

7165

SOUTH WEST BIBLE SCHOOL - July 1998

LET HIM THAT THINKETH HE STANDETH

Speaker: Bro. John Martin

Study #2

As touching things offered unto idols

Reading: 1 Corinthians 8

My dear brethren and sisters, we spent yesterday morning trying to give you some of the background of the turbulent Corinthian ecclesia where there were many, many problems coming from this cosmopolitan society, out of which the ecclesia, of course, was developed. But now we come to consider that section when Paul says, 'now as touching things offered unto idols', and he's going to talk, b&s, about the sensitivity that some had of eating meat that had been offered unto idols, and those who considered that to be nothing of importance.

And we need to make a statement at the beginning of our address, that there is no misunderstanding, and I hope the tape is working, because I want this to be recorded that nobody misunderstands, and it's the point that bro. David (Pride) made in his session this morning, and that is this, that when we're talking about these issues, b&s, where we should make allowances for each other in these matters, we are not talking about fundamental issues of doctrinal practice. Please, understand that! Let's not have any misunderstanding, the issues we're talking about are those issues which are really no issues, but which can divide, b&s, if we're not very careful with our attitude one to each other. So the question was, can we eat meat offered unto idols, or can we not?

That's the question, not the wallet, the meat! Now, you see, b&s, in this particular case there was an added ingredient, we must understand this. This evening when we have our slide show on the Land, I will show in preface to that night, I'm going to show you the pictures of Corinth and you will see that Corinth nestled at the base of a very high mountain which lay right behind it, the only one! It was visible for miles, and I'll show you that! it stood out like a lighthouse and Corinth was at the base of that mountain, and that mountain had a flat top on it, and up there, there was a restaurant come temple! And people could go up there, to have a night out, and have their evening meal up there and they could eat the things up there which were cooked for them, but it was also the temple of the Aphrodite, and Aphrodite, of course, we get an English word from that, b&s, the aphrodite, and the worship of the goddess of the Aphrodite was the worship of sexual depravity, and up on that mountain there were a 1000 priestesses who were

prostitutes up there acting as waitresses in that temple; so it was a little bit more than eating meat offered unto idols. There were dangerous things, b&s, in association with this, so it had that extra ingredient in it!

Now in this particular controversy, in 1 Corinthians 8, 9 and 10 there are two classes in the ecclesia, they were divided on their attitude over eating this meat. And Paul, for the sake of better words, called one group 'the strong' and the other group he called 'the weak'. Now the strong are described in verse 6 of chapter 8, he said, 'but to us', so you see, Paul intellectually agreed with the strong. I say intellectually, 'but to us' he said, to the strong, 'there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him', we know that, he said. So an idol is nothing in the world, it's nothing, it doesn't exist, and therefore, it can't in any way, shape or form affect the quality of meat. We know that! and so he agreed with the strong. But in verse 7 he said, 'Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled'. They were weak brethren and sisters, they thought, 'oh, I wouldn't touch that; oh, don't go near that, it's been offered to an idol' and they gave some reality to the idol and it was not a reality. Now they were wrong, their understanding of that was deficient, but we're going to see, b&s, and it's marvellous how this is done, we're going to see how this argument develops that in the end, the strong become weak and the weak become strong. In a most remarkable fashion, and Paul was a wonderful man, he had one of the most wonderful and deep appreciations of human nature and the workings of human nature, he's, b&s, one of those people that I can really associate with him, I really understand how he ticks! because he can see right through people and issues, he was such a marvellous diplomat in all that he ever did; I love the apostle because of that and he was disturbed that this question of eating meat, offered to idols, or another, he was disturbed because it had divided the ecclesia into these attitudes.

So you had the 'strong' who knew everything, 'we know that an idol is nothing in the world', and so their attitude was one of disdain and contempt for people with lesser knowledge than we've got. And on the other hand, the 'weak' brother who felt that he was doing the right thing by not touching this, and not touching that, he looked upon the strong as people who were liberal, who didn't realize the dangers of the world, and furthermore, among the weak there were those who had another attitude, and they felt that if the strong brother can do it, it must be alright, and they therefore, were induced into doing things which their conscience said was wrong! And so that's what was developing in the ecclesia.

Now I might give you a little illustration to begin with, b&s, that might help you to appreciate the point I'm trying to make, about issues that are not issues over which we ought to make allowances for each other. In my ecclesia which is a fairly large meeting, we're a very conservative meeting where I come from, I'm an exception! but in our meeting we have brethren and sisters who in the memorial hymn will keep their children sitting down; now my children stand up. I don't believe that's right, but I tell you something, I have towering respect for their reasons why they believe it's right. I mean

that! I have a great respect why they do that; there'd be a half dozen families that do that, nobody worries about it! It doesn't worry anybody because it's always been the case, and we know why they sit their children down, they feel it's the memorial hymn, therefore, we're singing that hymn with particular reference to the emblems, and they feel that their unbaptised children should not sing that hymn. That's fair enough! there's no argument with that! I don't agree with that reasoning but I have no argument with it, and that's a non-issue and has never been an issue in our meeting; it's been going on for years and no one takes any notice of that. And those who sit down don't treat those who don't with scorn, and those who stand up don't treat with scorn those that sit down! And there's no problem with the children over that, it's just not an issue because they sit down because they have a conscience about the matter, and our children stand up because we've got a conscience on the matter! But I want to tell you something, if every other family in our ecclesia's children sat down, so would mine, even though I would not believe that was necessary; it wouldn't worry me an atom; my children would sit down with everybody else's children, because it doesn't matter to me! My ecclesia says to me that you walk into the meeting on your hands, I walk in on my hands; money might fall out of my pocket but it doesn't matter whether I walk in on my hands or my feet, it's a non-issue, and they're the things, little trivialities, b&s, that we get all upset about and we should never allow that!

Now you turn to Romans chapter 14, here's exactly the same principle with a little bit of a difference; in Romans chapter 14, the apostle told the Roman this, he says in verses 1 to 4, 'Look, him that is weak in the faith, receive ye but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things, another who is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth. For God hath received him. Who art thou that judgeth another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth, yea, he shall be holden up because God is able to make him stand'. Now you see the point, b&s, it's those who have the sensitivity about diets that are weak, but you know in our community, I don't know about America, but in Australia we have brethren and sisters who have very strong convictions about what they eat, because God would have intended us to eat this or God would have intended us to eat that, and they in the ecclesia are generally looked upon as the 'strong'; Paul says 'they're weak' because they've forgotten that you call no creature common or unclean and that all things are received with thanksgiving, says Paul, whatsoever God gives us. But he says, 'don't argue about it! Why? because he said, 'they're all God's servants' so that one who does not eat anything else but vegetables, does it because he serves God; that's his way of saying that's his conscience and the one who eats other things other than vegetables, does it because he believes that's serving God, in whatsoever way he serves God And Paul says that's the answer according to his conscience and that's enough to ask and not to argue the point as to who's right or wrong, b&s, it's a question of accepting those things and respecting those things. Not only accepting them but respecting the motive, the genuine motive that people might do something different than us. Now that's the question of eating meats unto idols.

Now chapter 8 is divided like this, as Paul reasons the matter out in a most wonderful

fashion. It's divided like this, he says first of all, in verses 1 to 3, knowledge must be balanced with humility and love. And then from verses 4 to 7, Paul is in agreement in principle with the strong, but then verses 8 to 13 he says, OK, but that liberty of conscience which your knowledge gives you must not be used as a stumbling block to others. So knowledge must be balanced with humility and love, I agree with the strong intellectually but be careful, that by your freedom of your intellectual understanding, that you by that very exercise of your freedom, might cause others to stumble in the truth. That's the way this chapter is divided up!

So let's look at the first section, b&s, knowledge must be balanced with humility and love. Now, says Paul, as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge, and the 'we' in question are the 'strong'. But Paul says knowledge puffs up and love edifies, and the word 'edify' means 'builds up'; now a thing can either be puffed up with wind, or built up solidly. Now, b&s, knowledge 'gnosis' will puff up, it's not until a man or a woman gains 'epi-gnosis' that they come to realize what knowledge is all about. There's a difference between 'gnosis' knowing and 'epi' fully knowing things, complete knowledge of things, and Peter uses both those terms in 2 Peter chapter 1, just have a look at the way he uses them, and this is the difference. In 2 Peter we have his usage here of these two terms, and he says in chapter 1 and verse 5, 'And beside all this, giving all diligence add to your faith, virtue and to your virtue, gnosis (knowledge)' that's verse 5. But in verse 8 he says, 'For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the epi-gnosis of our Lord Jesus Christ'. And that which changed 'gnosis' to 'epi-gnosis' the last couple of virtues was brotherly kindness and love, and brotherly kindness and love turns 'gnosis' into 'epi-gnosis'. Mere 'gnosis' will inflate, mere knowledge will inflate, a proper comprehension of knowledge will build.

Now our young men particularly, I say our young men particularly go through those stages, and because they do, sometimes we get into trouble, because a young brother might come into the truth and he's got a keen and a sharp mind, and being young he can remember things pretty well, and he quickly picks up the knowledge of the Word, he reads the pioneers, he grasps the significance of that, and he begins to expound the Word and he gets praise for that, and he gets told he's a pretty good chap, and in the end, his knowledge puffs him up. It's almost inevitable, and it's wrong for the elders of the ecclesia to denigrate knowledge for that reason. Let him go, let him go on learning, yes, by all means we need to keep these young fellows in their place, I had to be kept in my place like that, and I was kept in my place; sometimes very embarrassing but I had to take that! But don't ever discourage that knowledge because you can't get 'epi-gnosis' unless you've got 'gnosis'. You have to go through that stage, but the day will come, b&s, when that young man will grow to a point where he'll understand what knowledge is all about and he'll start to build and he'll be a mature brother when he stands before an audience, with his notes in front of him, he will know this, that before he's ever come to the platform he will have said to himself, 'what I'm going to say today, will it be constructive?' That's the ruling factor, will it be constructive? that's 'epi-gnosis', that builds, and that's love, that's knowledge with love, b&s.

Now you know, this word 'edify' build up, that was one of Paul's favourite words, he uses it in Corinthians in chapter 14, verses 3, 5, 12, 17 and you know, it goes all the way through Paul's writings, edify, edify, edify. Build up, he's always building, but Paul was a positive builder, b&s, even in 1 Corinthians 3 when he talked about the building of gold, and silver and precious stones or wood, hay and stubble, and he says 'both classes of builders will be saved'; one's work will be destroyed because it's combustible. It goes up in flames but the builder himself, will be saved to despite his poor workmanship because he at least built. He at least made an attempt to build, the only ones who will be destroyed, it says, 'he that will destroy God's temple, will be destroyed'. God destroys the destroyers but He loves builders even those of poor quality who attempt to construct something in the ecclesia.

Now, says Paul in chapter 8 and verse 2, 'And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know', you know, James said this, 'who is a wise man and endued with understanding? Let him show forth in his manner of life, meekness of wisdom'. Where is he, says James, where's the man with knowledge, show me where he is? You'll see him by the way that he lives and the way he applies his knowledge. That man really knows something, but Paul says, 'he that thinks he knows something, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know'. That's very important, b&s, 'but if any man love God, says Paul, 'the same is known of Him'. Now you think about that! and what he's saying, b&s, is this, whilst it is important that we come to know God, ah, it is far more important that God knows us! Now that's the critical factor and there's only one way that God's going to know us, (and God knows us in any case, we're not talking about the fact of just knowing) but we're talking about knowing, recognizing. Now, God may not know us in that sense, and we might know all about Him, and we might be some of the most brilliant lecturers in our ecclesia; we may be able to get up and refute the Trinity, we may know, b&s, there's only one God; we can go back to the Hebrew and we know the usage of Elohim, and 'echad', one, and we know how that's used as this or that, and in what sense it's used. We may be able to dissect the Word so that we give an exact knowledge of God, to be told at the judgment seat, 'I never knew you'. Wise, says James, 'the devils knew there is one God; the devils fear and tremble' he said, the madmen know that! 'we know who thou art, Jesus, the holy One of God' they knew that, but 'wilt thou know oh empty-headed man, that faith without works is dead', and yet they had enormous knowledge, not of the imbecile, they had the knowledge of the sane, but James said they were empty-headed.

Now you look at Galatians chapter 4 in this regard, b&s, just look at the way Paul put it here, he says in verse 8 and 9, 'Look, how be it then, when you knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods' (now you listen to this next verse) 'but now, after that ye have known God, or rather, are known of God'. See the point, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God', and it's a remarkable thing that a man can have an exact knowledge of the fundamental that God is One and all about His character (he could know every characteristic of God) he could know Exodus 34, he expound that with brilliance, and God may not know him. And he knows all about God so he thinks, and the quality, b&s, if any man love God, there it is, so what does your studies of the bible do? What do your studies of God, we talk about God manifestation,

it is like a clinical term sometimes, when it really means, making God plain in your life, God is made plain to people. Now you can't do that unless you know Him, experimentally; not only academically but experimentally, you've got to know God, don't you? You've got to do that, and to know Him, you cannot know God and not love Him! It is impossible, and you can't love Him without knowing Him! Now, b&s, it is a simple fact, an incontrovertible, undeniable fact, that you can't love anyone you don't know! Husbands and wives, sitting out there, who are in love, how did you fall in love? because you saw the picture of your wife or something? or she wrote you a letter and said, 'Dear Bill, it's raining where I am today, and very cold, Love, Mary'. Did you fall in love with her because of that? No, it's because you met together at some stage or other, you found there was an instant compatibility in matters, and you talked about the bible perhaps and your attitude of the truth, and you felt that here was someone who breathed your spirit. And the way they laughed and their eyes twinkled and their little mannerisms, and the way they showed their care for you and love blossomed because you got to know that person; you could never have done that if you didn't know them! B&S, if you don't know God you don't love Him, it is impossible! And so Paul showed they're indivisible things, if any man love God, it means he's become epi-gnosis, and therefore, he knows God in that sense, God knows him! and that's the important thing. For God is love, now that's a remarkable thing you know, when you think about it.

Now we come to verses 4 to 7 where Paul agrees in principle with the strong. Now he says, 'Brethren, in verse 4, 'as concerning therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols', do you notice how he starts that twice; he said that in verse 1. But you see, what he did in verse 1, when he stated the subject matter he's dealing with, he stopped and said, I better qualify what knowledge is all about. See, so he says, it's no good launching into this with the strong and say, 'I agree with you because you've got the right knowledge, unless they understand what I mean by knowledge', so he restarts the subject because verses 1 to 3 are a little aside you see, where Paul says, 'let's get knowledge straight; let's understand what I understand by knowledge'.

Now he says in verse 4, 'As concerning therefore the eating of things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know (you're right, he says) 'an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one'. It's so obvious, b&s, and you know, things offered unto idols, what's an idol? it's a little bit of wood or metal, (we won't turn this up, but Isaiah 44, is a marvellous chapter). Isaiah 44 depicts this fellow who goes out into the forest and selects a very nice straight tree; yes, that one looks very straight. And he cuts it down, wipes his brow because he's perspiring and he strips off the branches and he cuts the trunk in halves, and with one half he peels off the bark carefully and he gets to work with his carving knife, and exquisitely for hours and hours of work, he works this image up, you see, an image of a god that he is making; and when it's made he's going to worship the god but it's a cold night. So he gets the other half and chops it up into little bits of wood, carries them inside and puts them in the fire, brings his idol in there, lights his fire because it's cold, and warms himself with this wood, and turns around and says, 'Allah, Allah, Allah' to the other wood. And he can't see that that wood there is burning; he's blind to the fact that that's the same wood there. This one he warms

himself with, and that one he prostrates and worships, and he can't see that that piece of wood is what he made; he made it, if anything it should worship him! And he's as blind as a bat to that! So Paul says, 'we know that it's rubbish!'

Now you take Isaiah 46, let me read this to you. You just listen to this, 'Bel, bow down, these are the gods of Babylon; Nebo, god of Babylon stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: our carriages were heavy laden; they are a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity'. So here are the idols of Babylon, you see, and they're all worshipping the idols of Babylon, you know, going on their knees and chanting away for hours on end and cutting themselves with lances and so forth, and then they want to move that idol from one place to another, so they yoke up the oxen, these great heavy metal things they lift up, and they plop them in the cart; they can't move, and the oxen strain in the harness and go along, you know, and there's a heavy load, and they're moving that god from one place to another and it can't move! And beasts of burden have got to be put to strain, men have got to strain their backs to get them up on the carriage and they're going to be carted from one place to another. And they can't understand that that idol can't move; but God says, 'Look onto Me, Israel, I have borne you from the belly of your mother's womb, I've carried you!' Now, there's the One we worship, the One that carries us because we can't move! And that's the stupidity, b&s, of idolatry.

Now Paul says, we know all that! Us brethren, who've got the knowledge, we understand all that, that's clear, I agree with you intellectually. And he goes on in verse 6, 'But unto us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him'. And that's what they didn't know! You see, he says, unto us there is but one God, but he didn't leave it there, b&s. He said there's one God, the Father. Oh! they didn't know that, because you see, the whole ecclesia was His children, and they had forgotten that! He's not only one God, He's the Father. Now he goes on and he says, 'of whom are all things' not some things, and the old things are the weak and the strong, and he says, 'there's one Lord Jesus Christ' (look at the title, the full title of the man) so that He's not only Jesus coming with our nature, but now having gone through the experience of death and resurrection, He's the Christ, and the Lord, He's the King-Priest, and why is He the King-Priest? 'that all things might be by Him' all things not only the strong, but the weak. And that's what they'd forgotten; and it was just like me, I've got 7 children, now say that I've got five of them married, OK, and one lad is getting married next year, say when my eldest girls, (I had four girls first) when they got to teenagers with just a year or so between them, they came pretty quick, now imagine a lad coming into my house, and he strikes up a relationship with one of my girls. I greet him into the house and Auntie Verna says he's welcome to come home, he's a good lad in the truth, and we think this could be a good thing for our daughter and he seems to be a nice lad; and he's welcome home there, b&s, but he hasn't got the choice of saying, 'Uncle John, I don't mind Shirley, Beverly and Valerie, but Coralee's a pain! and Colin I can't stand; Mitch is alright and Sam's a brat. He hasn't got that choice! because he's forgotten that I'm not only the head of the house, I'm their father! and he hasn't got a choice about which of

my children he's going to like and which he's going to dislike. Now I know Sam's a brat, and I understand that Coralee's a pain and all that, I know that, but I'll handle that! But he hasn't got the choice to make that discrimination between my children; because I'm their dad and Auntie Vern is their mom. Do you see what I mean? So there's one God but He's a Father, and b&s, and we're all in His family. I might be a pain in the neck to some of you, but I'm God's child, you try and deny that, Jesus died for me as much as He died for you, and you might be a pain in the neck to me; we just have to get on, God has not given us the choice to come into the ecclesia and select whom we want to sit with, and who we want to talk to, and He hasn't given us that choice, because He's the Father of us all! The strong had forgotten that, you see, they didn't understand that!

And so the apostle says you've got to have that knowledge. Now he says in verse 7, 'Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge' not everybody is as brilliant as we are, isn't it a pity? Shame, really, but they're not all brilliant as we are, 'and some with conscience of the idol unto this hour' (right now, says the apostle, it still exists) 'eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled'. So they didn't all have that knowledge, and the knowledge was the earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof', as he said in chapter 10, we finally come to that point. The earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof, what on earth belongs to an idol? 1. it's nothing in the world, and 2. God owns the lot! why he even owns the metal and the wood with which the idols are made. Now we know that, says Paul, but not everybody knows that! Oh, they know it academically, every brother says there only one God, and every brother knows that an idol is really nothing, they all know that academically but there's just that feeling, you know, they've got conscience of the idol. I wouldn't eat that because it's been offered unto an idol! now, they know academically up here that an idol is nothing, but they can't come to grips with that in here. Now Paul says they have a real problem, they've got a real problem, and we've got to be alive for that problem, b&s, because to that brother to eat that meat with that conscience is sin! To you, you can do it, it doesn't matter, but if he does it, it's sin; now you've got to remember that!

But Paul says you take notice of his conscience, which brings up to our last section. Liberty of conscience, our conscience! People who know ought not to become a stumbling block to the weak! Now, b&s, there are two irrefutable reasons why the strong ought on these questions, and I repeat again, not talking about fundamental issues, doctrinally or morally, we're not talking about them at all, forget that, we're talking about these other issues! There are 2 irrefutable reasons why the strong should always give away to the weak. ALWAYS! not a question of saying, 'ah, well, if he apologizes, I'll apologize; when he moves, I'll move! That's not a question, it's a question of always the strong giving way on these issues. And the reasons are these, that the strong says, 'there's no more wrong in eating, anymore is there any intrinsic value if I don't, it doesn't matter!' So if I went down to the marketplace and I bought that meat knowing that it had been offered unto an idol, if there was no challenge made about it and I knew it, there's no sin in my eating it, and if I refuse to, there's no intrinsic value in refusing it. I've got room to move!

But the weak are not like that, they didn't have any room to move; they couldn't eat it!

You see, they were not indifferent to it, and therefore, b&s, they had no flexibility, they were painted into a corner. They can't move at all! Someone's got to move and they can't; but the man who knows can, to him it doesn't matter at all. So a brother comes home to our place for lunch, he's a strict vegetarian, and not only so but he would be a little bit offended if others ate with him, if they ate meat, he wouldn't have the right attitude, he'd think, 'ah, I don't think this is right'; b&s, we all become vegetarians that day, if it doesn't matter whether I have a steak or if I don't! I've got room to move, that poor fellow's got no where to go. He's locked in to his position, now if you want to see how this works, you listen to this. Here's the greatest example of it!

Paul say this, Romans 15, 'We then, that are strong', WE, so he's with the strong intellectually, 'We then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification (building up). For even Christ pleased not Himself, but as it is written, 'the reproaches of them that reproached Thee, fell on Me', and he doesn't say Jesus, he said Christ, and he chose the title of the strongest one of all, even the Messiah had that attitude, and He came into the world, b&s, absolutely superior in every sense, in knowledge and in every way, He came into the world with a knowledge where He could justify what He did, because He did all those things that pleased the Father, and even He, gave Himself for the weak. The just for the unjust, and what did He do? 'the reproaches of them that reproached Thee, God, fell on Me'. Now b&s, here's the point that He's making, and you listen carefully, it's a magnificent point. The question here in Romans was that brethren had fallen out over diet, whether you eat meat or you didn't! And in their falling out together, they were abusing each other; they were shouting across the table as it were, and accusing each other of apostacy one with the other, and using all sorts of slander against each other. Now what Paul is saying is this, the strong brother ought to take a pull on himself and realize that the other chap can't eat meat, it doesn't matter to him, and therefore, he ought to realize that he ought to give way because his poor brother's conscience can't move and he ought to make room for that conscience! And the example is Jesus Christ, but listen, there's a difference here! All Paul is asking them to do, is to take it on the chin, the strong brother's got to take it on the chin, when the weak brother accuses him of being an apostate because he eats meat.

Take that kindly and sort of fluff it off a bit, and encourage the brother and try and help him and don't provoke his conscience. That's all he's asking them to do; Jesus was on the cross enduring insults to His Father! 'the reproaches of them that reproached Thee, God, fell on Me', and there He is, b&s, with them down at the foot of the cross, listening to their taunts, not about Him only, 'He trusted in God, let God deliver Him', 'He said He was the Son of God, well, let God show that He's the Son of God'. And they cast into His teeth, reproaches about His Father, and there wouldn't have been a love in the world equal to it. And the hurt to the Son of God, b&s, would be indescribable and the temptation to defend His Father would have been enormous, and he kept his teeth gritted together, because He wanted to save the very people, that were cursing His Father. And all Paul says was, 'all I'm asking you, the strong to do, is to take insults well against yourself'. And you say you're strong, He's the Christ! Now you think of that, b&s, you just think of what was going on, on that cross. Is it difficult therefore, for us who say we know, to try and do something to help our poor brother? Is it difficult when you

consider that example? Unbelievable!

Paul says in verse 8, 'Meat commendeth not to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, neither, if we eat not, are we the worse'. In other words, it's innocuous, we don't care, we've got room to move; he says if we eat we're not better, there's no intrinsic value in eating, and if we don't eat, it's not wrong. He says it doesn't matter to us! It's a non-issue with us, we've got room to move; he said, but you be careful that in the exercising of that liberty, you don't make a stumbling block to your weak brother. And he says, 'For if any man see you which has knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple' ah you see, it wasn't just buying it in the market was it? He's gone up there! 'Shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat', and do you know what the word 'emboldened' is? it's exactly the same word as 'edify'; so we've edified our brother, edified him, built him up to sin, by our example, 'eats those things offered unto idols'. Now, b&s, you're going to see in this argument, ah, it's absolutely magnificent! You're going to see it turn on its axis just like that! as we go through chapters 9 and 10, it's beautiful how this is done! And what Paul is going to show is this, that when you chose to go up there, where there were a thousand priestesses who were prostitutes to the goddess, the Aphrodite, whose religious rites were fornication, that's done religiously! Imagine the powerful impact upon the flesh, he says, when you go up there to do that, the argument is going to turn around in chapters 9 and 10, where the weak become strong, and the strong become weak. Because of the exercise of their wonderful knowledge on how that they can justify doing this or that, led them into extreme danger, and the timidity, b&s, of that brother who didn't have their vast understanding, his timidity became his defence.

And isn't that true in life? that we allow ourselves to do those things which we think that we can intellectually justify, and they take us, b&s, as our bro. David has pointed out, into dangerous circumstances, extremely so, and so this man was built and Paul says in verse 11, 'and through your knowledge', by the use of your knowledge he says, 'shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?' Now brethren and sisters, it was by their knowledge they did that, so their knowledge proved destructive, didn't it? and because their knowledge proved destructive and not constructive, it was something else but love! What was it? It was pride, it was sheer arrogance and pride; if knowledge destroys it cannot be love, it has to be some other vice, it's not that virtue. And so verse 1, it's wrong, knowledge builds up, but if it destroys, it's got no love in it! and they wound the weak conscience of the brother for whom Christ died. And you know, b&s, the word there for 'wound the weak conscience' is in the Greek, 'you strike a blow at your brother's weak conscience'. It's like a boxer in a ring, and he's got a man on the ropes, and the man is pleading for mercy, and the boxer sees his weak spot, and gives him one blow under the lug and lays him out flat! And he's wounded the weak conscience 'for whom Christ died', and there was the apostle Paul, you know, Acts says 'breathing out threatenings and slaughters', that's not true you know, the Greek says 'he was breathing them in'. It wasn't as if he was breathing out against the believers, Paul's life was filled with bitterness, he was breathing into himself, threatenings and slaughters, he was building up a bitterness against the Christians, and Jesus said, 'Paul, Paul, why do you persecute Me?', for whom Christ died! Isn't that incredible, b&s? and this is the

point that's being made here, and he said, if you do that you sin against Christ, 'forasmuch as you have done it onto the least of these My brethren'. Think of that! who do you in your ecclesia, if you wrote a list of your membership, whatever the membership might be, whether it's 20, or 200 or 300, if you wrote a list, who would be on the bottom of the list? You wouldn't dare make it, would you? but if you did, imagine the list you'd make according to your judgment or my judgment. Well, Jesus said, 'look at the bottom of the list, you touch him and you touch Me'!

Now Paul's point was this, he says, 'Look, wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth', what an attitude! I love that attitude, I just love the attitude like that, I reckon that's one of the loveliest attitudes; b&s, I know a lot of people like that, people who've got real epi-gnosis who love God and who are known of God, I'm certain they are, and they're the people who say, 'Listen, I know this thing is silly really, doesn't matter, they don't see it as silly, doesn't matter to me, therefore I won't get in their way. I'll be a vegetarian for the rest of my life if necessary, it matters not to me'. I love people like that, you see them in ecclesial life as you go through the portals of your ecclesia; you see brethren and sisters everywhere that put aside all their personal preferences, that know the pettiness of people, they can see how petty people are, but they don't treat them with scorn or deride them or look down upon them like they're second class citizens. But they're gentle with them, and they try hard and they go out of their way, that anything they might see as a personal preference is out the window! What does it matter, b&s, what really matters is to get people to the kingdom of God!

Now I want to quote you the words of bro. Barling in his letter to the Corinthians, and I don't know if I could find better words than these to finish this section than how he encapsulated the feelings of the apostle. And this is what he said, and you listen! I quote, 'Paul was not the inflexible advocate of principles that could be intellectually justified, but the passionate champion of whatever was best to get men and women into the kingdom of God'. Not the inflexible advocate, b&s, of principles that could be intellectually justified, but the passionate champion of whatever was best to get men and women into the kingdom of God.