mind when we, for example, have set before us meat that has been offered to an idol. It may be that the person with whom we are meeting, I’m using Paul’s expression, but it may be the person with whom we are eating is one who has scruples and he thinks that to eat meat sacrificed to idols is wrong. And so we may have to, for the sake of our brother, not offend him, so that we force him or are an aid in his going against his conscience, for if he goes against his conscience, his conscience becomes defiled. And later on Paul will say, he actually sins, and he sins against Christ himself. So that is the problem that the apostle has set forth.

The strong understand an idol is nothing, we may eat anything, the Mosaic law is no longer a guide to us, a guide in the sense that it was before. But the weak are the believers who don’t have the knowledge of other wiser ones, and we want to be careful to act toward them in such a way that will not bring them -- give them encouragement for eating food that they really feel is really wrong for them to eat.

And so now in the final verses, verse 9 through verse 13, the apostle makes an application. You might at this point ask the question, Well, could not we just go ahead and eat meat that another person regards as being wrong for us to eat with the aim of teaching them that we really are free to eat that? Well, I think it’s plain the apostle does not agree with that. He doesn’t say ever that you ought to teach the person by doing

something he thinks is wrong, and encouraging him to do something that he really thinks is wrong. In Romans chapter 14, verse 13 and 14 in verse 23 of 14 where the same subject comes up, he says that. Because what happens is we then make them sin against Christ, against Christ. By urging them or encouraging them that they think are wrong.

Now, there’s some ways in which you want to apply this. I’m sure there are ways in which I’d like to apply it, too, but I want to finish some other things. In verse 9 through verse 12, he’s thinking now specifically, about the weaker brother and the light that we impose upon him, “But where lists 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 temple will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?”

Now, that’s a very serious charge. That is if we in a public place where eating meat sacrificed to an idol and a brother with a weak conscience who has scruples about eating meat sacrificed to idols feels that that’s a sin, shall we do this particular thing? Because what we’re doing is we are, in building up this individual, emboldening him, building him up to eat the things offered to idols which for him will be sin, “And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died.”

Now, what Paul says here I think any Christian will have to be sympathetic with because: can a Christian heart resist this trifling not eating in the light of our Lord’s sufferings and self-denial for us? Let me read you something that was written on this particular point. This is something from Charles Hodge, and Charles Hodge says it was absolutely certain that none of Paul’s companions in shipwreck was on that occasion to lose his life because the salvation of the whole -- well he’s talking about something else, but then he says this -- let’s see if I’m reading the right thing here -- this appeal secured the accomplishment of the promise. No, that’s not it. Just a minute. I’m sorry to keep you waiting, but here it is.

He says, “There is great power and pathos in these words,” that is, that we are encouraging a weak brother to eat the things offered to idols and this causing the weak brother possible perishing for whom Christ died. He said, “There is great power and pathos in these words. Shall we, for the sake of eating one kind of meat rather than another, endanger the salvation of those for whom the eternal Son of God laid down his life? The infinite distance between Christ and us and the almost infinite distance between his sufferings and the trifling self-denial required at our hand give the apostle’s appeal the force that a Christian heart cannot resist.”

How is it possible for a Christian, if a believer’s conscience is weak, and if he feels that something that I’m doing is sinful, even when I know it’s all right, if he thinks it’s sinful that I should seek to encourage him to go against his conscience and thus sin against our Lord Jesus Christ? In other words, I’m not willing to suffer not eating, the trifling self-denial of not eating when our Lord has offered himself a sacrifice for us on Calvary’s cross. That’s what he means when he says the infinite distance between Christ and us. The almost infinite distance between his sufferings and the trifling self-denial required at our hand gives the apostle’s appeal the force the Christian heart cannot resist.

But now, what is meant by this statement, “Because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died.” Is it possible for a weak brother to perish? I thought we believed in eternal security. Or I thought we believed in the perseverance of the saints, but here is a statement to the effect that it appears that it’s possible for the weak brother to perish. What do we say, with reference to that?

Well, again, let me read something else for you. This language of Paul, it has been said, belongs to the same category as those numerous passages, which make the same assumption with regard to the elect. If the latter are consistent with the certainty of the salvation of all the elect, and this passage is consistent with the certainty of the salvation of those for whom Christ specifically died, it was absolutely certain, would be absolutely certain that they would be saved.

Now, there is an illustration of this that I think would be very interesting for us to take a brief look at, and I’d like for you to turn with me to Acts chapter 27, and I want to look at one place there, Acts chapter 27. This chapter, as you know, is the passage in which the apostle is on his way to Rome and so, consequently, he is forced to enter into the storm in the boat. And in the midst of the storm, you may remember, it becomes evident perhaps that they might lose their lives. And so the apostle makes some statements here, he says in the midst of the storm in verse 31, “And Paul said to the Centurion and the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved,” as the soldiers were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul’s said to the Centurion and to the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” But now if I look up above the apostle has made reference to the fact that they were going to be saved. He says -- let me see if I can find where he states it -- in about verse 20 -- I’m sorry. Did someone say something?

[audience] Verse 24.

[Johnson] Yeah. He says, the apostle has made a statement in verse 24, incidentally the apostle acted as a prophet from time to time and his prophecy -- contrary to the prophecies of the prophets today -- come true. Just recently one of the prophets has stated -- in fact, one of the prophets whose had an influence on a man, who has had great influence on Jackie Deere, has said that on June the 9th, a big prophecy has been made that God is going to rip evil out. It’s going to be interesting to see what kind of evil is ripped out. But anyway, here we read verse 24, “Do not be afraid, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar,” this is the Lord speaking, “And indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.” In other words, God has told the apostle everybody is going to be saved. But then why does Paul, when the sailors are seeking to escape from the ship, say to the Centurion and the soldiers, “Unless the men stay in the ship you cannot be saved”? It would seem that it wasn’t necessary. He would know that they were going to

be saved because God has said they are going to be saved. But the words of the prophets are often the means by which God’s purposes are carried out and so in this case too.

In the passage that we are looking at when we read about those who might perish for whom Christ died, those words, those words of warning, those words of instruction are the means toward the accomplishment of the end that no one perish. Because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish. No, if he’s a true brother, he will not perish. And -- but one of the reasons he won’t perish is because the word of God will act as means by which he is preserved from the actions that would bring about perishing. It is possible to understand this in another way. We’d understand this as simply in a profession. In other words, the brother is not a real brother. And some have sought to explain it that way.

At any rate, what I’ve been saying is true; that is, that God’s purposes embrace the means as well as the end. That’s why for example we pray because prayer is part of the means by which the purposes of God are carried out and sustained. We are told that we will not lose our salvation but the means which God provides are often the prayers and the concern and the seeking of the face of God that he gives us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in verse 13 he says, “Therefore” -- well, verse 12 and 13, “But when you thus sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” It’s not simply a sin against the brother. It’s a sin against Christ. And, therefore, it’s serious. So if I take advantage of my brother’s weakness and, in fact, might seek to teach him by my boldness, it’s I who am sinning. And I am sinning against Christ by not loving my brother as I should and caring for him. On moral and important things, the supreme guide for us is the word of God. On morally indifferent things such as this our freedom is to be moved by love. And the freedom moved by love is our supreme guide.

Now, that means practically, it seems to me, that those of us who are Christians and who realize that we are free from the Mosaic law and free from the requirements of the Mosaic law, we should not go out of our way to wound the consciences of those who do not understand the freedom that we have. There’s no doubt but that Paul considers himself one of the strong. And in Romans chapter 14, the same thing is set forth. But as a free Christian man, it’s his duty, and I think it’s also his desire, to be sure that his freedom is not so offensive to someone who doesn’t yet understand that we cause him to go against his conscience. Build him up to go against his conscience by doing something that deep down within he thinks is wrong.

When I was going through seminary, there were lots of people at that time that thought drinking coffee, at least among the Christians, drinking coffee was really wrong. Dr. Chafer never drank coffee, and he used to tell us that he didn’t think you should drink coffee. And there are other things that he used to occasionally speak against. He greatly admired wheat germ and whenever he said that he recommended wheat germ, all the grocery stores in the area of the seminary sold out within a week because the boys were going there they wanted to be like Dr. Chafer.

But Dr. Chafer historically didn’t believe that drinking coffee was good for you. He went out to lunch one time with Dr. Ironside and another person when Ironside was down here. They ate and they came home and one of the men who was with him, and probably was Dr. Ironside, when the waitress asked us for our orders, we gave our orders, and then she said what do you want to drink? And he said, we said we’re going to drink coffee -- there were more than one -- and Chafer said I’m going to have water, and I’ll bury these fellows later. And then later on in his life he had a heart attack in Seattle, Washington, and he died in Seattle and all the seminary laughed over the doctors prescription for Dr. Chafer because he recommended that he drink coffee on his death bed, drink coffee. We never got a chance to ask him about that.

This thing I think has reference to drinking wine, also. Is there anything in the Bible clearly that says one cannot drink a glass of wine? There are debates over this, but as far as I can tell there is nothing clearly in the Bible that says a person cannot have a glass of wine. The Bible speaks very strongly against drunkenness. But a glass of wine, no. As far as I can tell, the Bible doesn’t say anything against that. But should I drink wine if my brother with whom I’m eating thinks that it’s wrong? No. A little sacrifice like that, how can it possibly compare with our Lord’s sacrifice for us? I’m not interested in building up my brother, edifying him, strengthening him to sin, which is the term Paul used, emboldening him to sin. No, I can do without the glass of wine upon that occasion.

Let me close with a story. This is one that Dr. Ironside tells. I’ve always enjoyed reading this story and telling this story because it illustrates the point so well. He says many years ago he was preaching in a gospel hall in Detroit, and a former Mohammedan from India was there who was the head of a tea business in India his family owned. And he had been brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And on one occasion when holding a meeting there the Sunday school had its annual outing, and we all went over to a beautiful spot and spent the day together.

He said, I was chatting with this brother whose name was -- and this, by the way, was written long before Muhammad Ali came on the scene, but this man’s name was Muhammad Ali. And a young girl came by passing out sandwiches. She said, “Won’t you have a sandwich?”

And Ironside said, “I said, Thank you. What kind have you got?”

“Well, I have several different kinds.”

“Well, I’ll help myself to several of them.” Dr. Ironside was, [laughter] He probably did have several of them. Have you any --

And then she turned to Mr. Ali, and she said, “Will you have one?”

“Well, what kind are they,” he said.

“Well, there’s fresh pork and there’s ham.”

“Have you any beef?”

“No, I do not.”

“Have you any lamb?”

“No.”

“Fish?”

“No.”

“Thank you, my dear young lady, but I won’t take any.”

Laughingly she said, “Why Mr. Ali, you surprise me, are you so under the law that you cannot eat pork? Don’t you know that a Christian is at liberty to eat any kind of meat?”

And Mr. Ali replied, “I am at liberty, my dear young lady, to eat it, but I am also at liberty to let it alone. You know I was brought up a strict Mohammedan. Every three years I go back to India to render an account of the business to my father. He is really the head of the business, and to have a visit with the folks at home. Always when I get home I know how I will be greeted. When I -- the friends will all be sitting inside the house, and my father will come to the door, when the servant announces that I’m there, and he will say, ‘Mohammed, have those infidels taught you to eat the filthy hog meat yet?’ ‘No, Father,’ I will say, ‘pork has never passed my lips.’ Then I can go in and have the opportunity to preach Christ to them. If I took one of your sandwiches, I couldn’t preach Christ to my father the next time I go home.”

Well, that’s a simple little illustration, but that’s precisely what Paul is talking about, that when it comes to the freedom that we have, there are times when it may be necessary for us not to exercise our freedom for the sake of others whose conscience has not yet reached perhaps the strength that your conscience has. The clarity concerning the word of God is not the clarity that you have. And therefore you may be a stumbling block to him. May the Lord let us learn the lesson that knowledge may puff up, love

builds up, and the knowledge that is truly useful and divine and helpful and edifying is the knowledge that is buttressed by divine love.

Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for these very practical words from the Apostle Paul. And we ask, Lord, that Thou art give us the love that the apostle is talking about. Deliver us from the kind of false self-esteem, the preening of ourselves over the fact that we know biblical doctrine. We know it’s important to know biblical doctrine, Father, but we know it’s also important that the biblical doctrine that teaches us to exercise Christian love toward our fellow believers and toward the lost is also something that is for us to pay the closest of attention to. Enable us, Lord, to truly love out of the light that Thou hast brought to us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.