

# **Dr. Gary Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Lecture 21, Paul's Response to the Question of Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1**

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This is Dr. Gary Meadors in his teaching on the book of 1 Corinthians. This is session 21, 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1, Paul's Response to the Question of Food Sacrificed to Idols.

Well, thank you for joining us as we continue our work through the book of 1 Corinthians.

Today, we're going to look at chapters 8 through 10, actually chapter 11, verse 1, the versification in our Bibles that broke that up, and it shouldn't be. So, it goes through the first verse of chapter 11 actually, and this has to do with the question of food sacrificed to idols and how this new Christian community with a lot of Jewish influence and background survives in a thoroughly pagan polytheistic culture where the aspects of these gods are part of the fabric of everyday living. There are lots of interesting travel guides, and I'll mention a couple of these to you as we move on in our material today, but they talk about how as you walk around the city, you see certain temples dedicated to the various Greek and Roman gods, and it's just part of the culture.

It's just everywhere you look; it's a drinking fountain, the baths, and the public baths that they use. There isn't anything that isn't touched by the polytheism of that Greco-Roman culture. And so, these individuals who came to Christ as a new message, even if they were aware of Jewish teaching, now they're confronted with trying to work through how they live in that kind of culture.

This doesn't touch a lot of us, but it does touch a lot of Christians in parts of the globe. I had some students from Singapore some years ago, and one of them, the issue of food sacrificed to idols was not a problem in his church in Singapore; to the other one, it was a big problem in Singapore. So, this can be a current affair for some people, and it may be a very important text for you and your Christian community.

Religious pluralism is probably the term that captures it. That's something that most of our cultures, particularly Western cultures, have in their history. And today, with the movement of Islam, there's a lot of conflict in terms of how you deal with religious pluralism.

Some are willing to compromise and live peacefully together, and some are not. Well, anyway, we're going to look at the details as we have them in the book of First Corinthians. You should have your notepad in front of you.

This will be notepad number 11 and it covers chapters 8 through 11. And it also has an excursus on the concept of conscience in the Bible. Paul's response to questions of food sacrifice to idols, page 116 in your notes.

It's just sort of a section summary up to this point. Chapters 1 to 4 were a unit. Paul addressed the authority of his message about the cross, the problem of divisions and competition, and the social status of the things that were going on in those chapters.

Chapters 5 and 6 dealt with sexuality and litigation, continuing conflicts with the culture as these new Christians emerged from it. Chapter 7 was dominantly related to issues of marriage and sexuality. And we saw that in several lectures.

Now, in the first Corinthians 8 to 11:1, Paul addresses the issue of idolatry in the context of empire and the daily life of Christians. A worldview of idols permeated the world of Paul's day. The integration of a plethora of deities and temples into daily life was like the air one breathed.

It was part of their setting. It's like the illustration I've used and repeated. Does a fish feel wet? No, the fish does not feel wet.

It is in its environment. Did these people think they were idolaters? No, they thought they were showing homage and respect to the very deities that existed in that pluralistic setting. If you read Acts 15, Acts 17, Romans 14 and 15, and the texts that we're in now, you can see some of the struggles from various kinds of contexts that were involved.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 reflects this atmosphere and the fact that there was a major issue for the early Christians, where they had to abandon the life that they had known, the idolater they had known, the worldview that they had known, and adopt a monotheistic Christian, Jewish Christian worldview, which could have been very, very radical for most of them. Once again, I do like the work of Bruce Winter in relation to much of this, as he is focused on the Roman side of life and the culture of that time. He has an article in the Tyndale Bulletin, Volume 41, 1990, on religious pluralism and brings to our attention much of the background that was going on in these particular chapters.

He also points out a good source, which is a little bit later in the 2nd century, but should be an accurate reflection of 1st century Corinth, Pausanias, who writes called The Description of Greece. These are kind of like travel guidebooks. This was an ancient Greek writer.

You can look it up online. I checked it out myself recently, and you can surface all these texts, and you can find descriptions of Corinth and other cities, other Roman colonies, to give you a feel for what it was like if you haven't already obtained that, in terms of some of our introduction. In 8:1, we have the peri-death pattern again, now concerning.

The NIV just says now, but that's the peri-death. 8:1 and 10:14 give us some interesting terminal points. 8:1 says, now, about food sacrifice to idols, and then he begins to talk about that issue.

Then, in 10:14, therefore, my dear friends flee from idolatry. We're not at the end of the chapter yet, but for sure, we see some bookmarks, as it were, between this longer section of chapters 8 through 10. The conclusion in 10:31 to 11:1 also grabs our attention along these lines.

So, whether you eat, drink, or do whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the Church of God. Even as I try to please everyone in every way, for I am not seeking my own good but the good of many so that they may be saved.

Follow my example. This is where 11:1 needs to be kept in this section. Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.

That imitation idea comes up over and over as we work through some various sections of the Bible. Alright, chapters 8 through 10. There's a possible chiasm.

Once again, when I say chiasm, you should be thinking about Talbert by now, because he does like these things. The question of food in 8:1 to 13, which is chapter 8, is balanced by 9.24 to 11.1, where the food offered to idols comes back up. Then, in the center part of this, waving rites for the gospel's sake and the issue of ethics in chapter 9 in the community.

So, it's sandwiched in there, and we'll look at those in detail. Now, the issue of food sacrifice to idols. There were three opportunities, particularly, that confronted these early Christians in relation to this connection of their daily sustenance, that is, food and the temple.

We could say four if we were to include the general atmosphere in which they lived, as we've already talked about, an idol-conscious society. But we'll just take the three specific ones that are here. There is a book by Murphy O'Connor, a little dated now, called St. Paul's Corinth, which has a lot of good information in it.

Like any study, you're going to find some differences of opinion, and you'll find in this chapter particularly, we'll highlight some of these for you, and you'll find some who like certain sources and don't like other sources, and it'll be some give and take there. That's why research has to be extremely broad-based in order to find the common denominators to pursue—dining at the local temple.

In chapter 8 and chapter 10, this comes up. In 8:7. But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, since their conscience is weak.

Well, where would they eat this sacrificial food? These temples in a Roman colony were, many times, almost like what we would call community centers. If you're going to have a wedding, where are you going? If you're going to have a retirement party, where do you go? Where do you find a facility that you can use to host a party for your friends? Well, the most natural place to do that was related to using the rooms that were in part of the temple. Archaeology has shown a number of these dining areas.

There's some controversy over exactly how those were used. Were they used exclusively for banquets to the gods, or were they available for rent for people in the community who needed a place to do something? And so that's part of the controversy. Murphy O'Connor sees these as both dining rooms and temple rooms.

It seems like we have two things going on because, in chapter 8, Paul doesn't ring the changes as much on this so-called strong and weak issue. Those whose conscience is weak that means they lack knowledge. It's almost like he's trying to work them through something.

Whereas in chapter 10 and in the verses, verse 1 and following, it's a different story because you want to flee from idolatry, which is what he's after in chapter 10, and not to have any participation with the food that's connected to the temples. Now, so we've got, it seems like two things going on. Well, some have worked that out by this issue, and these local temples were so much part of the community that they offered several things.

First of all, were they going to get rid of the food sacrificed to idols? Well, and I should actually say it another way. Like in a Jewish community, food is, the animals are butchered in a way that is in keeping with kosher, with being acceptable to the Jews. Well, the Greeks sacrificed animals to their gods in different ways.

What are they going to do with the meat? Well, like any human being, they're going to find ways to profit from it, and they may have had restaurants connected to these temples where you could go and actually eat. And they may have had these banquet

rooms where you could rent them and use them for something. Then, there were also the dedicated aspects of eating this meat in relation to the gods.

Some think that chapter 8 is less volatile, that is, restaurants or community rooms, and that chapter 10 is more focused on when you're actually gathered to honor the gods, which, of course, is pure idolatry, and Paul gives it no quarter. So, that's part of what we're trying to figure out. I won't figure that out for you completely, but I'll expose you to the sources that try to help you move through these issues of just exactly what you are dealing with.

Dining at the local temple by Murphy O'Connor because the civil and social life of first-century persons was an integrated part of their idolatrous culture. The local temple was like a community center where many social events occurred. Besides family events like weddings and birthdays, there were trade guilds, Acts 19, and even funeral rites that were tied to using the temple as a social center.

The difficult issue of religious versus social events is often noted as if such distinctions could exist in the first-century Roman world. And here's where the rub comes. Just being there is identification.

There's a huge guilt by association involved as there's an emergence of the Christians into the culture. I'm going to mention something a little bit, and we need to look at how the Jews dealt with this in order to get a feel for how the Christians might have been dealing with it. Murphy O'Connor noted the temple dining rooms for social events, and Winter noted the issue of the imperial cult events that took place in these temples.

The imperial cult events would also delineate social status. The high and the elite attended, and the low were marginalized from these. These were part of the air that they breathed in that culture, and everything centered in that regard.

If a dignitary came to town, there would be a banquet at one of the temples, and the people of high status and elite would be expected to be in attendance and deal with that. So, it's hard for us to get our arms around this because their culture is not our culture. They were making choices like they'd made them their whole life.

Then, they became a Christian. Paul couldn't hand them a bible and say figure this out. It was all give and take and conversation and discussion.

It was a process, and it was a transition for these folks in many, many ways, and it was a sacrifice for them to deal with in terms of possibly losing their status in the culture. Now, this issue of Roman Corinth has a lot of pieces that we won't bring all up here, but let me just mention a couple of things. There are two very crucial issues involved with Roman Corinth.

One is what one would call the imperial cult. Now, here's a controversial domain, and you'll find scholars sometimes divided over exactly what that is and how that influenced it. I tend to, at least at my study at this point in life, be drawn to Bruce Winter and his group in terms of explaining this.

These individuals are Roman scholars. They're classical scholars. They're biblical scholars, and their desire is to understand these texts strictly within a Roman colony setting.

What these people lived with every day. There are others without as much of that sensitivity who come in and take what we call cherry picking. They'll take bits and pieces of information and construct it in a different way.

There are some pretty major scholars that debate over this stuff. I'm not going to dive into all that, but I just want you to be aware that there was an imperial cult in some sense. Exactly what it was is going to be debated, and that aspect was an expectation of Roman citizens.

This is part of religious pluralism, and it heightens religious pluralism because you have to show your respect and even adoration of Rome, which has provided you with the world that you have. It was part of the entire saturation of a deity-minded culture. We call it idolatry, and they look at it from a different perspective, and getting our minds into that's difficult.

So, imperial cult worship was definitely involved in the first century, and we'll talk more about that. A second thing that's particularly related to Corinth is See Corinth was a Roman colony so imperial cult.

The second thing is the issue of the games, the Olympiad. They moved the games back into the region of Corinth called Isthmia and those games were influential. This happened during Paul's time.

Paul refers to this. He refers to the tent making, which was his guild, and you know, I mean, what a way to find a lot of people when the games took place, and Paul goes sets up a tent, does repair work, and does evangelizing and teaching out of that kind of a base. Major banquets were involved with the games because you have patrons who support the games.

The rich were expected to set a context for the entire culture. They sought the welfare of the city, and they were expected to be there. They were expected to honor Rome, and it was part of doing business.

It was part of the survival of the higher-status individuals within that culture, and some of those higher-status individuals were part of the Christian community. Now, there are some interesting things that take place that I'll bring up from time to time. Rome, like Alexander the Great, was pluralistic, but Alexander had a curiosity about other religions, you might say, and if they didn't resist him, he created a context where they could survive and where he could learn about the variety and the diversity that existed in that world.

He learned some good things, he learned some bad things. Well, Rome was the same way. They tried to accommodate, to some extent, the various religions, and they accommodated the Jews to a great extent.

They got mad at them from time to time and took away the privileges that had been given to them, and then they would give them back. They kicked the Jews out of Rome at one point. There are a lot of historical items that are going on in that first century between the Jews and Rome, but one of the issues that seems to be relatively well accepted is the fact that the Jews in certain centers of the Roman Empire, which probably indicates that it was pervasive were given allowances in relation to their own religion and half some of that had to do with food and connections to idolatry.

It seems that there were actually kosher stands in the markets, if you please, and Rome even allowed it and expected it to be available to them. Some paint a scenario that the problem that Paul was having with the Corinthian community and the food offered to idols and so forth was taking place during a time when the Jews were *persona non grata* that is they were out of sorts with Rome and Rome had removed the expectation of accommodating the Jews in the marketplace in relation to kosher food. They did it before, but it was taken away at this time, so that would have put the Jews into a tailspin if the Christians were buying from the kosher markets to avoid idolatry it could put them into a tailspin as well, and then it goes on to say that this was addressed later and it went back to what it was before this crisis in the middle 50s.

Now you'll have to do some historical reading there. Winter's book, *After Paul Left Corinth*, talks about the kosher meat available, then not available, and it spans Paul's relationships with the Corinthians, and that could be a historical piece that's creating some of the onks that's going on in relation to food in the markets, food in the temples, and the general aspect of Christians living in the world but not being of the world as a mindset. So, there was the possibility of dining in the temples.

In chapter 10, verses 23 to 27, there's buying meat in the market, and we'll look at that passage a little more later, but it's a very interesting text where Paul says you can buy the meat in the market, as the NIV says, and I'll talk about this without asking questions of conscience, and you're okay. But if some Christian who doesn't

understand that idols are nothing is watching you and objects, then you've got other issues involved. Then, the third thing he talks about is dining at an unbeliever, unbelieving friend's home in chapter 10, verses 28 to 31, and you eat what's set before you without asking these questions again.

But if your host makes a point, and they might have made the point out of concern for you, saying, well, you know, I got this meat at the market, and obviously all meat was run through the temple because they're the butchers, and then they sell it in the market, then you have to stand for your scruples in terms of no association with idolatry. So, it's an interesting text that we'll look at a little bit more here in a moment. I mentioned to you the imperial cult.

I should mention that 54 AD, the same time as Paul, is about the time that this was established in Roman Corinth, and there's lots of information on this that you can surface. All right, so there you have three opportunities that were part of daily life, part of just living, that these people had never had a problem with before. But now they come into Christianity, which is so closely connected with Jews at this time, and the Jews had a problem with meat and idolatry, and Rome dealt with that, and the market dealt with that, and in come the Christians.

And I think we have to realize that a lot of the activity and the thinking of the early Christians was also connected to thinking of the Old Testament. The New Testament was in the process of being written. Things were being clarified.

Don't bifurcate the two testaments. They have to come together and be accounted for. Judaism, that is, we call it Second Temple Judaism from about the third century or so, third, fourth century B.C., up through the time of the apostles.

Second Temple Judaism, a lot of things were written. There's a lot of literature there. We talked about this in the introduction and a lot of very important literature.

In fact, most of it was written in Greek, which one needs to take into consideration. That's what conditioned, by and large, the community, the Jewish community of the first century. Furthermore, when the apostles wrote, particularly in the Gospels and in other places too, and quoted the Old Testament, it can be demonstrated clearly, and Robert France has done a lot of work in showing this; there are various publications that the Septuagint is sort of the handbook being used when the Gospel writers were putting down their material about Jesus.

Because when they quoted the Old Testament and the Hebrew that's available and the Greek is compared, the Septuagint, there is often a high percentage of the time that the Septuagint text seems to be the text that they were looking at. Paul talks about it in relation to Timothy and his family being brought up on the Scriptures. They would have been brought up with the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.



So, lots of things that are going on. But that's not the only problem and the only challenge we have when we come into chapters 8 through 10. The challenge of understanding Roman Corinth, the tensions and the issues that the Christians were going through as they transitioned into a new ethic.

But we have interpreters of the modern world coming to chapters 8 through 10 and trying to figure out how to read it. And I want to point these out to you. There are two major views on reconstructing the historical context and meaning of 1 Corinthians 8 to 10.

And each of these major positions becomes a lens through which you read these texts. We all have these interpretive lenses because things can be read from different perspectives. Like a symphony, you hear one thing, it's all the same orchestra, but you're listening to one part of that orchestra, and it tends to influence other pieces of it.

That's the role and nature of interpretation. There's, first of all, what I call the traditional academic view. I put the word academic in there because oftentimes traditional means traditional in a bad sense.

This is not a bad sense. This particular view is very well founded within the academic literature. Wendell Willis wrote a book called *I Don't Meet in Corinth, The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 through 10*, published by Scholars Press in 1985, which is a highly respected academic text.

Then, he wrote another article after the book had been out for a number of years and looked at it 25 years later. Those would be good things for you to read, as they represent what we call the traditional academic view. This view represents the strong and the weak as two groups who viewed the issue of *I Don't Meet* differently and were struggling over their views.

Now, let me say that a lot of the literature follows this line, and this is probably the most popular line that most people read in the text. I've always read it this way in lots of ways. When you bring in newer writing like Winter and his group, I use Bruce Winter because he's published a lot in this area and has focused on 1 Corinthians.

He keeps coming up all the time. It's an interesting thing. You'll notice I have him under the traditional academic view, but I put a question mark behind it because when Winter goes to analyze 1 Corinthians chapters 8 through 10, he doesn't go in with the lens of this view or the other view.

He goes in trying to surface what's going on underneath the surface of this and to treat it, to look at terms, to look at motifs that are involved in these chapters and

connect it with Roman Corinth and with Paul's teaching and try to ferret that out. So when you read Winter, you don't feel like he's putting the lenses of one of these views or the other on that text. And frankly, in some ways, Winter might be a third approach to this because there's some truth in both of the views that I'm mentioning here, the traditional and the other one I'll mention in a moment, as is usually the case when you're dealing with high-level academic people over a long period of time who are creating lenses through which we read the text, the reconstruction of the historical cultural backgrounds that are particularly important within epistles as one-way telephone conversations, as we've mentioned before.

That's another reason why I like reading the literature of Winter. As I refreshed myself for the lectures that we're doing in chapters 8 through 10, I actually reread four of his journal articles and several chapters of *After Paul Left Corinth*. And he has a number of books out on this, and I think he's writing a commentary on 1 Corinthians.

He's retired now in Australia, but I'm not sure where that is. I haven't gotten any word on that. So don't think of these as hard and fast.

There are some hard and fast in terms of perspective. You could probably put it in a couple of sentences. But when someone like Winter comes along and sort of ignores trying to pour the text into those modes, he lets the text emerge on its own terms, and I think it makes a lot more sense to do that.

Strong and weak are delineated by worldview. The word weak is used several times, and that's where people have scholars created this community of the weak, but what's going on is those who know those who don't know, those who have made a transition away from idolatry, and those who are still in the process of that transition. The strong had correct knowledge and, therefore, freedom, whereas the weak lacked knowledge and were therefore bound in conscience. We'll talk about conscience by inaccurate views about deities and their integration into society via food and social contact. Here again, I don't think that we can get our arms adequately around what kind of a transition it was for people in that time and space to move from what they had known all the way up into their adult and professional lives into something different.

Maybe they had a little help with the Jewish aspect of their passage, but when it came to Christianity and dealing with Paul, that was a conflict for them. More important, contextually, on page 117, the middle is Paul's protecting the strong from the weak or the weak from the strong. That's sort of an interesting perspective.

Was Paul trying to promote the rights of the strong, or was he trying to keep the strong from destroying the weak? All these things are talked about in the text. The problem is exactly how Paul was proceeding with this. What was the main

perspective that was going on here? If the problem is encased in social status, it may be the latter. The elite walks over those who are not in their position, and there is an issue in my mind as I read through these texts of rights relating to the possibility of the elite being part of this context and also rights in a more general sense that we would call freedom.

The problem is that a lot of older biblical studies miss the issue of Roman colony status elite and rights that they claimed because they were not as aware of that as they should have been. Maybe it couldn't have been because of just the nature of the progress of understanding and interpretation, and so, therefore, it's been a long journey even in academic scholarship about how the background to this passage influences what we have within the passage and even the definition of strong and weak. So, strong and weak are delineated by the worldview.

Here are some assumptions about this particular model of interpretation, and Garland will lay them out for you in a fair way. It seems that Garland goes with the other view, and I usually don't use secondary sources for this, but a good scholar is fair, and he's fair, and it's a convenient place for you if you can only buy that one book to see it. First of all, the weakly, bound by their past understandings and associations with idols, could not engage in a new worldview and free themselves to eat with a clear conscience, and I think that's a fair representation of the traditional academic view.

Paul agreed with the strong as technically correct but promoted the strong as responsible for not destroying the weak with the knowledge and freedom they experienced. Don't walk on your brothers and sisters, and it's probably more complicated than that, but nonetheless, there it is because, see if you bring in the strong and the issue of them going to banquets in relation to Isthmian games and so forth it's a little different than just going to buy a piece of meat in the market. The third thing Paul made was the distinction between innocuously consuming food associated with an idol in chapter 8 and participating in actual worship of an idol in chapter 10.

Paul permitted idol food as long as no one was caused to stumble, and when I read the text, I hear that once again, we have to be careful because we read from our own cultural context. We're not sensitized to all the nuances that need to be there, and we can miss things. The next bullet at the bottom of the page is Paul's maturity and ability to ignore guilt by association, which was beyond the ability of the early church and many of the new converts to grasp. This view is at the top of page 118, and there are lots of variations internal to the view. I would say Paul rejects any eating that implies identification with idols, especially in specific temple events, which means a banquet called for this express purpose of worshiping that god that wouldn't include those dinners that we talked about earlier.

Secondly, some, however, recognized that the temples were also community centers and had dining halls, which might be rented for events. These interpreters would not see meat in the temple in this context as a problem as long as the event is non-idol related. Third, Paul allows eating the meat in non-idolatry implied situations since idols are really nothing.

So, worldview dominates, but it wasn't easy for these early Christians to make the transition in their worldview, so you got both. You got everything existing at the same time. By the way, there'll never be a time in your ministry when you won't have every level of Christian understanding represented in your congregation. You'll have those who are mature and understand worldview correctly, and you'll have those who are just entering, and they still have all the baggage of their past life.

Let me give you a personal illustration of this that might help you. I didn't grow up in a Christian home. I don't remember ever seeing my dad in church, and I never went to church as a child except for Cub Scouts, which is a young man's organization, and they usually met in church halls and so forth, and I had a little involvement with that kind of thing and visited a vacation bible school because my friends did but I was never in a church in my school life, and I went into the navy right directly from high school, and as an unsaved person as a person who was not a Christian I just lived and I was rowdy and I went into the service to get away from the restrictions of my family and others and to be free as a rebellious young man.

Well, while I was in the Navy, after about a year, I became a Christian. It's a long story I won't tell you the whole story of this but on my way from San Diego, California to my next duty station in New London, Connecticut, I stopped at my home and went to a vacation bible school setting in a church to find an old girlfriend, and I sat down, and they had the kids dressed up like Indians, and the speaker was telling the story of the prodigal son and adapting it to a good Indian and a bad Indian, and I listened because this wasn't preaching and the spirit of God started to work on me and I became a Christian during that time didn't know a lot about what was going on or happening, but it was reality for me, and it was real my conversion but I was brand new to Christian thinking, and so I left my home and went on to my next duty station in Connecticut as a new Christian knowing absolutely nothing having nothing but a little testament and a gospel John to read. All right, well, when I was a kid in high school particularly, I had some very rowdy uncles, and I used to skip school and go to where they were down in our little factory town to a couple of bars called the Mecca and the Black Cat in Connersville, Indiana and I'd go and play pool watch them play pool you know sneak a beer do the things that you know a kid thinks is really cool.

Not a Christian had no Christian context whatsoever in that regard, and neither did they. Well, I had that background, and then I became a new Christian, and as a new Christian, I got the context of what's good and bad from the people that I was around and what I heard them say and so I was struggling as a new Christian with changing

behavioral patterns and when I got to New London, Connecticut I went to what was known as a Christian Servicemen's Center. It's a place where organizations trying to do evangelism and teaching with the military from a civilian base.

They have a place where you go. You can get food you can when you don't have much money in the military, and you have a place where you can park for the weekend. They had beds like a dorm, and so I went to one of those places. I was told to go there, and they would help me in my Christian life. Well, I went downtown in New London, Connecticut, and I was walking up the stairs to the Servicemen's Center, and I heard a familiar sound.

It was the breaking of billiard balls. They were playing pool. Now, if you know anything about pool and if you've ever been around that table game, you know that is a very, very distinct sound.

Well, I stopped because the only billiards pool that I had ever known was at the Black Cat in Mecca, which wasn't good. So, I backed down the stairs and checked the sign outside to make sure I was in the right place, and indeed I was. So, I walked up the stairs and was greeted by a friendly person who offered me some lemonade or iced tea or something. I looked to my right, and there was a room with two pool tables and people in there playing pool.

I couldn't even walk in there because, as a new Christian like these Christians in Corinth, my understanding of the world was that the pool was bad. It only has a bad context. With my former setting in that little rural factory town and no way I could look at it and deal with it, when someone asked me to play, I just beat it out of there.

There was no way because I couldn't make that transition in my mind from my context of playing billiards to their context, and I thought to myself, this could not be a Christian center because Christians wouldn't play billiards, so I was if you please weak according to the way of the traditional view of reading this text. I didn't have knowledge. I didn't understand the content that context makes all the difference.

It wasn't the game that's the issue. It's where it is and how you go about it. I wasn't able to do that. I was too new, and frankly, it took me a long time, months, even a year or so, before I could pick up a cue stick and play billiards and not feel guilty because, in my value system, it was bad, and I had to educate myself out of that.

My conscience needed time to catch up with that education, and I'll explain that a little bit later before I was able to do that and not be bothered by it. Well, can you imagine what it was like in Roman court as these new Christians tried to transition from everything they had known and accepted and are still challenged with I can't go into all the details of that challenge of the call of those former temples to them for allegiance. The former communities now looked at them askance and maybe even

ostracized them, particularly the lower class that didn't have the status to protect them.

How was that transition for them? Don't underestimate that. Okay, so the traditional view looks at it like most people have read it. We have to be careful. You cannot just call that a surface reading, even though most people do surface reading, and it seems that to be the way it comes across, but you've got to academically establish that view, and it has been established by a number of academicians as a legitimate way of viewing it, but I don't think it's the last word because I think we need to bring in more information to be able to adequately do even the traditional view.

Well, in response to, in objection to, and in contradistinction to the traditional view, there has been in recent days an alternate academic view and ironically, in the traditional surface reading view, that is, the texts are applied to certain guilt by association so these views aren't always clean and the details of the texts can have some continuity and pop up in both views in similar ways but the big deal was this was Paul dealing with the strong and the weak siding with the strong forensically and protecting the weak functionally traditional view or was Paul just flat saying without all of those distinctions don't you have anything to do with idolatry? Well, the traditional view did say that, but the traditional view took into account that there could be other contexts that wouldn't have been as immediately idolatrous, but in the alternative view, it's all idolatrous. Flee from it absolutely doesn't have anything to do with it, and they construct the text along those lines. The details of the text often end up being very similar in certain ways, but the lenses through which the text is being read will be different.

Heard, Gooch, and I think Garland, by my reading, goes with this alternate academic view. Garland says on page 173 in an article about this that Paul forbade Christians from any association with any food overtly connected to idolatry, and that would mean no eating in temples, even if they're restaurants, which needs to be proved absolutely held by some. No eating at any idol feast would mean the elite could not go to those feasts.

No buying meat in the market that had been through the temple system, so it's more of a blanket denial and more of a controversy in that regard. This view, on page 118 middle, is stimulated by a more literary critical procedure that requires literary rhetorical unity in 8 through 10 and explains the whole context by one presupposition. You see, in the traditional view, chapter 8 is dealing with a less threatening environment.

Chapter 10 deals with the pure idolatry environment, and when you read chapters 8 and 10, you see what seems to be two different things, and the traditional view accounts for that, I think, better. The alternative view says no, it's flat, and they will read it from that perspective when you read their literature. Excuse me.

Let me just remind you that if you do your homework and surface people who hold these views and read them, you're going to feel a swing on your part. When you read one author who's good, you'll say that's the view. You read another author of this view and say oh my, that's the view.

So, what you have to do is to study and read both sides carefully and then find a mediating explanation, which I think is Winter, who looks at it without imposing the views by and large, and then try to find your way through what the best is. Many times the truth is not found in the extremes but in finding the common aspect and new perspectives that bring the truth of both extremes into the center. Excuse me.

All right. Paul never allowed any idol guilt by association situations. The weak are more hypothetical constructs by Paul in setting up the argument.

They see the weak as a literary construct, not as a historical reality. I have problems with that myself, but that's the way this view goes. It is a very high academic sort of view using literary and rhetorical paradigms to do this, and those can have a lot of validity, and yet, at the same time, I find it difficult not to think of the strong and the weak as parties within the early Christian community in Corinth.

We've seen that up through 1 Corinthians to this point. Why are we going to all of a sudden shift that? As he goes on, the weak are more of a hypothetical construct by Paul merely to set up the rhetorical argument. This view argues that 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 hold the same view and not okay here and not okay there.

The primary difference of this view is the reconstruction of the background question of idol meat and whether there were two views in conflict at Corinth. John Heard, one of the main proponents of this, has a book, *The Origin of First Corinthians* and he challenged the traditional construct and claimed that there was really only one view in Corinth about idol meat and that they were objecting to Paul's view and that Paul was calling for an absolute separation from anything that had to do at any level with idol meat. As Heard puts it, at the bottom of 119, the Corinthians find nothing wrong with eating idol meat.

This is the Corinthians speaking to Paul. This is how he's sort of framing it. After all, we all have knowledge the Corinthians said, and this would have probably been coming from that elite social stratum that was trying to protect their businesses and their right to be in the banquets in spite of the fact that the idols were prominent and yes Paul did speak against that I think, and the traditional view thinks that as well.

We know that an idol has no real existence. We know there is no god but one. For those in Christ, all things are lawful.

That's what he's representing the Corinthians is saying, and as far as food is concerned, everyone knows that food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food. We fail to see what is gained by the avoidance of idol meat. That would have been their statement, according to this view.

You know yourself that when you were with us you never questioned what you ate and drank. Moreover, what are the markets? Are we to be required to inquire as to the history of each piece of meat we buy? And what about our friends? Are we to decline their invitations to banquets because of possible contamination by idol meat? So that's the way I heard reconstruction. His answer to that is that Paul says no, never ever.

Frankly, this is not a bad reconstruction. Even the traditional view would read this and say well, a lot of that's true, but how did Paul handle it? And that's where this view the alternate view goes to a literary rhetorical model that overrides the that historical reality of weak strong or accepting it as that and seeing it more rhetorically. Paul sets up the discussion and slams it.

So, chapter 10 would be the crescendo and 8 would be the start that he comes back in chapter 10 and brings the changes. So, there's that, there's glasses, there's perspectives that color how you read this. Hurt's thesis then is that the Corinthians' objections stem from a single point of view at Corinth that is opposed to Paul's to some degree.

There was no weak or scandalized second party. As Garland summarized, Hurd, the Corinthians were not asking if we could eat idol food. But they were saying, why can't we eat idol food? Now, I've read a lot of this material, and maybe I'm not the level of expert that some of these commentaries are. I could readily admit that they've written the stuff, but frankly, I think both things are true.

There were some who asked why we couldn't do it. And Paul answers that, and he answers it more on a community level than he does on a forensic level. And there are some who say, why can't we? Sorry, the play on words I kind of got out of. Can we eat? Yes, you can.

Why can't we eat? Because when you eat in a context where idols are, you're giving them credence, and you can't do that. That's participation. Eating at a friend's house and not asking questions is not participation, but when the questions come up, you shut it down.

So, I cannot remove myself from the traditional academic view yet. Not just a superficial traditional view. A traditional academic condition by Winter's more historical cultural Roman explanation of the details of the context.



Tenets of the alternate view. We need to be complete with this. If you don't have Garland to read, for example, here it comes.

First bullet point 119. A Western mindset of bifurcating one's religious and social worlds has been read in the First Corinthians 8 through 10. Well, that's probably true, but what does it mean? The mindset of the first century was not to compartmentalize the categories of life.

That is absolutely true. That's absolutely true. You don't compartmentalize life.

I don't think frankly that the traditional academic view would compartmentalize, but it is recognizing that question, and I think it has a lot to do with what is the legitimacy of guilt by association. Secondly, any dining in a pagan temple would have carried with it an aroma of idolatry of the institution. That's absolute guilt by association in this view.

The conversation of 1 Corinthians 8 to 10 was not new. Paul, in the Corinthians, had discussed the issue, but Paul's view was not well received. I frankly had most of the stuff, and yet there's more to be talked about.

Paul's view is understood to be that no food that was openly acknowledged to be offered to an idol was permitted. Well, the traditional view basically reads it that way with the nuance of the knowledge that idols are nothing. This included temple dining, a meal at a friend's, and the meat market, and yet I maybe haven't read enough of the alternate view, but I'm not sure how they deal with that issue of being at a friend's house and not asking questions.

The issue of being in the meat market and not asking questions. We'll talk more about that in the text. Paul had not become so unjust that he tolerated things that overtly reaped of idolatry.

Frankly, the traditional view agrees with that. So, I think the problem with these two views is that both of them have pieces of accuracy. Both of them do have a certain perspective that can be delineated, and yet both of them, I think, are touching on valid points within this text, and there probably needs to be a synthesis of this that hasn't actually developed within the academic community.

This view disputes that there are two groups, the strong and the weak. How do they get rid of the weak? Through a literary process, not a historical process. The weak are a setup in the discussion.

Well, there's nothing wrong with that. Paul does it sets up interlocutors all the time, particularly in the book of Romans, but there is some reality behind those

interlocutors. There's got to be some reality behind those without knowledge of the weak because we're talking about real life here in transition, and I think that the traditional approach to this sort of lets that come out as it comes out in life in my illustration about my own situation and the illustration of these Roman colony Corinthian new Christians who are struggling.

So, this view disputes the existence of a historically weak and looks at it more monolithically, and that's probably one of the major problems that I have. Now this worksheet. I do that when I'm in a class where we can have a conversation. We're not there, so you'll have to you can do your own homework and fill in those blocks and think about it, and use it as a way of getting to these two views.

I think I've laid the two views out reasonably well, hopefully clearly, and you can get your arms around it. The main thing is this difference between the alternate view dominantly is that the weak is a literary construct that Paul was using to explain things but that it was not really part of that historical context, and that's the linchpin of this that holds me back at least to some extent. I'm not against literary reconstructions of that nature; I'm just not sure that this particular context fits that, and I frankly have read more from the standpoint of the Roman reconstruction from Winter and his guild, so to speak, that don't even raise this but let it flesh its way out, and that allows for the weak and the strong under the category of elite and non-elite and this transition.

So, there's more work to be done. Maybe that's where we are in the history of interpretation of how to nail down this passage. So, those are the two major paradigms. What I want to do is try to not let them be the only lenses through which we look but to work through this text and not to just contextualize it into our reading because that would be reader-centered.

We want a text-centered approach, which means getting back to what it meant, so we're going to try at least to look at the details and ask how those details might fit these texts before us. So, a surface reading is a difficult and perhaps dangerous reading of this particular passage, and that's been true throughout 1 Corinthians. Reconstruction is essential in epistolary literature and particularly in the epistle that we're looking at.

Let's now go into the text itself and start working through this text and trying to think about it. Now, I use a sort of a traditional outline as we work through the text, and because of that, it's going to sound a little bit like leaning toward a traditional view, which, in all honesty, it may, but I'm trying my best to try to bring in now asking how do these texts communicate to us. There is a normativity to text but it's not a normative nature that ignores that reconstruction of what was it like for them so that we can understand it.

To do that is to abuse the Bible. The issue of food sacrificed to idols, the first major section of Acts of chapter 8, which is 1 to 13, is set out in a number of paragraphs, but that's the big one and I've cited Garland for your reading here, and that will obviously promote the alternate view and you can read through it and decide for yourself whether we're talking about the need to bifurcate these two views or to try to find some commonality as they surface things but that issue of the week is going to be a big one as to historical or literary. Now, I'm reading the context from these reconstructions, and I've done a little bit of that here, and we can see how that might proceed for us.

I've done it on the next three pages. Sorry, I wanted to do it just with the text but it doesn't work out totally. First of all, a traditional reading, an academic read, outlined here the so-called traditional view. That's why I put the word academic with it because sometimes the word traditional is by nature bad because that means it's not open to improvement or to revision.

That's not true with this. Has run so quickly to freedom, and that's why I put it in quotes because sometimes that's a Western understanding of freedom, not a first-century understanding because the word freedom also connects to the word rights that we've talked about previously and the elite and social status and we have to be careful. I think I see both of the word rights being used in more than one way in chapters 10, 8 through 10 and we'll surface that.

So, we might import a western idea of freedom here maybe a little too much. All right, chapter 8, verses 1 to 13. Paul warns against falling into any real participation with idolatry.

I think both views see that maybe in different ways. In 9:24 to 10:22, Paul warns against arrogant knowledge and flaunting participation. That has to be accounted for.

Are the strong just a literary concoction as well? In 10:23 to 11:1, Paul warns against offering a brother, offending a brother by one's own freedom. So, there is a real yin-yang as we move through these texts.

In the introduction of the issue in 8:1, we all have knowledge about food sacrificed to idols. We possess, but knowledge puffs up while love builds up. So, all of a sudden, we're confronted with two things here.

Knowledge, which I think Paul strongly upholds. We do not sacrifice knowing the truth on the sake of love. But we've got knowledge and love.

We've got accuracy and community going on. How do you bring these together and not just bifurcate them and have someone standing over here who's right but does not care about those who are struggling? So love bridges that gap.

Love is a *modus operandi* for the application of knowledge. But let me make it very clear. Love is not just an emotional idea.

Love in the Bible is very much about what is right. Love is a covenant term in the Old Testament. You shall love the Lord your God doesn't really have anything to do with about how you feel about God.

It has to do with your obedience to God. And that's another subject. However, love is a largely misunderstood term because of the imposition of a Western idea and a modern idea on the term love.

The term love is basically covenantal. And we'll bring that up as we look through these in different ways. Knowledge can puff up, it says, throughout this context of 1 Corinthians in chapter 4 and chapter 5, now in 8:1.

Knowledge puffs up. Does that mean you throw knowledge out? We know. Paul uses it in both ways.

In a good way, we know these things. But we can't let what we know to overcome the good of the community. Knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

That is not a bifurcation of knowledge and love. But love is how you bring about knowledge in a community. It's not easy.

It's a transition. And, as I mentioned, if you're in ministry, you've got people who are on the entire continuum every time you speak to your congregation. People who have arrived in terms of understanding a biblical worldview and people who have just started trying to understand it have a ton of baggage that they can't get rid of, and they're confused by what they see as discontinuity in that congregation.

As a ministry leader, you've got to learn to work with both ends of that continuum with redemption. Redeem the strong from being bullies. Redeem those who don't have the knowledge from giving up on knowing.

But help them to work through the transition process. I think that's exactly what's going on here in Roman court. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.

But whoever loves God is known by God. So, this is not throwing out the baby with the bathwater on either end of that continuum. You don't throw out knowledge and promote love.

You don't throw out love and promote knowledge. You have got to find out how both of these things work together. The Jerusalem Council, for example, in Acts 15, which precedes the issues that we're dealing with in 1 Corinthians, remember that in Acts 18, we have the Corinth thing going on, where Paul says that Gentiles are going to show love, if you please, to the whole integrated Jewish Gentile Christian community by abstaining from things, sacrifice to idols, and abstaining from blood and the issues that offended the Jewish Christians.

Acts 15 worked that out. Why isn't that brought up here? Well, the alternate view would say, well, it's not brought up because it's not germane, but because Paul is in total keeping with Acts 15. Or perhaps it's not brought up here because you've got a lot of transition pieces as you work through the book of Acts.

And the point is that you deal with different communities as to where they are in a given certain time and place. And Paul was making a concession in the Jerusalem Council for the good of the community, for love. And that didn't do away with knowledge, but it didn't let knowledge become a bully, as it can be.

So, you've got this human context of constantly dealing with people who are at different points in their lives. And as a result of that, you've got a clash of worldviews. Those who have adopted and are secure in a total Christian worldview, and those who are in transition.

Now, let's move on to this 2C. And that's the first few verses that introduce it. And then in Acts 8.4, excuse me, 1 Corinthians 8.4. So then, what about eating food sacrificed to idols? Knowledge, idols are nothing.

Love, some haven't been able to make the full transition yet. So, this continuum of knowledge and community has to be kept in mind throughout chapters 8 through 10. But notice how Paul starts in verse 4. So, then we know about eating food sacrificed to idols.

We know, all right, no compromise on that score. He just said knowledge puffs up, and yet he comes right back and says, I know. Well, is he contradicting himself? No.

We have to adapt how we understand the introduction in 1 through 4, that it's not throwing out the baby with the bathwater, to use a metaphor. We should not throw out knowledge because the community is having a hard time with that transition. No, we go head on.

And I think that's what Paul does. He comes head on and teaches what an accurate worldview is. In this passage, we know that an idol was nothing at all in the world.

All of those trappings of the city of Corinth and the city of Athens that are so integrated and part of the fabric of Rome, part of the fabric of the Greco-Roman culture and a Roman colony, all of that is nothing. And yet, everything is framed around it. But forensically, the idols are not real.

By the way, if you read the existing sources of the first century, this was not an easy transition because the temples even claimed healing. They claimed that their God performed an act for a person, and there are people who gave testimonies along those lines. So, it's not just a mental battle that's going on here.

It's what is true and on what basis. And then Paul brings the changes. An idol is nothing.

What's the basis of that? There is no God but one. By the way, that is the basic Jewish schema. The idea of the confession in Deuteronomy 6:4 is that there is one God and only one.

Monotheism dominates. And that's why idolatry is nothing because it's not true. It's a human construct from this particular viewpoint.

One God and he repeats that, by the way, even if there are so-called gods, little letters, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many little gods and many little lords that are recognized in your culture. Yet for us, our worldview, there is but one God, the Father from whom all things came and for whom we live. And there is but one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we live.

It's interesting the Spirit is not mentioned here. But don't worry, there is no jealousy in the Godhead. You see, the Trinity is a theological construct that we bring back to the scriptures.

Accurate, it must be for Christians. But it is not proof text. And here would have been a perfect place to do it, but he didn't do it.

Monotheism reigns. One God, three persons. And then the Christian community later works out just what does that mean.

And this would be a text that would have to be factored in. But not everyone possesses this knowledge. So, a biblical worldview is being brought out here in verses four to six and in seven and eight.

But not everyone possesses this knowledge. And I think we need to nuance that. There are people who are Christians in your community who haven't had time to make the transition to saying that these gods are nothing.

They're still plagued with the possibility that maybe it's true after all. In fact, some of them probably went back to their previous context. And if they were truly Christian, they struggled with that and then made their exit later.

But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrifice food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god. And since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

But food does not bring us near to God. We are no worse if we do not eat. And we are no better if we do.

Okay, let's think about verses four to eight. I've called this a biblical worldview as explicated by Paul. Here again, a traditional sort of an outline.

There's a distorted metaphysic. These new Christians have not yet grappled with the ontology and epistemology that's behind Judeo-Christian understandings. They're coming out of a religious pluralism, out of an idolatry.

They haven't been able to make that transition. 8.6 contains one of four explicit monotheistic texts in Paul. And I've listed them for you here.

Undisputed monotheism. Winter, in his article on religious pluralism, points out the Christian reasons why eating in temples from four to six is okay. And Paul's response is not only within a creedal idea, what you know, but also a relational framework.

So, he tries to unpack how they were working through both the forensic side, the ontology of no idol is anything, to the functional side, that in community, you have people whose worldview has not yet matured enough for them to be able to legitimately extricate themselves from that. Therefore, when they get into that context, or they see you there, their mentor, they feel a tinge of guilt and confusion, and you have to address that and deal with it.

There's a distorted metaphysic. We thought that gods were still something. Furthermore, there's a limited perceptual set.

Now, here's where I need my blackboard. If you can try to draw this in your mind's eye, sorry, I don't have a chart here in my notes. I would draw a stick person.

You know, you got your head and then the stick, legs, and arms as an illustration. And your left, my right. Over here, I would put data.

Okay. And data comes into the heart. I would draw the mind as a heart because that's the way the Bible does it.

Data comes into the heart, that is, the mind, and comes out the other side, and meaning is ascribed. Okay. If you are a Corinthian who knows nothing about Judaism or Christianity, and you've never espoused it, and even you reject it, the data comes in of religious pluralism and comes out on the other side as meaning.

I mean that these gods are something and that I must show homage to them. Not only just one of them but all of them. That's my culture.

That's my religion. But then, all of a sudden, you've become a part of Judeo-Christian tradition, and you've learned that idols aren't really anything. There's monotheism, and there's one God.

And to use the analogy of Romans 12, you need to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You need to change the way you think. So now, when this religious pluralism is run through your heart and your mind, it comes out on the other side that idols are nothing.

Why? Because you've changed your worldview. You've been transformed by the renewing of your mind, which means you now have a new worldview. Instead of an idolatrous, religious pluralism is an okay worldview; you now have a Judeo-Christian monotheism; idols are nothing worldview through which you run your data.

You see, where is meaning ascribed? It's ascribed in one sense, on the human plane, where the data goes in and comes out. That's why you can take the same data and come up with different meanings. It is rationality, the worldview of individuals, that assigns meaning to their data. It's all about worldview.

That's why Romans 12:1 and 2 is such a massive text. Therefore, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, not your emotions, the renewing of your mind. According to the teaching of the Old and New Testament as a unit, with its progression, you don't throw the baby out with the bath water in terms of the Old Testament.

You better not, there's a lot of stuff there you need. And so, this is what Paul's dealing with. He's dealing with a world that had a different, that's where this is where the word perceptual set comes from.

This grid right here, through which the data comes into, is what we call our perceptual set. Perceptual means, how do you perceive the world in which you live? This person over here says, the idol gets credit. You know all along, just like Hosea knew, you think the idol did it, but all along God gave it to you.



Read Hosea, which is a fascinating book on worldview, with Baal, the religious pluralism that Israel was in the midst of, and that God was dealing with. What a fascinating book. So, a biblical worldview is explicated.

You got a distorted metaphysical when there's some of them are still thinking that the idols are something. You've got a limited perceptual set. They have not yet been able to be transformed and renewed in their thinking.

They think that limited knowledge affects the accuracy of your reflected life. Just want to make myself a note for the future here. And then you've got the application of the principle.

You got the biblical worldview on one side, and there are some other details I'll mention here in a second, but I want to get the continuity. Then you've got the application of the principle in verses 9 through 13. All right, so he addresses a worldview in 4 through 8, now 9. Be careful, however.

All right, he's given them the truth we know, but now he's going to come back and give them the love. Knowledge and love go hand in hand. They're not to be separated, but there's continuity.

Knowledge governs the forensic side of life, the side of what truth is and what we know, and love governs the application of that in the real world. But it never leaves the knowledge base. But not everyone possesses this knowledge, verse 7. But now verses 9 through 13.

But be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. Now, in the alternate view, that's a construct. In the traditional view, it's a real group of people.

For if someone with a weak conscience sees you with all your knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So, this weak brother or sister for whom Christ died is destroyed because you can't love them enough to give them time to make the transition in their understanding. There is a lot more to be said here, but we're at a good time to stop, and we'll come back to page 121 and pick up this issue of managing the question of these two individuals. At least in the traditional view, the alternate view looks at these details.

We're looking at a worldview that needs to be changed, but how do you do it? I'll see you next time.

This is Dr. Gary Meadors in his teaching on the book of 1 Corinthians. This is session 21, 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1, Paul's Response to the Question of Food Sacrificed to

Idols.