

6889U

WINFIELD BIBLE CAMP - 2003

OUR FAITH: CHALLENGES AND CONSOLATIONS

THE CHALLENGE OF CORINTHIANS

Speaker: Bro. Michael Ashton

Study #4: Eating in Idol's Temples

Reading: 1 Corinthians 8

(microphone wasn't on right at beginning)

..... 1 Corinthians 8, 9 and 10 and we may ask ourselves, why it is that three chapters in this epistle are given over to a subject, when we really don't have idol worship in the way in which they did in first century Corinth? Why has it been preserved down to our day? and why is so much attention been paid to it? Such a large proportion of this first letter that the apostle wrote to Corinth and then preserved for us and to this day.

So that's our question, 'why the emphasis on meat offered to idols?' and the reason we ask it, as we've already thought, we don't have idols in that sense, you can't go around and see temples set out to idols as they had in Corinth (the photographs that we saw in the first session) but the real issue, the issue at that time and the issue for us today, is **worldly pursuits**, and we really need to think something about how it was that first century Corinth worked. You see, the pictures we did see of the idols' temples, whilst they didn't reveal to us, was just the impact it had on daily life. You can get something of the flavour if you go to a country these days, that's a Catholic country, for example, where the whole of life is ruled over by the church, where at every street corner you'll have a little shrine. Where you can't do anything, you can't be born, you can't get married, you can't die, you can't transact any legal work, without the say-so of the priest. That just gives us a flavour of how things were in Corinth, but in Corinth things were even more than that, because everything that you did was associated with the idols' temples. As the archeologists have dug around in the ruins of places like Corinth, they have discovered that the temples were often in different parts, so that you'd have say three levels.

The first level would just be a restaurant, and if you went for a meal, in first century Corinth, your meal would be in the restaurant associated with the idols' temple. The sacrifices then that had been offered to the idol, was the food which would be brought to the kitchens of the restaurant. That would be where you'd go! The next level up, well, that would be a place of entertainment, so the theatre or the gym, or anything else that you did, would be within the confines of the idols' temple. The top level would be the

shrine of the god or goddess, but all of the other parts would be part of the idols' temples. So the normal things of life would take place within the boundaries of an idols' temple. So that point that we've got there is that it's got to do **with worldly pursuits**, all the things that make up everyday life in Corinth, had a link in to the different idols, gods and goddesses who were worshipped there! So it's just as important for us today, as it was for those brethren and sisters in the first century. What is our relationship to those worldly pursuits and are we, in fact, compromising the beliefs that we hold, by some of the things that we do? and hence, there is a challenge in these 3 chapters for us, just as much as there was, for our brethren and sisters right back in the first century.

What comes out as we go into 1 Corinthians 8 is that there were 2 distinct groups within the ecclesia. We need to think of how it was that those two groups argued their case, because they did present their case to the apostle, and this was the basis of the questions which the apostle was being asked, in the letter that the 3 brethren brought to him from Corinth. You can see from verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 8, that he is answering their questions, 'Now concerning things sacrificed to idols' and verse 4, 'as concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice to idols'. So we're going to call these two groups, group A and group B, these two divergent views, they were so different from each other and the ecclesia asked for his verdict on which group was right.

Well, group A, this was their comment, it was like a Mantra, **we all have knowledge**, and just as we saw in an earlier passage, Paul is quoting back to the Corinthians words which they had written to him. These are not Paul's words, **we all have knowledge**, these were the words used by group A. What was it that they were really saying 'we all have knowledge'? We **know**, we all have knowledge, what was it that they knew? Well, they knew that an idol, to pick up a phrase out of the Old Testament, an idol is a **no - thing**. Not a nothing it's a no - thing, it's a thing with no existence and because an idol is a no - thing, then there is no point at all in worshipping it. Once you know then, that an idol doesn't exist, then whatever you do, doesn't really matter, does it? because there is no such thing as an idol; you can't worship an idol even if you appear to be worshipping an idol because there isn't an idol there! **We all have knowledge!** so we know that an idol is a 'no - thing', we also know that there is only one God so, of course, we can't be worshipping an idol, because there is no such thing as an idol. So therefore, the food that we eat can't be contaminated, how can it be? because the idol doesn't exist, so it doesn't matter what it is we're eating, because the idol is a no-thing, then the fact that food is apparently being offered to it, is completely immaterial and we're not affected by it. We believe very firmly in the fact that there is one God! There is a certain logic as you'll see to that argument, isn't there? and it would be possible to argue it very persuasively and I'm sure, that those in group A, did exactly that! We're not at all affected by these things because there is no such thing as an idol, an idol has no power; and those that believe an idol has power, are just completely deluded by that!

But there is another group, group B, and this comes out by the time that we come down to verse 7, 'Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge'. Not everyone thinks the

way those in group A were thinking and arguing. So group B had its Mantra, and we can call them **the sensitive group** (and I put 'sensitive' in inverted commas, and you'll see why in a minute). So their group is '**we know there are such things as idols**'. You'll notice, they're not saying we know there are such things as 'gods', but we know there are such things as 'idols'; let me just read verse 7 for you from the RV, 'Howbeit, in all men there is not that knowledge, but some, being used to until now to the idol, eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol'. They had spent all their life knowing that there are idols in Corinth; they'd seen the impact the idols have had on everyday life amongst their colleagues and friends and family members, and so therefore, they can't get out of their mind, the existence of these things. It's not that they believe in the gods whom the idols represent but they are conscious that the idols are there! they can't get that out of their mind! There's as much logic in the arguments of group B as there was in the arguments of group A, because the idols were there, and the temples were real temples; you could go up to it and it was stone, it wasn't a vision, they weren't ephemeral, the temples and the idols were really there! even though what they represented was not there.

So group B has a problem, so some with conscience of the idol eat as if it is something offered to an idol, and they can't get that connection out of their minds, whenever they eat that food, they know that the food was brought by someone who believed they were offering it to a god or to a goddess. That's so much in their minds that (sorry for the pun) it flavours their thoughts as they're eating! and you can understand how that would be the case! Therefore, the apostle said, 'their conscience is defiled because it is **'weak'**, and again, I've put the word 'weak' in inverted commas; that's the word the apostle Paul uses but it hasn't got quite the meaning that we think about 'weak'. You know, 'weak' is often something that is despised, 'strength' is something which is credited to the person who has it. But their conscience is defiled, they can't rid their conscience of the knowledge that this meat had been offered conscientiously by the offerer to the idol. Now the offerer may be deluded but in his conscience he thought he was offering it to the god or goddess. So the conscience of the person who eats that food is affected by that connection, they cannot remove it from their minds. Now those two lines of thinking, as I say, both have a logic to them that we can understand and there is no meeting point between them, none at all. The two views are so divergent, and hence the problem of the brethren and sisters in Corinth. No wonder they came to the apostle Paul, and you'd need the wisdom of Solomon to resolve that difficulty, wouldn't you? where you've got these two completely different views apparently coexisting within one ecclesia.

So how's the apostle going to deal with this? Well, of course, this is not the first time that the problem has arisen. We can think back to the time of Acts 15, let's just turn there, shall we? because many years earlier, shortly after the first missionary journey, the news comes back to Jerusalem, and you may just wonder how that news came back in the form that it did, well, there's just a little clue (just while you're going to Acts 15, you just like to drop in at chapter 13 of Acts which is the record of the first missionary journey) where we're told in verse 5 at the end of the verse, 'that Paul and Barnabas had also John, that's John Mark to their minister', then in verse 13 of Acts 13,

when Paul and his company loose from Paphos they came to Perga in Pamphylia and John Mark departing from them returned (not as one might expect to Antioch from where the party set out, at the beginning of Acts 13) but to Jerusalem'. You may ask yourselves why he returned to Jerusalem? I mean, there's lots of other questions about John Mark as to why he left them in the first place? but putting them on one side, why does he return to Jerusalem rather than to Antioch? Well, it was his home town, so there's a good reason for going back to Jerusalem, but it was also the leading ecclesia at that time, and it's just possible that John Mark returned and spoke to the brethren in Jerusalem and said, 'you realize that Paul and Barnabas are baptizing Gentiles and they are not being required to keep the Law!' So by the time we come to Acts 15 verse 1, 'Certain men which came down from Judea from Antioch, to where Paul and Barnabas have now returned, and taught the brethren, saying, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When then Paul and Barnabas had no small discussion and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question'. So the Jerusalem conference is held and Paul and Barnabas explain why it is that they do not circumcise or ask Gentile converts to be circumcised. The outcome of the Jerusalem conference is that two brethren from Jerusalem, verse 27, Judas and Silas are sent with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with the outcome of the conference, 'and they shall tell you the same things by word of mouth'. Verse 28, 'For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication, from which if you keep yourselves, ye should do well!'

So although the question at the Jerusalem conference was slightly different from what the Corinthians asked, the question was, 'should Gentile converts be circumcised?' the answer to that question is of interest, when we look at the Corinthian ecclesia, because what the brethren in Jerusalem discussed was, 'how could those in Jerusalem whose conscience now felt, that a Gentile convert who was not circumcised had somehow not yet separated him or herself from their former pagan ways; how could their conscience be reassured? Had they completely forsaken idolatry? So the apostles in Jerusalem say, 'well, there's one thing that these new believers could do; you see, their consciences were exercised by the behaviour of Gentile converts. So they said, 'there are some necessary things we require from you'. **Abstain from meats offered to idols, abstain from blood and from things strangled, abstain from fornication!** We saw to what was going on in Corinth, we thought of the 1,000 temple prostitutes and so on. So you can see, can't you how those things would affect someone would have been brought up with the hygienic and ritually religious provisions of the Law of Moses, and now they see Gentiles eating common food, rather than holy food. They see them eating food with the blood still in it, 'and you shall not eat things that have blood in it'. They saw Gentiles apparently involved in areas where prostitution was taking place and if you should abstain from all the appearance of evil, how could you be in a place like that, where it gives the appearance of evil, whether you were involved in that evil or not? and therefore, the apostle said, abstain from these things if at all possible.

So if you just go back to 1 Corinthians 8, the apostle now really asks this question, 'what is it that really builds up?' Look at verse 10, Group A was saying of those in group B, if they just follow what we do, because we have no problem with eating this food that's been offered to idols, then their weak conscience will be gradually built up, so that they will no longer have a conscience about eating these things. That word 'built up' actually appears in verse 10, 'If any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be **built up** (that's what the word 'emboldened' means, it's the same word as 'edify' (3618). 'Shall not the conscience of him which is weak be built up to eat those things which are offered to idols'. This is a problem which isn't going to go away, group A were saying. They will get used to it! and again, there is a logic to their point of view; our consciences do change, that's both the best thing and the worst thing about having a conscience. A conscience isn't a fixed thing, your conscience today may be different to how it was yesterday and it could be different to how it's going to be tomorrow. Our consciences have to be **sharpened** and the only way in which we can sharpen our consciences is constantly to expose them to the divine mind. If we leave that sharpening process aside, our consciences will be blunted, and what group A were asking was that the consciences of group B should change by eating meat offered to idols.

So what does 'build up'? The apostle says, 'But, ah, group A thinks knowledge builds up', this is verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 8; we know that we all have knowledge and the apostle now says, that knowledge doesn't build up, it puffs up! What does build up is **love!** Now I'm a great fan of J.B. Phillips just in case you didn't know it. J.B. Phillips in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 8 says a lovely thing, his paraphrase is very good, he says, 'While knowledge can make a man look big; only love can make him grow to his full stature'. Isn't that lovely? While knowledge can make a man look big, only love can make him grow to his full stature. That really captures the sense of what the apostle is saying in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 8, so it's almost as if he's cut the ground from under the argument of those who were in group A, **we all have knowledge!** so you think you're big? this is now going to cut you down to size; what you really need is **love!**

So does that mean that the apostle is come down heavily on the side of those in group B? Is he supporting their view? that's really what we've got to look at, isn't it? NO, actually there's a message for both groups in what the apostle has to say and we need to look carefully and discover just what this message was that he's teaching them. What was his message to both groups? You see, he's warning group A against **complacency**, because that's the problem, isn't it? with their view. If you accept the view of group A then you carry on going to the idols' temples; you go there for your meals, you go there for your entertainment; you're surrounded by people who are worshipping the idols in Corinth, believing that the idols are something. Not believing that the idols are no-thing, but believing that they're something. Their worship then, engages them in all sorts of pursuits which really ought to impinge upon the conscience of someone who has accepted the gospel truths, and whose way of life is trying to be brought into line with the way of life of the Lord, whom they claim to be following. Can

you really rub shoulders with a true idol worshipper and still retain your integrity as a believer in Christ? That's what the apostle is saying to those in group A, you mustn't be complacent, he says. Notice this in verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 10, here are the ones who had knowledge, who think they are big (knowledge makes you look big) so, 'let him that thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall', there is no temptation that has taken you such as is common to man. God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but tempted you will be, if you carry on in that way! That's what the apostle is saying to those in group A. Don't be complacent! think of David! and that's really what lies behind these words in 1 Corinthians 10, who thought he stood as he walked around the roof of his palace. 'But let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall'.

There was also a warning to group B, and surprisingly the warning to group B was that they should be aware of **the subtle temptations of idolatry**, but surely they were. But the apostle says to them, verse 14 of 1 Corinthians 10, 'Wherefore, my dearly beloved, **flee from idolatry**. I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say!' What the apostle is doing is he's putting his finger on something which we perhaps don't always appreciate. You see, we see these two groups, A and B existing today in 21<sup>st</sup> century ecclesial life; and you can put forth almost any issue that arises, and you'll find that within the ecclesias there will be those who follow the line of group A, and those that follow the line of group B. Those who say you mustn't do that because it might cause **me** to stumble, are the ones who are in group B. The ones who are in group A who say I'm able to do this with a perfect clear conscience; don't put your conscience on my shoulders, how often do we see that happening? What the apostle is saying to those in group B, you may feel that you've got a weak conscience in this particular area, but like the man of whom the Lord Jesus spoke in His parable, who saw a speck in his brother's eye, there is somewhere a plank in yours; you might not acknowledge it, but it's there. You may have difficulty eating in this idol's temple, but if you really examine your life, you're actually still eating in another idol's temple; but you're not aware that there's a slippery slope there for you, just as you think there's a slippery slope for your brother or sister. So he says, '**flee from idolatry**', open your eyes to your own life, rather than talking about what someone else is doing; because if you've noticed that's the point of view of those in group B. What they're saying is, 'they are wrong and I, by not eating this food offered to idols, I'm right, look at me! I'm the one who is following the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he or she is not!'

Therefore, the apostle turns to them and says, 'Look much more carefully at your own life, rather than what someone else is doing; look to your own salvation in this matter, because while you're saying what you're doing might affect me, actually your foot is on the banana skin, and you're going to slip very quickly indeed. So the apostle Paul's message is as even handed as it possibly could be to both groups, and he says there is a problem in both of those arguments. They're both fatally flawed! You see, there is a serious problem here, isn't there? with this view that, 'if my conscience is going to be affected, you mustn't do it!' because if we all put up those things where our consciences were affected, no one would ever do anything. It's like two people standing before a

doorway and saying, 'after you' and the other one says 'and after you' and you keep on going and no one walks through. You never get anywhere at all by that process; so although it is possible to cause our brother or sister to stumble, we have to recognize that when the scriptures speak about that, they use a word for 'stumble' which is so important it says, that what my brother or sister's action is doing is causing me to go out of the way of salvation, not that I would prefer it that they didn't do that, which is what we often mean when we say you've offended me; but you're actually putting a barrier in the way of salvation for me! So the apostle's message, as I say, was even handed to both group A and to group B.

He actually uses now his own example to try and prove the point. This is chapter 9, it's a little section here that starts in verse 7 and runs through to verse 14, where Paul says, '**I have knowledge**'. So what was the knowledge that the apostle Paul has got about himself? He says, my knowledge is this, he says, I have a right to receive material support because I'm a preacher of the gospel, and he puts forward 6 reasons as to why he knows that to be true; 6 facts to prove that he has the right to receive material support.

1. The first one is in verse 7, 'Who goes a warfare any time at his own charges? who plants a vineyard, and eats not the fruit thereof? who feeds a flock and eats not of the milk of the flock?' So he says, soldiers, farmers and shepherds all receive the reward of their labours. That's true, isn't it? and we accept that! and Paul says, I know it and you know it! Am I not a labourer? am I not a shepherd? am I not a soldier? am I not a farmer? **I therefore, ought to receive material support because I'm a preacher of the gospel.**

2. Then in verses 8 and 9, he says, 'Come what's more, the Law itself provides for the oxen when he treads out the grain'. So this is the second point! It isn't only that soldiers, farmers and shepherds receive a reward for their labour, **even oxen receive the reward for their labour and the Law supports it. We all have knowledge**, and I know, says the apostle, that I should receive the rewards of my labours as a preacher of the gospel.

3 and 4. The third point is that just ordinary gratitude for what he's done amongst the Corinthians should cause them to look after him. That point is wrapped up in the fact that he says, the apostles were their spiritual fathers. Verse 11, 'If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather?' So **natural gratitude** and the fact that the apostle had become **their spiritual teacher and father.**

5. Verse 13, the fifth point that he brings forward, 'Do you not know that they which minister about holy things (these are the priests in the temple) live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? So if the priests are fed, because they are working on behalf of the people, should not the apostle be fed? because **he is working on behalf of those to whom he's preaching.**

6. Then finally, in verse 14, as the most important argument of all, it's what the Lord preached too, **'even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel'**. The Lord Jesus said, 'the worker is worthy of his hire' and it's that to which the apostle is referring here. So 'don't muzzle the ox that treads out the corn', we all have knowledge, and the apostle says, I know that I have a right to material support.

Now some might claim that right, and they would be group A, wouldn't they? But not Paul, so why was it that he didn't claim that right? Was it that he was thinking of those who might feel that Paul was only in it for the money? In other words, their conscience was going to be affected, is that the reason he didn't do it? So therefore, is he supporting group B? He clearly isn't supporting group A, because he's not taking that right, is he supporting group B? is that the reason? Well, no it isn't! It wasn't for their consciences that he was not taking that material support which was his due. He was doing what he did as an example of **love because love builds up, knowledge puffs up!** So it was because of his love for them, it wasn't because he was trying to deny one group and support another, but it was because he had love for them all, and he wanted to win as many as possible for Christ. So he didn't take that right that was his, even though he knew that he could have done it.

He then brings forward another example. He brings forward the example of **Israel in the wilderness**. What about Israel? Well, just think about it! this is 1 Corinthians 10, and he now uses a phrase which contrasts with the phrase with which he started 1 Corinthians 8, the phrase the Corinthians themselves had used, **we all have knowledge**; he now says, 'I would not that you should be ignorant (so you think you all have knowledge? there are some things you've not taken into account) and that is always the case, did you know that? If someone claims to have information, there is always a piece of information that is missing to him, almost invariably. The one who thinks he has all the facts at his fingertips and is therefore able to make the right judgment, is the one who is most likely to make the wrong judgment because the most essential piece of information is held by someone else. You always need a bit of humility about every situation and that's what the apostle is teaching us here.

'I would not that you should be ignorant', so what was it that they had not taken into account at all, in these matters? So it was this example that brings before them that clear bit of information. He speaks now about Israel **all being baptized** to Moses, in the cloud and in the sea, just like all the Corinthians had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we've got a comparison here right away between Israel in the wilderness and Corinth in the wilderness of paganism. Well, Israel sat down to eat and drink, before the golden calf (Exodus 32). It's absolutely analogous to the Corinthians sitting down and eating in idols' temples-Israel before the golden calf, the Corinthians before Venus or whoever it may be that they were worshipping at that time. Just like eating in idols' temples! and what happen to them?

Well, the apostle goes on and says in verse 6, 'These were our examples to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted'. We shouldn't desire evil things as they desired; we mustn't be idolaters, we mustn't commit fornication, that's verses 7 and 8; we mustn't tempt Christ, verse 9; we mustn't murmur, verse 19. Now it's interesting, isn't it? that little list, 'the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play', they lusted after evil things; they were idolaters, they committed fornication; we've got a list here, yes, it is written about Israel in the wilderness, but we've got a list which must apply to people in Corinth, that's why the apostle has brought it forward, this is the information that the Corinthians needed, and what he's trying to do, is to peel away the scales from their eyes, and saying, 'look at Corinth as the Lord Jesus must look at Corinth. Can't you see how the people in Corinth really are in His sight? they lust after evil things, they are idolaters, they are fornicators, they tempt Christ, they put Christ to the test with everything that they do. They are constantly murmuring, they are not thankful for the things which God gives to them, and they're seeking things which they can get for themselves, to satisfy their own pleasures, their own passing pleasures. So who do you want to be like? that's the challenge that the apostle is putting out to the Corinthians at this stage! So Israel were just like the people in Corinth. So the apostle does go on after having spoken about that example in verse 14, 'Wherefore my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak to wise men', notice, he doesn't say I'm speaking to knowledgeable men, he doesn't say to men who have sensitive consciences, I speak to wise men and the apostle now is trying to form a **new group**, and he's inviting members of group A and group B to join this group. This is the group of wisdom whose banner is **love**. That's the mantra of group C! '**love one another as I have loved you**', and that's how they should act now; 'So I speak as to wise men, judge what I say.

He now speaks about the **Lord's table**. Why is it, he says, that you are arguing about eating at idols' tables, when what you should really be doing, is eating at the Lord's table, because the Lord's table has something which the idol's table can never have! The Lord's table and the memorial meal is potent force; it's so powerful! The Lord's table can do what the idol's table has proved itself impossible of doing; the idol's table cannot **unite you**. In fact, your discussion about it, has deeply divided you; you're in two camps, but the Lord's table can bring you together. Don't talk about whether this brother is eating at an idol's table or not, is he eating with you at the Lord's table? that's much more important. Are you eating with him there? or are you finding some things which cause you to go away and eat on your own as if you will have nothing to do with him? NO, the memorial meal is a potent force, it both unites believers together, but more importantly, **we are united with our Lord** when we eat at that table. So the apostle says, I can eat at an idol's table with an absolutely clear conscience; I can eat food that's been offered to idols and I'm not affected by it at all. But just in the same way, as I won't take my rights and material support as an apostle, I shall not do that because much more important to me, is the links that I have with my brethren and sisters, and I want to eat with them around the Lord's table.

So he now teaches them the apostle's way! To take account of every brother or sister's conscience, would stultify all activity; the example of the door that I used,'after

you, no, after you', you would never get anywhere if you spent your time with that and we should think very carefully, very carefully indeed before ever we say to our brother or sister, 'what you are doing is harming my conscience'. It may be true, but we should think very carefully before we say that to the brother or sister. What we should try and do, is involve them in our meal around the memorial table and what that means! they are our brother and sister. Paul has immediately raised the discussion onto a much higher level, just as we saw when we were thinking of 1 Corinthians 1, he's trying to see this from the viewpoint of the Lord Jesus Christ. What does the Lord see when He looks at Corinth?

Now for us, the issue is not eating food that's offered to idols. With us, the issue is very different. It's our association with the world. It's whether the things that we do are, in fact, compatible with our profession with our Lord Jesus Christ. So the apostle in his writings brings forth, what I call, **Six Worldliness Tests**: these are the tests that you must apply, and I must apply, before we do anything. These are the tests that we apply about going out for a meal, going out to see a play, should we see this film? should we watch that television program; should we involve ourselves in this sporting event? Whatever you want to answer that this, whatever is your particular interest, add it to that list! This is what the apostle is talking about in **our case**. Not meat offered to idols, but he's talking about the ball game; he's talking about the Shakespearean play; he's talking about the concert for us. These are the tests then that we need to apply. They are challenging tests and I make no excuse for that whatsoever. They are as challenging to me as they will be you, if there is any comfort for you. Take notes very carefully of these tests!

Test # 1 - Can I offer thanks before doing whatever it might be? You see that's what the apostle says when he writes about meat offered to idols in Romans 14 verse 6. He raises various things here: he that regards the day (because there are special days, aren't there?)

'He that regards the day regards it to the Lord, he that regards not the day to the Lord, he doth not regard it'. He that eats (whatever he eats) eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he that eats not (he that refuseth certain foods) to Lord he refuses them, and he gives God thanks for what he does eat. So whatever it may be, can I offer thanks before hand? and you can think of some things which the world would like us to do, where we could not offer thanks before hand. If that's the case, we ought not to be doing it, and it's going to be different for each of us in this room. We need to recognize that it's going to be different. That, of course, is the problem of group B.

Group B tries to put everyone in exactly the same position, with exactly the same developed conscience; now if I can make an admission to you, standing here, my conscience is different now from what it was when I was baptized. Actually, I'm thankful that it is! and I would hope that it is, and I would hope that it's changing and I hope that yours is! But just imagine how I would have felt, when as a young brother 40 years ago when I was first baptized, if a brother or sister demanded of me, what my conscience now demands of me; that would be wrong, wouldn't it? So we're all at different stages of

development so far as our conscience is concerned. So that question has got to be answered by us as individuals, not by some one else telling us. Well, there's something you can't give thanks for, if you can give thanks for it, then that pursuit has passed Test #1(Romans 14:6). But there are still 5 more to go!

Test #2 - Will it be edifying?(1 Cor.8:1) Well, this is almost the hardest of all the six tests: we know that we all have knowledge, knowledge puffs up, **but love edifies**. We've seen how important edification is! is what I'm going to do edifying? Well, you've got to answer that for yourself, and I'm sure you can see the harshness of that test.

Test #3 - It's there! Don't you think from what I've just said, that you put this to one side? Will it cause my brother **to stumble**?(8:11) We need to think about that before we do anything.

Test #4 - Can I **do it to the glory of God** (9:23) You see, in 1 Corinthians 9, the apostle said in verse 22, 'To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some! This did I for the gospel's sake, that I might be a partaker thereof with you'. I do it for the gospel's sake, can I do it to the glory of God? that's test #4.

Test #5 - **Is it something that I couldn't invite my brother or sister to share with me?** Because if you can't, then really you ought not to be doing it! I ought not to be doing it! Can I share it as an act of fellowship with my brother or sister? Otherwise, I'm doing it behind locked doors, but my Father sees in secret; and there will be an open reward at some stage, for the things that are done in secret. So if I can't share it as an act of fellowship with my brother or sister, really I ought not to be doing it. (10:21)

Test #6 - The final and perhaps the most important test of all - Would I do it if Jesus was with me? and all of those tests come out of these 3 chapters in 1 Corinthians, about eating meat offered to idols. Group A with its knowledge were shown to be wrong, and Group B with its sensitive conscience was shown to be wrong. Not because it had a sensitive conscience note, that's not why group B was wrong; the apostle wants us to have sensitive consciences. Where group B was wrong, was that sensitive conscience was then being imposed upon the other brethren and sisters. That's the only place where group B was wrong, and so now the apostle tries to bring them to this central position, to be with the apostle, **LET ALL THINGS BE DONE IN LOVE!**