

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ  
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

YEAR B - FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Delivered by Tau Phosphoros  
to the Parish of St. Ambelain  
on February 1, 2015

Today, my brethren, we return to a discussion we began a couple of weeks ago concerning our attainment of gnosis and the responsibilities that come with that blessing. Let us return, then, to our continued study of 1st Corinthians. In this passage we are told right off by Paul that he will be discussing sacrifice to idols, and that "we all have knowledge." He is speaking directly and specifically to those who have attained gnosis and who understand the truth of God. But then he follows immediately with "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Wow, did he really just say that? To a Gnostic, that stings a little. But remember who he's talking to here. He is not speaking to the psychic who has not received gnosis, discouraging him or her from doing so. He is speaking to the one who has gnosis and admonishing that one to not let that spiritual gift become a stumbling block.

After this jolting introduction to the subject, he goes on to explain what he means. He first explains what is already assumed to be known, that idols are no more or less than what we hold them to be. And if our God is Spirit and that Spirit is One and infinite, then simple objects can hold no inherent otherworldly power for us. Therefore, eating food in the presence of an idol is neither better nor worse than eating food anywhere else.

"But," Paul tells us, "there is not gnosis in all men." In other words, among those who yet lack a mature knowledge of God and Christ, even if they consider themselves Christians, many hold to a superstitious belief concerning the sacrifice to idols. We must therefore use caution in exercising our absolute liberty. Remember, a couple of weeks ago we read the words of Paul that said, "All things are lawful to me but not all things are beneficial." Our passage here elaborates upon this sentiment. There are no restrictions upon what we may eat, or when or where we eat it. But if we are observed by those without understanding, our actions may be misconstrued as something other than what they are. In this example, Paul is pointing out that if one who is known to be advanced in the knowledge of Christ is seen by others lacking that knowledge to be eating in a temple of a false god, it may lead to a false understanding, perhaps even indicating that it is appropriate to make offerings to those empty idols.

Paul says that it would be better for him to never eat meat than to do so and inadvertently cause his brother to stumble. This is not, by brethren, a call to vegetarianism. It is the illustration of a principle - that we are to be mindful at all times about how our actions impact those around us. Just because an action is permitted does not make that action the appropriate one for a given situation. The more freedom we obtain, the more responsibility we assume in exercising that freedom. We must develop the discernment necessary to exercise our liberty to the benefit of humanity and to the glory of God. And Paul has given us the key to that discernment: Agape - Love. "Love builds up," he tells us. It is the cultivation in our hearts of this single virtue that will guide us rightly always.