

When Right Becomes Wrong // 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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[0:00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

1 Corinthians 8 Now, concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagined he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that an idol has no real existence, and that there is no God but one.

For although there are many so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

[1:18] However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in the idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?

And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the person for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble.

[2:28] This is the word of the Lord. Praise God. Please be seated. Amen. Is it wrong for believers to watch R-rated movies?

Or to listen to rock and roll? Is it wrong to smoke tobacco or drink alcohol? What about CBD or THC gummies?

Is it wrong to mow your grass on Sunday? If I get sick, is it wrong to take an antibiotic? If I'm watching the game, is it wrong to make a bet on it?

If I'm buying a car, is it wrong to take out a loan? Is it wrong to get a tattoo? If I have kids, is it wrong to vaccinate them? Or is it wrong to not vaccinate them?

Is it wrong to let them celebrate Halloween? And when they get older, is it wrong to put them in public school? Is it wrong for girls to wear a two-piece bathing suit or guys to swim without their shirt on?

[3:36] What about yoga pants, short skirts, and strapless dresses? Are they wrong? What about high-rise mom jeans? Can we just agree they are wrong and leave them in the 80s?

Is it wrong for teenagers to date? Is it okay for them to spend time alone? Is it wrong to hold hands? To hug? To kiss? How far is too far? How far is wrong? What is wrong?

What is right? These are questions you have no doubt asked. The answer is not as easy as we think. We don't come to Christ and receive a long list of rights and wrongs.

In fact, the Bible contains a few black and white commands like honor your mom or honor your father, so call the old man today, or don't steal, don't murder.

[4:35] But the vast majority of decisions we make on a daily basis are neither black nor white. They're gray. Perhaps the Lord's favorite color is gray.

So what are we to do? How do we discern what is right and what is wrong? In our passage, the Apostle Paul has been answering various questions that the Corinthians have written.

If you're our guest today, we're just kind of walking through this letter, but this letter is a response to a prior letter that the Corinthians had written from him. This church that was gathered in the city of Corinth, the Roman colony there in Greece.

And this letter is a response by the Apostle Paul to their letter and to questions they have. If you look down there in verse 1, he says, Now concerning. This is the third time he's said this phrase. It's a formula alerting them that now I'm going to answer your question. He said that in verse 7, Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. So it appears when he says, Now concerning here, he's just saying, Now concerning about another matter in which you wrote.

[5 : 44] But what was the matter? What was the question they were asking him? It seems they were asking, Is it wrong to eat food offered to idols?

Or even more specifically, I think they were asking, Why is it wrong to eat food offered to idols? Not likely a question you asked this week.

Now Paul's answer is long. Begins in this verse, goes all the way to the end of chapter 10, actually 11 verse 1.

Paul gives five reasons why you should not eat food offered to idols. And this morning we're going to look at the first reason.

While the specific question, Why is it wrong to eat food offered to idols? It's not one we ask. We will often ask, I guess.

[6 : 45] But the first reason he gives is one we need to learn. A vital principle about how we think through gray matters in the life of the church. And where we're going is, Don't let your right become wrong by disregarding your brother or sister in the church.

Don't let your right become wrong by disregarding brothers and sisters in the church. The first question, or the first point actually, is the first question is not, Is it right or is it wrong?

The first question is not, Is it right or is it wrong? And I get those, Is it right, is it wrong? Questions all the time from young folks.

But when it comes to do's and don'ts, Far too often we step off on the wrong foot. And that's what Paul's alerting us to here. We step off with the question, Is it right or is it wrong? Can I do it or can I not?

And often we don't go much further than that. The Apostle Paul does not just answer that question outright. He does what he does throughout this letter. Breaks it down theologically.

[7 : 48] But let me set the context first. Now if the Apostle Paul were here and he were asked, Is it wrong to take or to eat THC gummies? He might need a little context to answer that ethical question.

And so too we need a little context to understand this food offered to idols. What's going on here? Now the first century was very pluralistic. There were all sorts of gods and goddesses.

Nike, Zeus, Athena, Ares, Artemis. You remember that in Ephesians when the gospel came to town. All these people, it broke out in a riot. So riots are not just for our day.

The riots were back then. They were shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. So it's very pluralistic. And the gospel came and broke in and changed things. There was also the worship of the emperor.

And Corinth was a Roman colony. And so there was a requirement to worship the emperor, to offer incense, pay homage, offer sacrifices to him. And so while there are churches on every corner in the south, seemingly, in first century Corinth, there were temples on every corner.

[8 : 54] To various gods and goddesses, pagan temples, ungodly temples. Now that much we likely know.

But these temples were also like restaurants. Where people would eat the leftover meat. The idea is you'd often offer sacrifice. Pour out the blood. Maybe the fat is burned.

But so much of the animal was not consumed in the sacrifice. And so the temple became kind of like a restaurant. It would open up its doors for people to go in there and buy up some of this sacrificed meat to eat it.

A way of supplying food. But not only that, the meat that was not eaten in the restaurant, so to speak, was sold into the marketplace for people to buy.

And so this food or this meat offered to idols was then on your shelf at the local Aldi. And so people began to ask, is it wrong to eat this food?

[9:59] After all, they had been suddenly delivered from worshiping idols. And so they're asking, what should I do with this food? Now, as is typically the case in churches, when something contentious comes about, they split into two groups.

And the yeas were saying, yes, it's wrong to eat that food sacrificed to idols. There's only one God. And we can't turn back to worshiping the idols of this age.

We're followers of Christ now. Stop eating that food offered to idols. And the nays were saying, no, it's not wrong to eat this food.

Idols are nothing. Idols are figment of people's imagination. Why does it matter if I eat this food?

Come on. Let's eat. Now, it seems that the nays were more than the yeas.

The idea is most of the people in the church thought it was okay to eat food sacrificed to idols, which is not surprising because there's so much blurriness with this church, so much worldliness in this church. And so it seems that they were just okay with it.

[11:06] And so in these verses, Paul is mainly addressing that group. He's mainly addressing the ones who think it's okay. And he essentially says, the first question is not, is it right or is it wrong?

Look at how he continues in verse 1. He says, we know that all of us possess knowledge. Now, as we've seen already, these quotation marks are what we believe, Paul, what we believe are Corinthian slogans.

And so it seems that the nays are out there saying, we all possess knowledge. We all know these idols are nothing. We all know we can eat this meat.

We all know what is right. But then he continues and says, all of us possess knowledge, but this knowledge, that knowledge puffs up.

But love builds up. Now, some jump off on this verse and say, that's right. Knowledge puffs up.

What we need to do is let our knowledge not get in the way.

[12:09] Love trumps hate after all. We need to be more accepting and welcoming like Jesus. But not all knowledge puffs up. That's not the Apostle Paul's point.

His point is, this knowledge puffs up. A certain knowledge in relation to idols. Now, this word puffs up is not meant to talk about being bowed up after lifting weights or something like that.

But in reference to the puffing up of pride. It's already occurred three times in this letter. This word. Onomatopoeia, I think.

It sounds like what it means. So the ffff of pride puffs you up. You think you're better than anybody else. Your chest is out. That's what's going on. But how can knowledge lead to pride?

Now, we all know that love without knowledge is just pure sentimentality. It is the teenage son's mom who buys his spin every time. Bless his pee-picking heart.

[13:18] Sentimentality. Ignorance. But Paul is warning about the opposite danger. Knowledge without love. Knowledge without love is a know-it-all. You know, a person who has their mind made up, their hair parted, all their I's dotted and their T's crossed.

They got it all figured out. They have nothing else to learn from anybody. It's that person who knows what they know but does not know what they don't know.

It's that stupor that takes over most teenagers and keeps them captive for eight to nine years. As Mark Twain put it, when I was a boy of 14, my dad was so ignorant, I could hardly stand to have the old man around.

Just a doofus. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished by how much the old man had learned.

Sadly, some people never get out of being a teenager.

And it's this danger that Paul is concerned about. In fact, biblically, the most dangerous place you could be is not in a brothel.

[14:27] Biblically, the most dangerous place you could be is being wise in your own eyes.

Proverbs says there's more hope for a fool than someone who's wise in their own eyes.

Unable to listen. Unable to hear. Unable to be adjusted. Unable to listen. And so Paul is saying, that's what you're like, you naysayers.

We know what's right. We know what's wrong. We got it buttoned down. We got it figured out. We don't need your help. You need our help. And Paul says the first question is not is it right or is it wrong.

First question is not who's right or who's wrong. So what is the first question? What are we meant to think firstly? And he continues, look, in verse 3, and this is brilliant.

But if anyone loves God, he's known by God. If anyone loves God, he's known by God.

[15 : 26] And that's not the way we expect. If anyone loves God, we expect it to come. God loves him. But he's saying something very important. If anyone loves God, he's known by God.

Maybe even if anyone loves God, we think he knows God. But he's underlining something very important here. On the one hand, it's so vital to see the most important thing about us is what we know, but who knows us?

The most important thing about us is not what we know about this or that, but that God knows us and loves us. I remember that old song. You know, you remember Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Little ones of him belong. There we, well, I don't know. Did I mix two songs? Is that it? Yeah, that is it. I don't know. But I was, and you know, one time I was visiting my brother's house and I was in his son's room.

And so I know that. Jesus loves me, this I know. And on his wall, it said, Jesus knows me, this I love. I think I like the other version better.

[16 : 31] But either way, it's a profound biblical truth. Oh, Lord, you've searched me and known me. 2 Timothy, the Lord knows whose are his.

1 Corinthians 13, I shall know fully even as I have been fully known. But why does the apostle Paul mention this here? He's alerting them to something very crucial.

The crucial dividing line is not between who's right or who's wrong on a particular issue. The crucial dividing line is those who are of the world and those whom God knows.

Do you see that? Already he's alerting them that the others on the other side are not your enemies. The others are on the other side are your brothers and sisters through Christ.

It's so incredible what he's doing. It leads to the rest of his argumentation. Don't let your right become wrong by disregarding your brother or sister in the church. So he's beginning to open their eyes.

[17 : 31] That it's not just about button down the hatches on a particular issue. It's about considering who knows you and who else the Father knows around you.

All right. So secondly, the first question. We know what it's not. The first question is, is it permitted or is it prohibited? If the first question is not, is it right or is it wrong? What is the first question? Well, it is. Is it permitted or is it prohibited? So in these gray matters, that's the first question we should be asking. Or to put it another way, what does the Bible say about that? What does the Bible say about that?

Now, these verses are stunning. Some say this is like a creed or something like that. Look down there in verse 5. Although there are many so-called gods in heaven and earth, indeed there are many gods and lords.

There's one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ. Some people say this is a creed or something like that. The Apostle Paul is reciting a creed of some sort.

[18 : 34] Others just say that the Apostle Paul is writing. And he just stumbles upon something incredible. Obviously, he's inspired, so he's not stumbling. But he comes upon something incredible.

I think it's more of the latter. But either way, it's staggering. On the one hand, the Apostle Paul, in this little statement, affirms monotheism. This idea that there is one God over all.

That's what Jews believed. And that's what Jews celebrated. The Shema was put in their doorposts. These verses from Deuteronomy 6. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

This wonderful reminder. The Lord is one. And why do you love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? This idea that in the same way that he is one, then all of you should be one.

Worshipping. Glorifying him. So Paul affirms this monotheism. But he also affirms the highest doctrine of Christ imaginable. So this would have been before the Gospels would have been in their written form.

[19 : 40] And yet the Apostle Paul is articulating the highest doctrine of Christ. That Jesus Christ is the Lord. Alongside God the Father.

Not in a way that diminishes the monotheism of God. That there's one God. And yet there is the Lord. And there is God the Father. And he doesn't mention the Spirit here because it wasn't, you know, he didn't forget it.

It doesn't apply in this setting. But the staggering, as staggering as this statement is, firstly, it arrives in this context. The Corinthians are asking, why can't we eat food sacrificed to idols?

He continues in verse 3. Look, he quotes them twice. We know that an idol has no existence. So he's quoting their argument, you know. This is the naysayers. This is our idol has no existence. There's no God but one. That's the Shema. So those are quotes. Those are things they're throwing around. But then he continues and says, verse 5, there's many gods.

[20:52] But really, there's one God. Many lords. But really, there's one Lord. One God who's the Father.

One Lord who is Jesus Christ. The knowledge, therefore, that sets us apart is not merely that we are known by God.

Or that we know there is one God. But that we know the one God through the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what is exhilarating.

When Jesus landed in Galilee, they said, this one preaches with authority. This one doesn't talk like the scribe. All of his earthly ministry was a proving that he is the son of God.

He is not another prophet. And yet, this God, God and man in one man. Jesus Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for sin.

[22:00] And so there is one God. And there is one Lord. And wonderfully, there is one mediator that stands between God and us. The man, Christ Jesus, who died for our place.

And so these incredible truths became a confession for them. That this God, there is one God, the Father. And there is one Lord who deserves our allegiance, our worship.

That is what Paul is saying. So from the Father we exist. But through the Son we exist. We have been made new in him. Born again to a living hope.

We walk by faith in the Son of God. And so this truth is deeply practical. It's stunning in the context. It's a confession that's meant to anchor us and guide us in anything.

This one Lord who deserves our allegiance. Confessions like this are so vital. And this improvement, if I can put it that way, on the Shema.

[23:04] This filling out of the Shema. It should be vital for us. Throughout the history of the church, the church has used confessions to anchor and guide them. And this confession should be like that.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism famously begins, What is the chief end of man? And the answer is man's chief end is to know God and glorify him.

There's a great story about the Westminster Confession from the old guys. There was an officer in the U.S. Army. He was in a great western city in the midst of rioting. Perhaps in L.A. in the 90s or something like that.

The streets were overrun by a dangerous crowd. And one man he saw in the midst of this crowd, another army man walking through the crowd with great calmness and firmness of mind.

B.B. Warfield is the one who tells us this story. And he says, amidst this surrounding uproar, he's just walking with a demeanor of confidence and calmness.

[24:05] So impressed was his bearing amidst this uproar that as he passed, as the one man passed the other man, they both turned back to look at one another.

Like, what's going on? You're calm. I'm calm. What's going on in the midst of all this? He said the other man came up to him and said, What is the chief end of man?

And he said, Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him together. And the other man said, I knew you were a Westminster Shorter Catechism guy.

I thought it was a pretty good joke, but y'all didn't buy in on it. But that's what I was thinking about you too. He responded, What is it meant to do? These things are meant to locate us.

But why is he telling us this right here? Because the apostle Paul wants to recalibrate their conscience.

[25:08] Now, the word conscience does not appear in this text until verse 7. But what Paul is teaching applies to the conscience. We recalibrate our conscience by considering what God's word says about this or that.

We often think of the conscience as that little voice in our head. Or perhaps two voices. You know, a pull in each way. A tug of war in our head. Mr. Jekyll and Dr. Hyde or something like that in our heads.

But our conscience is more than our sense of what is right and wrong. It's this sense that we have of what is right and wrong that's meant to guide us in these decisions about what is black and white. So the question is, Are we always to follow our conscience? Are we always to be like Pinocchio? Remember Pinocchio, be a good boy and always let your conscience be your guide. Well, no. Sometimes our conscience can become seared. No longer feeling bad for evil. Sometimes our conscience can become weak. Feeling bad for things that are not really bad.

[26:14] Other times our conscience can become defiled. Unable to discern bad from good. But our conscience can often also be tender.

Feeling bad for what is bad. And a terrible conscience, or a good conscience, tender conscience is a terrible thing to waste. And so the Apostle Paul is recalibrating their conscience.

When I first became a Christian, my conscience needed to be recalibrated. I had been living in sin. My conscience was seared in so many ways.

And God cleansed. You know, we have a clean conscience through the power of the gospel. God cleansed my conscience. I remember becoming aware of a tender conscience for the first time watching a movie I'd watched hundreds of times.

Literally. And suddenly I was grieved by the debauchery in the movie. But there was a particular area I really needed recalibration.

[27:15] And that was smoking marijuana. I liked to smoke marijuana. Kind of hard to believe. I mean, with Gil, you believe it. But, you know, you might be asking, is he still smoking marijuana?

I have the same question. I assumed. I mean, this is the way I thought. I just assumed I would smoke marijuana to the day I die. The only thing I thought about was, how am I going to get it when I'm like 60?

I don't know any dumb teenagers. In the fall of 2001, after becoming a Christian, I remember having this question. Is it wrong to smoke marijuana?

I sat with a friend of mine one night named Ryan. And we had a sordid past, both of us. And I asked him, is it wrong to smoke marijuana?

I'll never forget what he said. You need to go search the scriptures for yourself. That's not always the only answer you want to provide, but it was so helpful for me.

[28:24] Several weeks after that, I think, sometime in October 2001, I was reading this passage. My room still had marijuana in it. Under lock and key.

And was convicted. This very text. I exist for God. I exist to serve Jesus Christ. I exist to live through his power.

I got down on my knees that night and said, God, deliver me from smoking marijuana the rest of my life. Not everything's been like this.

But in God's mercy, I haven't smoked it once. God delivered me. What was going on in that little apartment in the fort in Knoxville?

God was recalibrating my conscience to live for him. So is it right or is it wrong?

[29:27] It's not the first question. First question, is it prohibited or permitted? What does the Bible say? Now, sometimes we say, well, the Bible doesn't address it. I mean, marijuana's not in there, so are we supposed to receive it with thanksgiving and praise the Lord?

Well, no. That's not good Bible study. You know, so you've got to look at other things. And this is where this stuff gets complex. I'm not going to go off my notes right now.

But this is where you've got to think more than just the singular word in there. You've got to think more about biblical principles. And that's what the Apostle Paul's teaching them to do right here. Is it permitted or is it prohibited biblically?

The next question is, is it loving or unloving? Is it loving or unloving? So in these burning questions about, is it wrong?

Well, the next question, after considering what the word of God says, is it loving or unloving?

Because something that passes the first test may not pass the second.

[30:30] Now, in these verses, Paul has already said the nays may have the truth, but they do not have love. And he tells us here how they do it.

How is their knowledge off? That's what he's saying here. The nays are saying, no, it's fine to eat meat offered idle. Idols are not real. Kind of like that. Birds are not real. Idols are not real.

So what if food... Birds are real, by the way, but that's just a great video. Idols are not real. But what if food is offered to them and they're saying, forget about it. Forget about it. Idols don't matter.

Let's go get something to eat. But there's a problem with that. In a church, there's a problem. Some of the yeas have a weak conscience. Following the advice of the nays, they do something against their conscience and it breeds great trouble.

Look in verse 7. Not all possess this knowledge. So he's saying not all possess the knowledge that idols are nothing and there's no God but one. But some, through a former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol.

[31 : 36] And their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Weak here does not mean frail or feeble or fragile. It means because of the past, their conscience is not calibrated quite like it needs to be.

Their conscience is tender in places where it should not be tender. It may not need to be tender. You know? It's not a wrongful place to be.

You know? Obviously, there are some things that are always wrong for everyone. But there are certain things because of our past and because of our relationship to our past, there are certain things for which we're weak towards.

And so we must be careful. But how is their conscience defiled by eating meat when idols are nothing? And this is critical.

This is critical about the conscience. Romans 14, 23 says, Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. So it's helping us to see something very vital in regards to our conscience.

[32 : 38] Regardless of whether your conscience is recalibrated in the ways it should be, regardless of whether it's right in what it calls wrong, or right in everything that it calls wrong, if you go against your conscience, it is sin.

If you think it's wrong to drink root beer, then you're sinning if you do. If you think it's wrong to drink cold beer, you're sinning if you do.

You see, your conscience is meant to be this guide. And even though it's not always informed to be right, it's always right to obey your conscience, even if you later need to inform it.

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, was known for enjoying a good cigar and also for his humor. And he had this great little story that illustrates this reality of conscience very well.

Once he said he came upon his pastor's college student smoking a cigar at 9 a.m. I mean, goodness, wait until 12 or something. So he said he walked up on him and said, Men, shouldn't you be ashamed smoking a cigar so early in the morning?

[33 : 46] Immediately all the guys started putting out their cigars, stomping it out on the ground or something like that. As soon as they got done stomping up their cigars, he lit up his own cigar. And he said, I didn't say it was wrong.

I just asked if you should be ashamed. And clearly you were. But it illustrates it so well. Mark Dever helpfully says, Conscience cannot make a wrong thing right, but it can make a right thing wrong.

So in the community, those things, you'll bump into those things. You get married and you'll have a different conscience on things. Maybe you have a different way of viewing debt or something like that.

Obviously, something you need to work out, but you also want to be aware that you might have a different conscience or informed in different ways in the way you relate to these different things.

So what happens though, get back to our meat-eaten, sacrificed meat setting. What happens when someone eats meat offered to idols that has a weak conscience?

[34 : 53] Look down in verse 7. It says, Their conscience is defiled. Look at verse 11. It says, By your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed.

It said earlier that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up, right?

So that word goes throughout Corinthians. It's got the idea of building up, edification, something like that. It says, look down in verse 10. If anyone sees you have this knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged?

That's the same word. Will he not be built up to be destroyed? So instead of encouraging someone to obey God, you encourage them to the destruction of their soul.

It's a stumbling block. Now, a stumbling block, it can be misunderstood biblically. The stumbling block is not you doing something I do not like. So sometimes we have these pet peeves. Let's don't insert that in this category.

[36 : 03] It's not you doing something I do not like. A stumbling block is a weak person being tempted to do something that you're doing and sin against their conscience. We all know how it works.

Come on, man. This movie's not that bad. This movie's not that bad. But you know what? I've walked out of more movies as a Christian than I care to admit.

Sometimes I just go and say, because I cared, then I care to admit because I wish I had never gone in. And said, I want my money back. I'm not watching that film. You know, but that's the way it goes. Come on, dude, just one drink. What could hurt you? Just a drink, you know? That's the way it often goes. Come on. It's okay if we cuddle a little bit, you know, cuddling. It's just second base. It doesn't really matter. You know, it doesn't really matter.

Come on. And so it begins this thing. That's the way it works out. You're kind of urging someone, encouraging someone to go against their conscience. But when you encourage one another to go against their conscience, it's a sin against your brother.

[37:00] Man, the alarm bells are meant to be going off here. You think this is just something you are doing privately, or in the temple, or in the supermarket, or something like that. But he is saying, when you do that against your brother's conscience, you're sinning against them.

You have a brother. You have a sister in Jesus Christ, this wonderful person. You're called to guard and protect. But not only that, it's a sin against Christ. So God has, Christ has joined you together in one family.

You are his body. When you tear apart what Christ has established, you're tearing apart Christ. It could not be more sobering. It could not be more serious.

Now, I'm sure you have so many questions. Quick caveat. The weak here is someone who is truly vulnerable and could be tempted to follow you and follow and go against their conscience.

Sometimes, in the church, there are people who act like the weak and try to get everyone to do what they're doing. So, if they think it's wrong to smoke cigars or drink alcohol, they speak bad about anybody who does.

[38:13] If they think it's wrong for teens to date, they look down on anybody who does. If they think it's wrong to wear yoga pants, who cares, you know? They withdraw from those who do. And those people are not weak people.

They are controllers, and they must be resistant. But, as a brother and sister of the Lord Jesus Christ, in these matters, love is always meant to come before liberty.

Love must always become, come before doing what I want or doing what I'm free to do. The accent biblically, the responsibility biblically is on the non-weak, the strong, in a particular area.

The mature believer will not say, freedom, freedom, freedom, at all costs. You will not take away my freedom. The mature believer will lay it down if love asks for it.

In fact, the true evidence of possessing freedom is not exercising it, but the willingness to lay it down. And we don't see that anywhere more clearly than in Jesus Christ, who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.

[39:38] And as Daniel reminded us, in, even in his mother's womb, he upheld all things by the word of his power. Martin Luther, in a great little book that's kind of striking and paradoxical, almost challenging book, but probably the most famous book on Christian liberty, at least the one I'm most aware of, he says, a Christian man is most free Lord of all, subject to none.

This idea that a Christian man is completely set free, you know, Christ has set you free for freedom. He has set you free. A Christian man, second sentence, is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

That captures the paradox of the Christian life and of these issues. On the one hand, you're completely set free, you know, anything that's not explicitly forbidden in scripture, go, do it, eat your heart out.

And yet, anything that would be tempting to your brother, don't do it! You know, this idea, you're meant to guard it and be careful. We are a family, we're brothers and sisters and considering how to build one another up is critical for how we make these day-to-day decisions in the gray area.

So if we drink alcohol, for instance, in moderation, we will not serve alcohol if a former alcoholic comes over. That would be flaunting liberty.

[41:11] Completely unnecessary and completely wrong, I believe. If we choose to homeschool our kids or put them in private school, we will not tear down those who choose to put them in public school.

One author says, if your kids are in public school, you've already lost. I disagree. I think that's a foolish statement. Some homeschool families probably need to stop because they might be home

but it doesn't appear that they're getting much schooling.

What about modesty? Is it wrong to wear a two-piece or guys to swim with their shirts off? What about yoga pants, short skirts, and strapless dresses?

If you are a young woman in this church or you're a mother of a young woman, I would challenge you to recalibrate your conscience on this.

You just kind of fit in with the world. You're not going to have a calibrated conscience. If you want to calibrate your conscience on modesty, you must begin with a focus on the right attitude of heart.

[42 : 15] 1 Peter 3. Quiet and gentle spirit. Now that does not mean like sit around and never say anything.

That's not, gentleness biblically is not that. And so there's so much there. But you would also want to have a right understanding of clothing.

After all, there were no clothes until after the fall. Modesty cannot stay in the heart. You can't say you're modest in heart if it doesn't show in your clothing biblically.

But as a sister to other brothers in the church, this should also be a consideration. Just like everything else, is my clothing loving or unloving to them?

Your brothers are supposed to make a covenant with their eyes. They might not sin against God.

So where is this clothing leading my brothers to look? What is it accenting?

[43 : 21] Now sometimes I think women in the church have a wrong attitude. That's his problem. It's my body. The problem is that's the way the world thinks.

My body, my choice. That's not the way a Christian thinks. Your body is not your body. It belongs to the Lord. So this is critical. I use it as illustration.

I mean, there's any number of things we could have picked, but it's a great thing to think about. And when you shop, it's even harder if you're trying to think in this way.

Don't let your right become wrong by disregarding your brother or sister in the church. If you get this principle, it could change your life. Paul, you know, it drops in with all the argument he's been making.

Your body is not your body. It was bought with a price. You were bought with a price. You were bought with a price and then you were brought into a new family.

[44 : 25] Brothers and sisters, I'll never forget. I love, I have wonderful parents. I'm so much to be grateful for. On Father's Day, I have a lot to be grateful for. You may not be in the same situation I am, but I remember after becoming a Christian and being aware that as wonderful and awesome as my dad was, the Heavenly Father is so much more wonderful.

wonderful. And I just remember it dawning like, he's my father and my dad is my brother.

And you are too, my brother and my sister. It's a change of identity. It's love that binds us together, not warm feelings or warm fuzzies, but the sacrifice of love.

You see, love now has a name. Jesus Christ. What did he do with his liberty?

He laid it down. What did he do with his prerogatives? He laid them down.

[45 : 39] Remember what he told me? Do you not think I could call 12 legions of angels to deliver me right now? But I lay it down. I'm taking up the cross because I chose to.

And so, we are only a church that honors and glorifies Jesus Christ when we do the same. We seek not our own interests, but the interests of our Lord.

May God help us. Father in heaven, we give you thanks and praise. we offer ourselves to you sincerely and completely.

You are the one God over all from whom we exist. You are the one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom we exist.

we offer every part of our life, every area of our life. We renounce the attitude of you are not welcome here.

[46 : 46] But instead, we want to follow you, God. As our Lord, we want to walk in your footsteps, not seeking our own interests, but seeking your interests.

Not defending our rights, but laying them down. We want to be a people bound together in love.

All these different personalities, different convictions, different homes, and yet, same spirit, the same Son in our Lord, the same God and Father.

We praise you and worship you. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.