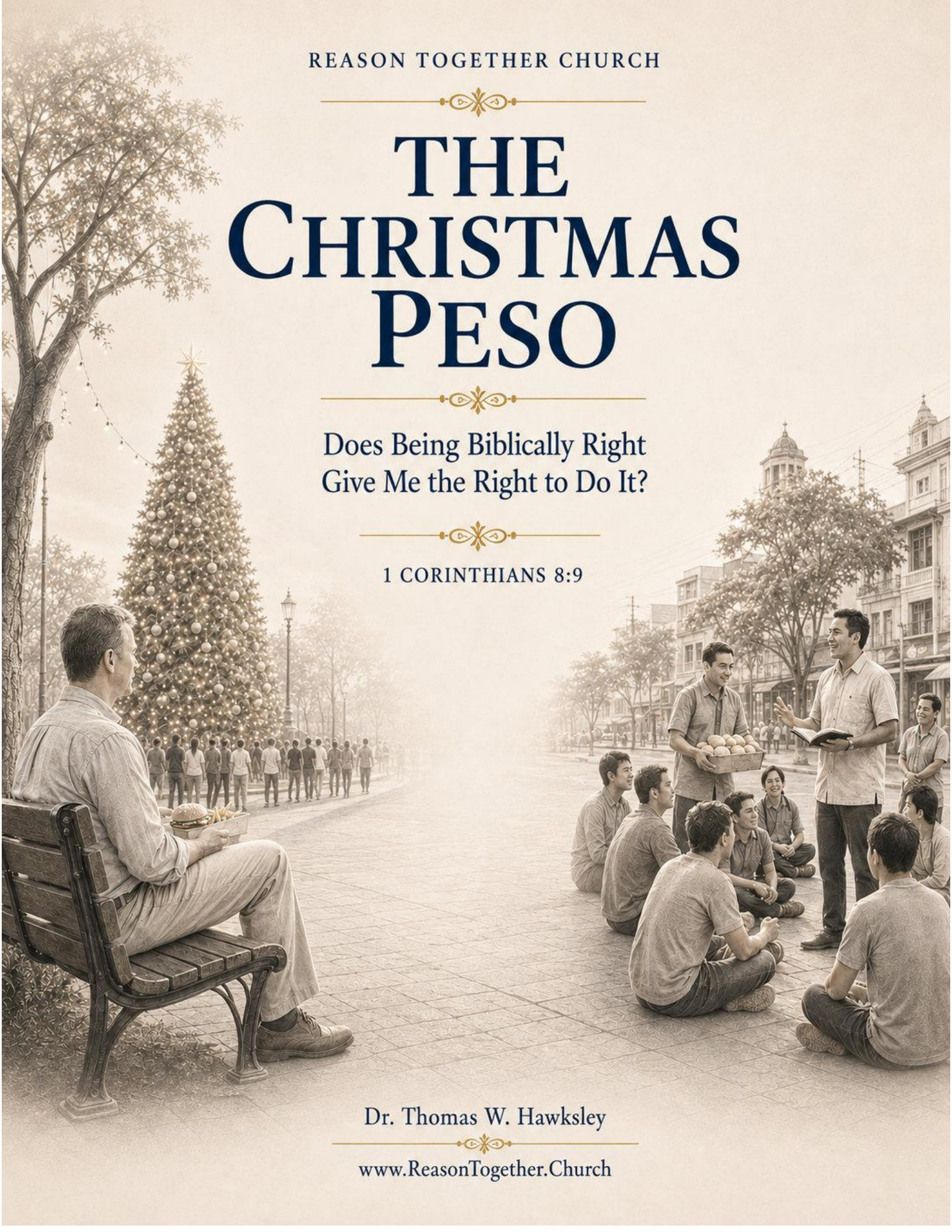




REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE CHRISTMAS PESO

Does Being Biblically Right
Give Me the Right to Do It?

1 CORINTHIANS 8:9

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

To those who are with us every week, welcome home.

To our returning friends, we are grateful to see you again.

And to every first-time visitor and honored guest, we want you to know that you are genuinely welcome here.

You do not have to pretend that you have every answer.

You do not have to hide the questions that have been troubling you.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

After the service, I hope you will join us in the Reason Together Cafe.

The coffee is free and so are the refills on conversations.

Our Keiki Kids Center is also available for our younger guests.

Before we begin, let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us together today.

Thank You for giving us Your Word and for allowing us to approach it with sincere questions.

Give us knowledge, but do not permit our knowledge to become pride.

Give us conviction, but do not permit our conviction to become cruelty.

Give us liberty, but teach us to govern that liberty with love.

Show us what must never be surrendered and show us what we should gladly lay down so that someone else may see Christ.

Speak through Your Word today.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.

Our opening Scripture is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 8.

The first verse says:

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge.

Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

Verse 9 says:

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

And verse 13 concludes:

*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth,
lest I make my brother to offend.*

Before we enter today's study, let me briefly mention giving.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Our guests are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to give faithfully through your home church.

For those who consider this their church home, there is a giving box in the back and you may give cheerfully as the Lord leads.

A gift does not have to appear large to matter.

A small gift placed in the right hands can become a meal, a conversation, an act of compassion or an opportunity to point someone toward Christ.

Today's message begins with a Christmas tree, moves through the streets of Cebu, pauses beneath a cardboard sign and ends beside an empty bag that once held one hundred pieces of bread.

But to understand why that Christmas tree mattered so much to me, you need to know what Christmas had always meant in my family.

Christmas was a very big event in the home where I grew up.

The birth of Jesus Christ mattered deeply to us.

We sang Away in a Manger and Silent Night.

But we also enjoyed the ordinary fun of the season.

We sang Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and Jingle Bells.

Our extended family gathered from several states.

There were aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and grandparents.

Some years there were so many people and so many gifts that Christmas had to be divided between two homes.

One gathering took place on Christmas Eve and another on Christmas morning.

I have childhood photographs in which the family is standing near the tree because there was no place left to sit.

The room was filled with presents.

Some years there may have been more than five hundred gifts around that tree.

That was the Christmas world I knew.

So when ministry took me away from home during the Christmas season, I felt the distance more deeply than I expected.

The second Christmas I spent away from home found Danielin and me serving in Cebu, Philippines.

Cebu had McDonald's, Pizza Hut, American television programs and many things that felt familiar.

We were staying in an American-style condominium with indoor plumbing and air conditioning.

By missionary standards, I was comfortable.

But comfort and home are not always the same thing.

Outside the condominium, poverty was everywhere.

The streets were dirty.

The weather was hot and muggy.

The familiar songs and decorations were present, but the people who shared my memories were not.

To be honest, I was lonely and depressed.

So I decided to bring a little of my kind of Christmas into that condominium.

I would buy a Christmas tree, decorate it, wrap gifts for several local Pastors and invite them to a Christmas gathering.

Danielin tried to talk me out of it.

I did not listen.

I wanted something familiar.

I wanted one evening that felt like home.

We bought the tree.

We wrapped the gifts.

We prepared a meal.

And for a little while, I was excited again.

Then the Pastors arrived.

Almost immediately, I knew the evening was not going as I had imagined.

Many Filipino Baptists regarded the Christmas tree as pagan or as part of a Catholic observance that Protestants should reject.

Some believed that participating in the custom would be spiritually wrong.

They were not pretending to be offended.

Their convictions were sincere.

The tree happened to be in a separate room, so I closed the door.

We ate together.

We sang hymns.

We studied the Bible.

We laughed and prayed.

By the end of the evening, fellowship had recovered.

But I was still relieved when everyone went home.

I did not sleep that night.

I had internet access, a question and enough determination to keep studying until morning.

I researched the objections those Pastors had raised.

I examined the Scriptures they used.

I studied the history of the custom.

I also learned more about the religious history of the Philippines and began to understand why their convictions were so strong.

By breakfast, I believed I could Biblically defend having a Christmas tree.

I had spent the night preparing to prove that I was right.

Then the Holy Spirit brought 1 Corinthians chapter 8 to my mind and asked me to consider whether proving I was right was the only Biblical question in the room.

The issue was no longer merely whether a Christian could have a Christmas tree.

The issue was whether my liberty might become a stumblingblock to the very people with whom I had come to serve.

That experience left me with the question before us today.

Does being Biblically right always give me the right to do it?

Does the Bible actually prohibit a Christian from having a Christmas tree?

So I did what I have always believed a Christian should do when confronted with a Biblical question.

I went to the Scriptures.

I read their arguments.

I studied the passages they used.

I examined Jeremiah chapter 10.

Jeremiah speaks about a tree being cut out of the forest.

A craftsman works upon the wood.

The object is decorated with silver and gold.

It is fastened so it cannot move.

But Jeremiah is not describing a family bringing an evergreen into the house in December.

He is describing an idol fashioned from wood and treated as a god.

The Bible does not command Christians to have Christmas trees.

It does not command Christians to celebrate December 25.

But neither does Scripture declare that an ordinary decorated tree is automatically an idol.

Romans 14 tells us that one person may esteem one day above another while another esteems every day alike.

Paul says that each should be fully persuaded in his own mind and act unto the Lord.

By the time I had finished studying, I believed I could make a strong Biblical defense of the tree.

I had the verses.

I had the context.

I had the argument.

I was ready to prove that I was right.

Have you ever been there?

Have you ever studied an issue, gathered the evidence and prepared your answer?

Have you ever known exactly what you were going to say and exactly how you were going to prove it?

And then, before you could deliver your brilliant argument, God asked you a different question?

That night, my question was whether the tree was permissible.

God's question was what insisting upon that tree might do to the people with whom I had come to minister.

That is when 1 Corinthians 8 became more than a passage about meat offered to idols.

It became personal.

Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

Paul does not say knowledge is evil.

Biblical knowledge matters.

Doctrine matters.

Truth matters.

Love does not require us to pretend that every interpretation is equally correct.
But knowledge can be carried in the wrong spirit.
Knowledge can become a weapon.
Knowledge can become a trophy.
Knowledge can become a way of humiliating someone rather than helping someone.
Knowledge can tell me that I have won the argument while love asks whether I have wounded the person.
Being wrong is not loving.
But being right does not automatically mean I am acting in love.
Truth tells me what is right.
Love asks how that truth should be carried.
My question changed.
I stopped asking only, Am I allowed to have this tree?
I began asking, Is exercising this freedom worth injuring our fellowship or distracting from the ministry we came here to accomplish?
Paul said:

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

We need to understand what a stumbling block is.
A stumbling block is not simply anything another person dislikes.
It is not every disagreement.
It is not personal irritation dressed in spiritual language.
If every objection became a permanent veto, the most restrictive person in the room would control the conscience of everyone else.
That is not what Paul teaches.
The Christians in Corinth understood that an idol was nothing.
But some believers had come out of lives deeply entangled with idolatry.
If they watched a knowledgeable Christian eating inside an idol's temple, they might be encouraged to participate while their conscience still told them it was sin.
They would act against their conscience and be spiritually wounded.
Paul did not say the meat had become spiritually contaminated.
He said the exercise of liberty could become destructive.

Romans 14:15 says:

But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.

Paul's concern was not merely the object.

His concern was whether the believer was walking in love.

The object could be meat.

It could be wine.

It could be a holiday.

In Cebu that night, it was a tree.

The tree was not worth placing between those pastors and the work we were attempting to do together.

So I closed the door on the tree that evening and stopped making it the center of our gathering.

Not because I had discovered that it was an idol.

Not because every Christian must reach the same conclusion.

I set it aside because Christian liberty includes the liberty to surrender a liberty.

You cannot voluntarily surrender a freedom unless you genuinely possess it.

And sometimes the highest use of Christian liberty is the freedom to lay it down.

So let me ask the question that will follow us through this message.

What am I willing to surrender so someone else can see Christ?

There is a small miracle in Matthew chapter 17 that may be one of the clearest pictures of this principle.

The collectors of the temple tribute approached Peter and asked whether Jesus paid the tax.

Jesus asked Peter a question.

Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute?

Of their own children, or of strangers?

Peter answered, Of strangers.

Jesus replied:

Then are the children free.

Jesus established the truth first.

He was the Son.

The temple belonged to His Father.

He was not obligated as though He were a stranger in His Father's house.

Jesus was right.

Then He used a wonderful word.

Notwithstanding.

The children are free.

Notwithstanding.

I possess the right.

Notwithstanding.

My position is true.

Notwithstanding.

There is something more important than insisting upon it at this moment.

Jesus said:

Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook.

Peter was to take the first fish he caught.

Inside its mouth he would find a coin sufficient for Jesus and Peter.

The coin did not prove that the collectors were right about Jesus.

It demonstrated that Jesus would not permit a secondary dispute to become an unnecessary obstruction.

Jesus did not pay because He was wrong.

He paid because His mission mattered more than winning that argument.

Long before there was a Christmas Peso in Cebu, Jesus used another coin to show that freedom may be surrendered for something greater.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul applies the same principle to his own ministry.

Paul establishes that an apostle has legitimate rights.

Those who preach the Gospel may receive material support.

Those rights were real.

Yet 1 Corinthians 9:12 says:

Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

There is that word again.

Nevertheless.

I possess the right.

Nevertheless, I will not allow that right to hinder the Gospel.

Paul did not surrender an imaginary privilege.

His sacrifice mattered because the right was genuine.

Then he says in verse 19:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

Paul adjusted himself to reach Jews.

He adjusted himself to reach Gentiles.

He became weak to reach the weak.

He became all things to all people, not by changing the Gospel but by removing unnecessary barriers around its presentation.

The Gospel advances when believers stop asking only what they are entitled to keep and begin asking what love is willing to surrender.

But this teaching requires an important boundary.

Christian love does not require us to surrender Biblical truth.

The lives of Timothy and Titus show us the difference.

In Acts chapter 16, Paul wanted Timothy to join the missionary work.

Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek.

Paul circumcised Timothy because of the Jews in that region.

Circumcision did not save Timothy.

It was not added to faith as a requirement for justification.

It removed a cultural obstacle that could have prevented Jewish listeners from hearing him.

But in Galatians chapter 2, Paul refused to permit Titus to be compelled to undergo circumcision.

Why did Paul yield with Timothy and refuse with Titus?

Because with Titus, false teachers were making circumcision part of the requirement for acceptance with God.

The truth of the Gospel was at stake.

Paul yielded when yielding advanced the Gospel.

Paul refused to yield when yielding would alter the Gospel.

The Christmas tree was a Timothy issue, not a Titus issue.

Setting it aside did not deny the incarnation.

It did not deny the deity of Christ.

It did not deny salvation by grace through faith.

It removed a nonessential point of conflict from a particular ministry setting.

Love may surrender a preference.

Love may surrender a privilege.

Love must never surrender the Gospel.

Christian love does not surrender truth.

It surrenders anything else that unnecessarily stands between a person and the truth.

The Christmas tree was only the first part of the story.

A few days later, I walked to a mall about a mile from our condominium.

In front of it was a courtyard bordered by stores and restaurants.

During the day, the area could have been part of almost any American city.

The grass was cut.

People in business clothes hurried along the sidewalks.

Cars circled in search of parking spaces.

I liked to sit on a bench near a large tree in the park and eat lunch because the place reminded me of home.

For Christmas, the city had decorated that tree and placed a manger scene nearby.

I bought a small pepperoni pizza and a can of Pepsi, then carried them to my usual bench.

There were storytellers reading about the virgin birth.

Children watched a puppet show about Jesus.

For a few moments, I could enjoy the beauty of the season and revisit some of the memories I had missed.

After lunch, I made several visits and spoke with people to whom I had been witnessing.

Danielin was spending time with her sister and would return later that evening.

I decided to do a little shopping, eat one more American-style meal and return to see the tree after dark.

But Cebu after dark was not the same city I had enjoyed in the daylight.

The businesspeople were gone.

Homeless men and women filled the streets.

Small children tried to sell trinkets so their families could eat.

Others were trapped in forms of exploitation that no child should ever know.

There seemed to be an open hand in every direction.

And because I was an American, many assumed I had the money to answer every need.

I did not.

I tried to help when I believed the Holy Spirit was directing me, but my resources could not begin to meet all the need around me.

Sometimes, and I am not proud of this, I simply looked away and kept walking.

To reach the taxi stand, I climbed a set of stairs, crossed an overpass and started toward the steps on the other side.

The route was well lit.

It was heavily traveled.

An armed guard stood nearby.

Panhandling was normally prohibited there, but several people still slept or waited quietly in the open area.

Then I noticed a woman holding a small child.

The baby rested against a homemade cardboard sign.

The sign contained only three words:

One Peso Bread.

I carried my wallet in a buttoned shirt pocket beneath another layer of clothing.

I kept smaller amounts of money in my two front pockets.

In my right pocket was the thirty pesos I needed for the taxi ride home.

In my left pocket were a few loose coins from the stores and restaurants I had visited that day.

I reached into that left pocket, gathered the coins and placed them in the cup before the woman.

Ten minutes later, I was back in the condominium.

I took a hot shower.

Danielin prepared something for me to eat.

I told her about the woman and child beneath the sign.

I felt the contrast between our borrowed sixth-floor condominium and the people sleeping below us on the street.

That night, I would sleep in a comfortable bed with a full stomach and every expectation that tomorrow would be much like today.

Outside our window were people with no pillow, no secure meal for morning and no assurance that life would ever change.

The next morning, I awoke to the wonderful smell of fresh bread.

Small bakeries seemed to be on nearly every street corner and Danielin had visited one before I awakened.

At breakfast I asked her again about that sign.

How could one peso make a difference?

At the time, one peso was worth less than two American cents.

Many people I knew would have told a cashier to keep that much change rather than carry it in a pocket.

Danielin handed me a piece of warm, fresh bread and asked me to eat it.

When I finished, she asked how it made me feel.

I told her it made me happy.

It tasted good and felt good in my stomach.

Then she told me that the piece of bread had cost one peso.

The amount people had begged for through the night could purchase a basic piece of food that might sustain them through the day.

For a small child, that one piece of bread might be everything the child ate that day.

Suddenly, the simple breakfast before me looked like abundance.

I found it difficult to finish eating.

The Holy Spirit used Danielin's explanation to turn a cardboard sign into a ministry question.

We asked two local Pastors to come and talk with us.

I told them that if they would lead the soul winning, I would pay for bread and we could spend several evenings near the mall feeding hungry people and sharing the Gospel.

We scheduled the first outing for that very evening.

The coin had not changed.

But my understanding of its value had changed completely.

To the giver, one peso could appear insignificant.

To the hungry child, it could mean the only food available that day.

And placed in the hands of local ministry, one peso could become bread, compassion and an opportunity for someone to hear about Jesus Christ.

Jesus once sat near the treasury and watched people give.

We often concentrate on how much money entered the box.

Jesus also saw how much remained in each giver's hand.

A poor widow placed two mites into the treasury.

The amount was small by ordinary accounting.

But Christ said she had given more than the others because she gave out of her poverty.

In John chapter 6, a boy possessed five barley loaves and two small fishes.
The disciples saw an inadequate lunch.
Jesus saw something that could be placed into His hands.
God does not ask us to pretend that small things are large.
He asks us not to decide that small things are useless.
A cup of cold water matters.
A widow's handful of meal matters.
A boy's lunch matters.
Two mites matter.
And in Cebu, one peso mattered.
We usually measure a gift by what leaves our hand.
Jesus also sees what that gift means when it reaches someone else's need.
What has God already placed in your hand that you have dismissed because it appears too small?
That evening, Danielin purchased one hundred warm pandesal rolls for one hundred pesos.
The bread came from Julie's Bakery.
One hundred rolls.
One hundred pesos.
One hundred small answers to one hundred moments of hunger.
The bread was offered freely to hungry people.
That matters.
The bread was not bait.
Nobody had to earn it by pretending to believe.
Nobody was asked to purchase it by listening to a sermon.
It was given because people were hungry.
Jesus cared about physical hunger.
When He saw the multitudes, He had compassion upon them.
He did not tell hungry people that their bodies were irrelevant because their souls were eternal.
James asks what it profits if a brother or sister is without food and we offer religious words
without giving what is needed for the body.
First John asks how the love of God can dwell in someone who sees a brother in need and closes
his compassion.
A Gospel that announces the love of God should produce people who know how to show love.

But the local pastor also understood that physical bread was not the entire Gospel.

The bread would satisfy hunger for a little while.

Then hunger would return.

So while offering physical bread, the pastor began speaking about the Bread of Life.

He spoke about Jesus Christ.

He spoke about His death.

He spoke about His burial.

He spoke about His resurrection.

He spoke about salvation and the assurance of Heaven.

That is the same movement we see in John chapter 6.

Jesus fed the multitude.

The next day, the crowd searched for Him.

Jesus told them they were seeking Him because they had eaten the loaves and were filled.

Then He said:

Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.

And in John 6:35 He declared:

I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

Jesus did not apologize for feeding them.

But He refused to let them confuse the temporary gift with their eternal need.

The church must avoid two opposite errors.

We must not preach to hungry people while refusing reasonable compassion.

And we must not fill stomachs while remaining silent about eternity.

Bread without the Gospel may postpone hunger.

A sermon without compassion may conceal the love it proclaims.

Christian compassion feeds people because they are hungry.

Christian faithfulness tells them that hunger is not their only need.

There is another beautiful connection in the name of this story.

It was not merely called the Peso.

It became known as the Christmas Peso.

The name Bethlehem carries the meaning House of Bread.

The child born in Bethlehem would later declare, I am the bread of life.

The Bread of Life entered the world in the House of Bread.

Luke tells us that He was laid in a manger, a feeding place.

We should not pretend that Luke stops to explain that as a symbol.

But we can still appreciate the beauty of the connection.

On the first Christmas, the Bread of Life entered the world in the House of Bread.

Years later, ordinary bread on a street in Cebu pointed hungry people back to Him.

And here is something else we must understand.

The Gospel is free, but carrying it costs something.

Isaiah 55:1 says:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat.

Revelation 22:17 says:

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

No peso can purchase forgiveness.

No dollar can buy redemption.

No religious ceremony can earn eternal life.

No human being can pay the price of his own soul.

Salvation is free to the sinner because Jesus Christ paid its immeasurable price.

But carrying that free Gospel to someone else will usually cost the believer something.

Someone purchased the bread.

Someone organized the gathering.

Someone preached.

Someone counseled those who responded.

Someone gave time, energy, comfort and resources.

The peso did not purchase salvation.

It purchased bread and helped create a moment in which someone could hear about the salvation

Christ had already purchased.

Then came another decision in the story, and it may have been harder for me than purchasing the bread.

I have heard many sermons telling Christians to go into all the world and preach the Gospel.

That day, I sensed God telling me that the most helpful thing I could do was to sit down, be quiet and pray.

Being an American could attract attention in Cebu.

Sometimes people who would ignore a local Pastor would gather to hear a foreign visitor.

That could be an advantage.

But on that street, it could also become a serious distraction.

Some people would approach the American because they hoped for money, not because they wanted to hear about Jesus.

Most of the people in that area spoke Cebuano.

The local Pastors understood the language, the culture and the needs in ways I did not.

If I stood in the middle of the work, eyes might turn toward the contents of the American's wallet instead of toward the Savior the Pastors were proclaiming.

Danielin bought me a hamburger and fries from McDonald's.

She told me to go across the street, sit on the bench in front of the decorated tree, eat my meal and pray while they shared Jesus.

So there I sat.

I was near the same public Christmas tree that had reminded me of home.

Across the street, my wife, two local Pastors and several church members were preparing to do the ministry.

I had helped fund the work, but I would not be its face.

I felt strangely out of place watching missionary work instead of leading it.

Yet on that particular evening, sitting across the street was not withdrawal from ministry.

It was obedience within ministry.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is sit down and be quiet.

That does not sound heroic.

It does not produce a dramatic photograph of the visiting American standing in front of the crowd.

But ministry is not measured by who appears in the photograph.

Remaining across the street did not mean I was uninvolved.

I had listened.

I had researched.

I had helped organize and support the work.

But on that street, the most helpful place for me was not at the center.

John the Baptist said of Jesus:

He must increase, but I must decrease.

John did not say that another minister must increase in place of Christ.

Christ must increase.

The local pastors were better positioned to make Christ increase because the visiting American was willing to decrease.

Sometimes faithfulness means standing up and speaking.

Sometimes faithfulness means sitting down so the right person can speak.

This matters in the church.

Ministry is not limited to the person holding the microphone.

The person making coffee can be ministering.

The person preparing a room can be ministering.

The person caring for children can be ministering.

The person supporting a local worker can be ministering.

The person who creates room for someone else to lead can be ministering.

First Corinthians 3:6 says:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

The planter is not the Savior.

The one who waters is not the Savior.

God gives the increase.

From my bench across the street, I watched the group move to a quiet part of the sidewalk and kneel together.

For about ten minutes, they prayed for God to bless the evening and allow them to reach people.

By the time they stood, passersby were already watching.

One of the Pastors reached into the bag and lifted a piece of bread from Julie's Bakery.

He began speaking in Cebuano, but the message was later translated for me.

He told them that the bread was warm, soft and delicious.

He told them that it had cost one peso and that he would give it to them freely.

Then he explained that if they ate the bread and walked away, it would satisfy their hunger only for a short time.

But if they would eat and remain, he would tell them about the Bread of Life whose salvation lasts forever.

He invited them to come, eat and hear about Jesus Christ, His death, burial and resurrection. People began gathering.

I could not count everyone from where I sat.

But I watched the bag grow lighter until every one of the one hundred pieces had been given away.

Then something happened that I do not want us to miss.

The bag was empty, but most of the people stayed.

There was no more bread to receive.

No one was being rewarded for remaining.

A few left, but most continued listening as the Pastor preached.

A lamp post illuminated part of the sidewalk.

From across the street, I could see people crying and bowing their heads.

The Cebuano language contains enough English words that I could catch pieces of the message.

But I did not need to understand every word to recognize that the plan of salvation was being given.

After the Pastor prayed, Danielin and the church members spoke with people individually.

The listeners waited patiently for their turn with a counselor so they could understand what they had heard.

Only after the last person had gone did I leave my bench and rejoin the group.

Together, we rejoiced in what God had done.

The physical bread was gone.

The Bread of Life was still being offered.

The illustration had disappeared, but the message remained.

The method had reached its limit, but Christ had not reached His.

I could remain in Cebu only a short time, but we continued the bread ministry until I had to leave for another destination.

Before departing, I left money so the local Pastors could continue as long as the funds lasted.

The people began calling the work the Christmas Peso.

Eventually, the designated money ran out.

But the preaching did not stop.

The same Pastors continued returning to that area after the Christmas season ended.

When the park was no longer crowded with holiday activity, they moved their meetings from the sidewalk into the park.

Later, I received a photograph of people kneeling near the same bench where I had eaten my hamburger and prayed.

A local Pastor leaned against the tree that had once been decorated for Christmas.

The visitor was gone.

The special funds were gone.

The holiday crowd was gone.

But local believers were still sharing Jesus.

The ministry did not belong to the visitor.

It did not belong to the peso.

It belonged to Christ.

Second Timothy 2:2 tells us to commit the truth to faithful people who shall be able to teach others also.

Healthy ministry does not make people permanently dependent upon one personality, one donor or one visiting worker.

It equips faithful people to carry the work forward.

The Christmas Peso became most beautiful when it was no longer mine.

A ministry that ends when its founder leaves may have gathered followers.

A ministry that continues after its founder leaves has multiplied servants.

Now look at everything that was surrendered in this story.

The tree was moved out of the center and the door was closed.

That was liberty governed by love.

The argument was surrendered.

That was knowledge governed by charity.

The platform was surrendered.

That was ministry governed by humility.

The pesos were surrendered.

That was possession governed by compassion.

The door closed on the tree.

The argument ended.

The American sat across the street.

The pesos became bread.

The bread disappeared.

The people kept listening.

The visitor went home.

The pastors kept preaching.

What decreased was the tree, the argument, the visitor, the peso and the bread.

What increased was Christ.

And every surrender in this story points toward a surrender infinitely greater than our own.

Philippians chapter 2 tells us to have the mind of Christ.

He made Himself of no reputation.

He took upon Him the form of a servant.

He humbled Himself.

He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Second Corinthians 8:9 says:

Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Jesus did not merely surrender a holiday preference.

He surrendered Heaven's glory.

He did not merely surrender a place at the front of a gathering.

He took the form of a servant.

He did not merely give a coin.

He gave Himself.

Mark 10:45 says:

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

We began by asking whether we had the right to put up a Christmas tree.

But perhaps the greater Christmas question is not what we have the right to put up.

It is what love is willing to lay down.

Christ laid down His glory.

Christ laid down His reputation.

Christ laid down His rights.

Christ laid down His life.

Christmas is not primarily the story of what humanity offered to Christ.

It is the story of God giving Christ to humanity.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.

Now I want to speak to anyone who has never personally trusted Jesus Christ as Savior.

The one-peso bread could be purchased.

It could satisfy hunger for a little while.

Then it would be gone and hunger would return.

But Jesus said:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.

You cannot purchase the Bread of Life with a peso.

You cannot purchase Him with a dollar.

You cannot purchase salvation with a good deed, a religious ceremony or a lifetime of effort.

The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

That includes me.

That includes you.

Our sin separates us from a holy God and we cannot repair that separation by our own works.

But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world for us.

He lived without sin.

He died upon the cross in our place.

He was buried.

On the third day, He bodily arose from the grave.

He paid the price we could never pay.

Salvation is the gift of God.

It is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you know that you are a sinner and you are ready to place your trust in Christ, you can call upon Him today.

The words of a prayer do not save you.

Jesus saves the person who genuinely trusts Him.

But prayer is one way to express that faith to Him.

You may pray with me:

Heavenly Father, I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

I believe that He died upon the cross for my sins.

I believe that He was buried and that He arose bodily from the grave.

I turn from trusting myself and place my faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Please forgive me, save me and give me eternal life.

Thank You for the gift of salvation that Christ has already purchased.

In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and sincerely trusted Christ, please speak with me or with one of our church leaders after the service.

We would be honored to pray with you, answer your questions and help you begin walking with Christ.

For those who already know Christ, let us bring the message home.

What permissible practice have I turned into a demand?

Am I using Biblical knowledge to build people or merely to defeat them?

Is there a freedom I should temporarily surrender?

Is there a truth I must refuse to surrender?

Must I be visible before I believe my service matters?

What small resource has God already placed in my hand?

Am I offering physical assistance without eternal hope?

Am I speaking about eternal hope without practical compassion?

Will the ministry continue when I am no longer present?

What stands between someone else and Christ that love may be asking me to remove?

What am I willing to surrender so someone else can see Christ?

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth that makes us free.

Teach us never to compromise that truth.

But deliver us from using truth as an excuse for pride, selfishness or unnecessary offense.

Give us the wisdom to distinguish a preference from a doctrine and a liberty from a command.

Give us courage to stand when the Gospel is at stake.

Give us love to yield when only our personal rights are at stake.

Open our eyes to the hungry, the hurting and the overlooked.

Show us the pesos, the loaves, the cups of water and the quiet acts of service that You have already placed within our reach.

Teach us to serve when no one sees us.

Teach us to equip others and rejoice when they continue without us.

May our knowledge be governed by charity.

May our liberty be governed by love.

May our giving be governed by compassion.

May our ministry be governed by humility.

And above everything else, may Jesus Christ increase.

In His name we pray.

Amen.

There will be times when faithfulness requires us to stand and refuse to move.

There will also be times when love asks us to lay down something we have every right to keep.

May God give us the wisdom to know the difference.

And when the tree is out of sight, the argument has ended, the bread has run out and our name has been forgotten, may Jesus Christ still be increasing.

The Christmas Peso was about more than how much one coin could buy.

It was about what love was willing to surrender.

And every sacrifice in that story points toward Bethlehem, where the Bread of Life entered the world, and toward Calvary, where He gave Himself for us.

Aloha Nui Loa.

The Question Behind the Story

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. 1 Corinthians 8:9

The public title is The Christmas Peso, but the Biblical question beneath the story is larger than a coin, a piece of bread or a holiday custom. The first question was whether a Christian could Biblically defend having a Christmas tree. The deeper question became whether possessing a legitimate freedom automatically made its exercise loving, wise or helpful in every ministry setting. The complete account moves through four visible objects. A Christmas tree raises the issue of liberty. A peso exposes the hidden value of a small gift. Bread joins compassion to Gospel proclamation. An empty bench across the street shows that ministry can require a servant to surrender visibility. The objects change, but the spiritual movement remains consistent. Knowledge, liberty, resources and influence are placed under the government of love so that Jesus Christ may increase.

This commentary follows the sermon rather than treating the story as an illustration attached to an unrelated exposition. The experience in Cebu supplies the lived questions. Scripture supplies the authority, definitions, boundaries and final answer.

GOVERNING ANSWER: Being Biblically right establishes what may be true or permissible. It does not by itself settle whether exercising that right in a particular moment will build another believer, advance the Gospel or glorify Christ.

A Personal Word from Pastor Tom

Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. 1 Corinthians 8:1

The most uncomfortable part of the story is not that local Pastors disagreed with me. It is that I spent the night preparing to prove that I was right. Researching the Bible was proper. Examining Jeremiah 10, Romans 14 and the history of Christmas customs was necessary. The danger appeared when a correct conclusion began to feel like permission to make the conclusion the center of the relationship.

The Holy Spirit did not ask me to stop caring about truth. He redirected me toward another truth I had temporarily neglected. First Corinthians 8 does not place love against doctrine. It places

knowledge under love. The question was no longer only, Can I defend the tree? It was also, What will insisting on this tree do to the people with whom I came to serve?

That correction continued through the rest of the Christmas Peso experience. I had to learn that a coin could be worth more in another person's hunger than in my pocket. I had to learn that buying bread did not make me the best person to preach. I had to learn that a ministry could become more beautiful when it continued without my presence, my money or my name at its center.

PERSONAL CONFESSION: I went to Cebu prepared to minister. God used Cebu to teach me that ministry sometimes requires surrendering the argument, the platform and the need to be recognized.

The Christmas World Behind the Tree

Why the Tree Carried Emotional Weight

The sermon begins with childhood memories because the tree was not emotionally neutral.

Christmas in the Hawksley family included the birth of Christ, familiar songs, extended family and sometimes more than five hundred gifts spread between two gatherings. Photographs showed family members standing near the tree because presents had occupied the available floor space. That was the Christmas world Pastor Tom knew.

In Cebu, familiar conveniences did not remove homesickness. The condominium had indoor plumbing and air conditioning. The city had American restaurants and television programs. Yet comfort could not reproduce home. Loneliness and depression made the desire for a private Christmas gathering understandable. The tree represented memory, family and emotional refuge. This background matters because Christian liberty is often discussed as though people were choosing between abstract options. Real disputed practices carry memories, loyalties, wounds and cultural meanings. Love must take those meanings seriously without allowing emotion to replace Biblical judgment.

The Private Tree and the Closed Door

The invited Filipino Baptist Pastors associated the tree with paganism or with Catholic observances from which their Protestant communities had separated. Their conclusion may not have reflected the best reading of Jeremiah 10, but their concern was not theatrical. It arose from religious history and sincere conscience.

The source account must be preserved accurately. The tree in the condominium was in a separate room. The door was closed. The article does not say that the tree was immediately dismantled or thrown away. Closing the door removed the disputed object from the gathering so the group could eat, sing, study, laugh and pray together.

This was an early act of accommodation before the full theological lesson had been understood. The door did not declare that the tree was an idol. It declared that fellowship and ministry were worth more than forcing the practice into the center of that evening.

NARRATIVE DETAIL: The door closed on the tree, not on the people. The physical action protected the relationship without pretending the disagreement had already been resolved.

Jeremiah 10 and the Christmas Tree Question

*For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. **Jeremiah 10:3***

What Jeremiah Describes

Jeremiah describes wood cut from a forest, worked by a craftsman, decorated with silver and gold and fastened so it cannot move. The surrounding verses explain the object. It cannot speak, it must be carried and it can do neither evil nor good. The prophet contrasts manufactured gods with the living Lord. The passage is a denunciation of idolatry.

A modern reader may notice superficial similarities between a decorated object made from a tree and a Christmas tree. Context, however, identifies the object as a crafted idol that people fear or trust as divine. Jeremiah does not discuss evergreen trees placed in homes as seasonal decorations. The proper conclusion is limited. Scripture does not command Christians to display Christmas trees, nor does it command the observance of December 25. Scripture also does not identify every decorated tree as an idol. An ordinary object becomes idolatrous when it is worshiped, trusted or allowed to occupy the place belonging to God.

Why Winning Jeremiah 10 Was Not Enough

Correcting a misuse of Jeremiah 10 could answer the narrow interpretive question. It could not answer every pastoral question. A believer may establish that a practice is permissible and still need to ask whether the practice is useful, edifying and loving in a specific setting.

This distinction protects both truth and love. Refusing to call a harmless decoration an idol protects truth. Refusing to flaunt the decoration before tender consciences protects love. Biblical maturity must be strong enough to do both.

COMMENTARY CONCLUSION: The overnight research was not wasted. It established liberty. First Corinthians 8 then taught how a believer should carry that liberty among other people.

First Corinthians 8: Knowledge Under Charity

The Corinthian Setting

Corinth was saturated with temples, sacrifices and social customs connected with pagan worship. Meat from sacrificed animals could be eaten in temple dining rooms, sold in the marketplace or served in private homes. Some believers understood that an idol had no genuine divine existence and that food possessed no independent spiritual power. Other believers had only recently left idolatrous worship and still connected the food with their former allegiance.

Paul agrees with the monotheistic truth known by the mature believers. There is one God and idols are nothing. Yet he refuses to make knowledge the only consideration. A person can possess correct theology and exercise it in a manner that spiritually wounds someone for whom Christ died.

Knowledge Puffs Up

Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. 1 Corinthians 8:1

Paul does not condemn knowledge. The entire letter corrects error through revealed truth. His warning concerns what knowledge can do to the person who possesses it. Knowledge can inflate self-importance. Charity, or love, builds another person. The contrast is between self-expansion and another person's edification.

The tree incident makes the contrast tangible. Overnight study supplied passages, context and an argument. Love asked how those materials would be used. Would knowledge patiently teach and strengthen, or would it publicly defeat people whose consciences were still tender?

Christian teaching becomes dangerous when accuracy is used as permission for contempt. Truth can be spoken with patience. Correction can preserve dignity. A believer may refuse error without treating the mistaken person as an enemy.

A Real Liberty

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. 1 Corinthians 8:9

The word translated liberty can refer to authority, freedom or a genuine right. Paul is not warning against a privilege that only appears legitimate. The danger exists precisely because the strong believer truly possesses freedom concerning the food. A real right can be exercised in an unloving manner.

This explains an important line in the sermon: Christian liberty includes the liberty to surrender a liberty. Voluntary restraint has moral meaning only when the believer genuinely could have acted otherwise. Closing the door on the tree was not confession that the tree was sinful. It was a decision that the tree would not govern the evening.

What a Stumbling Block Means

In strict context, a stumbling block is not simply an act that another person dislikes. The knowledgeable believer may embolden someone to participate while that person's conscience still identifies the conduct with sin. The weaker believer then acts against conscience and is wounded. This definition prevents the phrase from becoming a tool of control. Irritation is not identical to temptation. Disagreement is not identical to spiritual ruin. If every objection became a permanent veto, the most restrictive conscience would govern the entire church. Paul never authorizes that arrangement.

The tree incident also involves the broader Pauline concern of unnecessary offense and Gospel obstruction. Romans 14:15 warns against grieving a brother through food. First Corinthians 9:12 refuses the use of an apostolic right when it might hinder the Gospel. First Corinthians 10:23 asks whether lawful conduct is expedient and edifying. These related passages support temporary restraint even when the narrow mechanics of 1 Corinthians 8 cannot be proven in every detail.

EXEGETICAL GUARDRAIL: Not every offense is a Biblical stumbling block. The sermon's conclusion rests on the combined Pauline ethic of conscience, edification, peace and an unobstructed Gospel.

The Brother for Whom Christ Died

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 1 Corinthians 8:11

Paul measures the vulnerable believer by the cross. The person's value does not depend upon the maturity of his present understanding. Christ died for him. To wound his conscience is therefore not a minor social mistake. Verse 12 says that sinning against the brethren in this way is sinning against Christ.

The mature believer should not ask only whether the weaker person deserves patience. The cross has already answered the question of value. Christ's sacrifice places the other believer's welfare above the pleasure of displaying a nonessential freedom.

Romans 14: Days, Conscience and Peace

The Disputed Matters

Romans 14 addresses disagreements concerning food and days. One believer eats broadly while another eats herbs. One esteems one day above another while another esteems every day alike. Paul does not demand identical practice. He commands both groups to receive one another because God has received them.

*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. **Romans 14:5***

This instruction applies to matters Scripture permits rather than to commands God has settled. Conscience is not an independent source of revelation. It can be uninformed or misinformed and should continue to grow under Scripture. Yet a person should not be pressured into violating conscience while growth is taking place.

The Strong Must Not Despise and the Weak Must Not Judge

Paul assigns responsibilities to both sides. The strong must not look down upon the weak. The weak must not condemn the strong. This balance is essential for holiday disputes. A Christian who abstains from Christmas customs must not declare faithful participants to be idolaters without Biblical warrant. A Christian who participates must not mock abstainers as foolish or spiritually inferior.

Romans 14:15 says that if a brother is grieved because of food, the believer is no longer walking charitably. Verse 19 directs the church to pursue peace and mutual edification. Verse 20 warns against destroying the work of God for the sake of food. The object is small when compared with the person and the work God is doing.

*It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth. **Romans 14:21***

The phrase nor any thing allows principled application beyond meat and wine. A tree, holiday meal, entertainment choice or other liberty can be temporarily surrendered. Application must still preserve the distinction between loving restraint and permanent bondage to another person's preferences.

PASTORAL BALANCE: The strong should be patient without contempt. The weak should be teachable without judgment. Love protects conscience while truth helps conscience mature.

Matthew 17: The Coin and the Word Notwithstanding

The Children Are Free

Collectors approached Peter concerning the temple tribute. Jesus asked whether earthly kings collect tribute from their own children or from strangers. Peter answered, From strangers. Jesus concluded, Then are the children free. The statement establishes His position before He accommodates the collectors.

As the Son, Jesus was not a stranger in His Father's house. He did not pay because the collectors possessed a better doctrine of His identity. He was free. The text then turns upon one word in the KJV: notwithstanding.

*Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook. **Matthew 17:27***

Notwithstanding does not erase truth. It governs the immediate use of a right. Jesus would not allow a secondary dispute to become an unnecessary obstruction. The coin in the fish's mouth displayed His supernatural authority even as He voluntarily paid the tribute for Himself and Peter.

This incident supplies a fitting Biblical coin before the Christmas Peso. Jesus did not pay because He was wrong. He paid because His mission mattered more than winning that argument. The story also limits itself. Jesus did not avoid every offense. He confronted hypocrisy and proclaimed truths that caused hearers to leave. He yielded in a secondary matter, not in His identity or Gospel.

THE WORD TO REMEMBER: The children are free. Notwithstanding. Christian liberty becomes Christlike when a genuine right can be placed beneath a greater mission.

First Corinthians 9 and 10: Rights Under Gospel Government

Paul's Apostolic Right

First Corinthians 9 establishes that Gospel workers possess a right to material support. Paul appeals to soldiers, farmers, shepherds, the law of Moses and temple service. He does not surrender the principle that ministry may be supported. He chooses not to use the right in a setting where its use could create an obstacle.

Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. 1 Corinthians 9:12

The chapter parallels Matthew 17. Jesus says notwithstanding. Paul says nevertheless. Both establish the right before surrendering its immediate use. Sacrifice matters because the freedom is genuine.

Free to Become a Servant

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 1 Corinthians 9:19

Paul does not adapt the content of the Gospel to obtain approval. He adapts himself. He becomes as a Jew to Jews, as one outside the law to those outside and as weak to the weak. The same Christ is proclaimed while unnecessary cultural barriers are removed.

This principle reaches the bench across the street. The visiting American had permission to speak, but the local Pastors possessed language, relationships and long-term presence that made them better messengers in that moment. Freedom did not demand the microphone. Freedom made service possible.

Lawful Is the Beginning of the Question

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. 1 Corinthians 10:23

Lawfulness is a necessary test, but Paul adds helpfulness and edification. Verse 24 tells the believer not to seek his own advantage but the good of another. Verse 31 places eating, drinking and everything else beneath the glory of God. Verse 33 looks toward the salvation of many.

The full Pauline sequence therefore asks more than, May I? It asks: Is it helpful? Does it build? Does it seek another person's good? Does it glorify God? Does it remove or create barriers to salvation?

PAULINE SEQUENCE: Knowledge is governed by charity. Liberty is governed by conscience. Rights are governed by the advance of the Gospel. Lawful conduct is governed by edification and God's glory.

Timothy and Titus: Accommodation Is Not Compromise

Why Timothy Was Circumcised

Acts 16 records Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy because of the Jews in the region. Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek. The Jerusalem council had already rejected circumcision as a requirement for Gentile salvation. Timothy's circumcision therefore functioned as missionary accommodation. It removed a predictable cultural objection without changing the Gospel.

Why Titus Was Not Compelled

Galatians 2 records Paul's refusal to permit Titus to be compelled. False teachers were attempting to make circumcision part of the requirement for acceptance with God. Compliance in that setting would have signaled surrender of justification by grace through faith. Paul refused so that the truth of the Gospel might continue.

The contrast gives the sermon its essential doctrinal boundary. Paul yielded when yielding advanced the Gospel. Paul refused when yielding would alter the Gospel. Christian love is not softness toward every demand. It needs discernment to distinguish preference from doctrine and cultural access from theological compromise.

The Christmas tree was a Timothy issue rather than a Titus issue. Closing the door did not deny the incarnation, the deity of Christ or salvation by grace. It removed a nonessential point of conflict from a particular gathering.

BOUNDARY: Love may surrender a preference. Love may surrender a privilege. Love must never surrender the Gospel.

The Public Tree and the City After Dark

Two Trees That Must Not Be Confused

The account contains two different trees. The first was the private tree inside the condominium. The second was a large public tree near a park, mall and outreach location. During daylight, the public setting felt familiar and inviting. A manger scene, stories about the virgin birth and a puppet presentation about Jesus surrounded the decorated tree.

Pastor Tom ate a small pepperoni pizza and drank a can of Pepsi at his usual bench during the day. Later, after visiting people and shopping, he returned toward the area after dark. The meal associated with the later bench assignment was a hamburger and fries purchased by Danielin. Preserving these distinctions keeps the chronology credible.

The Same City Seen Differently

Cebu after dark revealed suffering that daytime business activity had concealed. Homeless adults filled the streets. Children sold small items so their families could eat. Other children were trapped in exploitation. Need appeared in every direction and an American visitor could not answer every open hand.

The sermon's admission that Pastor Tom sometimes looked away prevents the story from presenting the visitor as a flawless rescuer. Compassion fatigue, limited resources and uncertainty are real. The Gospel does not require pretending that one person can meet every need. It does require willingness to see the person God places directly within reach.

One Peso Bread

Near the taxi route, a woman held a small child against a handmade cardboard sign containing three words: One Peso Bread. Thirty pesos remained reserved for the taxi. A few loose coins were placed in the woman's cup. The action seemed small because the giver did not yet understand what one peso could buy.

The next morning, the smell of fresh bread led to the explanation. Danielin demonstrated that one peso could purchase a piece of bread that might be all a hungry child ate that day. The monetary value had not changed overnight. The relationship between the coin and the need had changed the observer's understanding.

THE PESO'S THREE VALUES: To the traveler, one peso could appear negligible. To a hungry child, it could represent the available meal. In the hands of local ministry, it could become bread, compassion and an opportunity to hear about Christ.

Small Gifts in Biblical Perspective

The Widow's Two Mites

*This poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury. **Mark 12:43***

Jesus does not pretend that two mites possessed a larger market value than the gifts of wealthy people. He evaluates the gift according to sacrifice and what remained. Human accounting sees the amount entering the treasury. Christ sees the relationship between the gift and the giver's life. The passage must not be weaponized to pressure poor people into surrendering necessities to religious institutions. Jesus' observation exposes a deeper measure of generosity and stands near His condemnation of leaders who devour widows' houses. The vulnerable deserve honor, not exploitation.

The Boy's Lunch and Other Small Things

John 6 presents five barley loaves and two small fishes before a multitude. The disciples correctly recognize that the amount is insufficient. Jesus does not ask them to deny arithmetic. He receives what is available and reveals His sufficiency.

Other Biblical images support the same application. A cup of cold water matters in Matthew 10. A widow's handful of meal matters in 1 Kings 17. The Good Samaritan's two pence help fund continuing care in Luke 10. The principle is not that every small gift will multiply visibly. It is that apparent smallness does not make faithful obedience useless.

APPLICATION: God does not ask believers to call small things large. He asks them not to call small things useless before placing them at His disposal.

One Hundred Pieces of Bread

Pandesal from Julie's Bakery

Danielin purchased one hundred warm pandesal rolls from Julie's Bakery for one hundred pesos. Each roll embodied the lesson learned at breakfast: one peso, one piece of bread and one immediate moment of hunger addressed.

The bread was given freely. Nobody had to profess faith, pray a prayer or listen to a sermon before receiving it. That ethical detail matters. Food offered to vulnerable people can become manipulative when assistance is conditioned upon religious performance. In the Christmas Peso ministry, compassion was not a commercial exchange for attention.

Bread as Bridge, Not Bait

Giving bread because people are hungry is already a loving act. The local Pastor then used a universally understood experience to explain Christ. He said the bread was warm, soft and freely offered, but it would satisfy hunger only temporarily. Those who wished could remain and hear about the Bread of Life.

The distinction preserves both compassion and proclamation. The church should not use eternal need as an excuse to ignore the body. It should not use bodily care as a replacement for announcing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

MINISTRY ETHIC: The bread was free. Listening was voluntary. The Gospel was proclaimed openly. Human need was addressed with dignity rather than used as leverage.

John 6: The Bread of Life

Jesus Fed the Multitude

John 6 begins with an actual meal. Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes for a hungry multitude. The physical feeding is not an illusion or an unimportant preliminary. It reveals compassion and divine sufficiency. Christian preaching should not spiritualize the event until the hungry bodies disappear from view.

Jesus Corrected the Crowd's Horizon

*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. **John 6:27***

The crowd returned because it had eaten and been filled. Jesus exposed a desire for continued provision without recognition of the One signified by the miracle. He did not apologize for feeding people. He refused to let temporary bread define the full horizon of His mission.

*I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. **John 6:35***

Jesus does not merely distribute the enduring bread. He is the Bread of Life. The language of coming and believing explains the spiritual response. Eternal life is found in receiving Christ by faith, not in maintaining an earthly bread line or performing a work to earn salvation.

The Bread Ran Out, but the People Stayed

From the bench across the street, Pastor Tom watched the bag grow lighter until every roll had been distributed. Then the defining moment occurred. The bag was empty, but most of the people remained. No additional bread rewarded their attention. They continued listening as the Pastor proclaimed Christ and counselors later spoke with them individually.

The physical sign reached its limit while the reality to which it pointed remained. The bread could postpone hunger. Christ could give eternal life. The method disappeared, but the message continued.

SERMON LINE: The physical bread was gone. The Bread of Life was still being offered. The method had reached its limit, but Christ had not reached His.

Bethlehem, the Manger and Christmas

The House of Bread

Bethlehem is commonly understood as house of bread or house of food. The One who later declared Himself the Bread of Life was born in Bethlehem. Luke also records that the infant Jesus was laid in a manger, a feeding place.

The connection is homiletically beautiful, but it should be carried with restraint. Luke does not stop to interpret the manger as a prophecy of John 6. The doctrine that Christ is the Bread of Life rests

upon Jesus' own words. Bethlehem and the manger provide fitting imagery rather than the foundation of the doctrine.

The title Christmas Peso therefore reaches beyond the season when the outreach began. Christmas announces God giving His Son. The Cebu story displays believers giving up preferences, resources and visibility so that the Son could be proclaimed.

CHRISTMAS CONNECTION: The Bread of Life entered the world in the House of Bread. Years later, ordinary bread on a Cebu street pointed hungry people back to Him.

The Gospel Is Free, but Carrying It Costs

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Revelation 22:17

No peso purchased forgiveness. The coin purchased bread. Salvation remained the gift of God, provided through the immeasurable price paid by Jesus Christ. The distinction must be explicit whenever material assistance and Gospel proclamation share the same setting.

The Gospel is free to the sinner because Christ paid for redemption. Carrying the message to others still involves human cost. Someone bought the bread. Someone organized the gathering. Someone preached in the local language. Someone counseled listeners. Someone gave time, energy and comfort. Grace is never sold, but grace creates generous servants.

This protects the story from two errors. It does not claim that charity earns salvation for the giver. It does not suggest that receiving assistance purchases a profession of faith from the recipient. Christian service is the fruit of grace rather than the price of grace.

NECESSARY DISTINCTION: The peso did not purchase salvation. It purchased bread and helped create a compassionate moment in which someone could hear about the salvation Christ had already purchased.

Across the Street: The Ministry of Stepping Aside

Why the American Could Become a Distraction

A foreign visitor could attract attention in Cebu. Some people might approach an American because they expected money. Most people in the area spoke Cebuano. The local Pastors understood language, culture and need with a depth the visitor did not possess. Visibility could help in another setting, but here it risked turning attention toward the American's wallet rather than toward Christ.

Danielin bought Pastor Tom a hamburger and fries and directed him to sit on the bench near the public tree, eat and pray while the local team ministered. This was not withdrawal from responsibility. He had listened, helped organize and supported the work. His best assignment in that moment was to create room for others.

He Must Increase

He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3:30

John the Baptist's statement is Christ-centered. The goal is not the increase of one minister at the expense of another minister. Christ must increase. On that Cebu street, the local Pastors were better positioned to make Christ known because the visitor was willing to decrease.

First Corinthians 3:6 distributes ministry roles between planting and watering while reserving the increase for God. First Corinthians 12 describes one body with many members. Ephesians 4 presents leaders who equip saints for ministry. Together these passages dismantle the idea that meaningful service belongs only to the visible speaker.

Preparing bread, funding an outreach, caring for children, making coffee, counseling afterward, translating, praying and stepping aside can all serve the same Gospel. The microphone is a tool, not a measure of importance.

MINISTRY PRINCIPLE: Sometimes faithfulness means standing up and speaking.

Sometimes faithfulness means sitting down so the person best equipped for that moment can speak.

When the Visitor and the Money Were Gone

The Ministry Continued

The first outreach was not the end of the Christmas Peso. The bread ministry continued during Pastor Tom's remaining time in Cebu. Before leaving, he supplied funds so the local Pastors could continue until the money ran out. Eventually it did. The preaching continued.

After the Christmas crowd disappeared, the Pastors moved the gatherings from the sidewalk into the park. A later photograph showed people kneeling near the same bench while a local Pastor leaned against the tree that had once been decorated. The visitor was absent. The special money was exhausted. The holiday setting had passed. Local believers were still sharing Christ.

Multiplication Rather Than Dependence

The same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2

Healthy ministry equips faithful people rather than building permanent dependence upon one donor, personality or visiting worker. Continuation does not prove that every decision was perfect, but it provides strong evidence of local ownership and multiplication.

The later magazine report describes the broader fruit separately from the first evening.

Approximately five hundred dollars eventually supported bread ministry at twenty-three locations and the report records more than seven hundred professions of faith. Those numbers belong to the later continuation report. They should not be collapsed into the first outreach night or used to imply that every profession can be independently evaluated from a distance.

LASTING BEAUTY: The Christmas Peso became most beautiful when it was no longer mine. The visitor left, the designated money ended and faithful local believers continued.

The Progressive Surrenders

The sermon's unity becomes visible when the surrendered objects are placed in sequence. The tree was removed from the center. The argument was withheld. The platform was yielded. The pesos became bread. The bread disappeared. The visitor departed. Each decrease created room for a greater increase.

- The door closed on the private tree: liberty governed by love.
- The argument was withheld: knowledge governed by charity.
- The pesos became bread: possession governed by compassion.
- The American sat across the street: ministry governed by humility.
- The bread ran out while listeners remained: the sign yielded to the Savior.
- The visitor and funds departed while local preaching continued: ownership yielded to multiplication.

None of these surrenders made truth less important. They removed lesser things from the center. The sermon does not glorify passivity, silence or poverty. It glorifies Christlike discernment that knows what may be surrendered and what must be preserved.

UNIFYING MOVEMENT: What decreased was the tree, the argument, the visitor, the peso and the bread. What increased was Christ.

Christ's Supreme Self-Giving

The Mind of Christ

*But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. **Philippians 2:7***

Every human surrender in the story must culminate in Christ. Philippians 2 does not teach that the Son ceased to be divine. It describes His voluntary humiliation, servanthood and obedience unto death. The eternal Son did not cling to visible privilege. He entered human poverty and went to the cross.

*Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. **2 Corinthians 8:9***

Paul grounds Christian generosity in the prior grace of Christ. The Christmas Peso is not finally a tribute to human nobility. Believers open their hands because Christ first gave Himself. They surrender lesser rights beneath the cross of the One who surrendered infinitely more.

The Greater Christmas Question

The sermon begins by asking whether Christians have the right to put up a tree. It concludes by asking what love is willing to lay down. Christmas is not primarily humanity offering something to Christ. It is God giving His only begotten Son to humanity.

Christ did not merely surrender a preference. He took the form of a servant. He did not merely move out of the center of a gathering. He made Himself of no reputation. He did not merely give a coin. He gave His life a ransom for many.

CHRISTOLOGICAL CENTER: The greater Christmas question is not what we have the right to put up. It is what love is willing to lay down beneath the self-giving of Jesus Christ.

Early Jewish and Christian Witnesses

The following writings are not canonical Scripture and carry no authority equal to the Bible. They are useful only as historical witnesses showing that Jewish and early Christian communities reflected upon generosity, restraint and care for the poor.

Tobit 4

Tobit advises giving according to one's means. The person with abundance gives accordingly and the person with little should not fear to give from that little. The parallel with the one-peso theme is striking, but the passage should be identified as Apocrypha rather than quoted as inspired authority in a KJV-centered sermon.

Sirach 4

Sirach warns against keeping needy eyes waiting and grieving the hungry. It witnesses to the moral seriousness with which ancient Jewish wisdom treated the visible needs of the poor.

The Didache

The Didache contains early Christian instruction concerning generosity with discernment and food associated with idols. It shows that the practical tensions of giving and pagan food continued to concern early churches after the apostolic period.

First Clement 38

First Clement urges the strong not to neglect the weak and the rich to provide for the poor. The passage joins strength, humility and practical care in a way that resonates with the Christmas Peso themes.

The Shepherd of Hermas

Similitude 5 describes a fast in which the believer calculates the cost of food not consumed and gives that amount to a widow, orphan or needy person. Voluntary self-denial becomes another person's provision. The image is historically instructive, not a command binding the church.

The Letter to Diognetus

This early apologetic writing portrays Christians as people who share their table, live in poverty yet enrich many and answer hostility with blessing. It preserves an early picture of generosity as public Christian witness.

AUTHORITY GUARDRAIL: These sources may illuminate reception history. Doctrine in this commentary rests upon canonical Scripture.

Objections and Biblical Responses

If the Tree Was Permissible, Did Closing the Door Reinforce Error?

Temporary accommodation does not necessarily endorse another person's interpretation. Paul could abstain from meat without declaring meat unclean. Closing the door preserved fellowship without announcing that Jeremiah 10 prohibited the tree. A later setting may permit patient teaching, but the immediate gathering did not require a public contest.

Does Romans 14 Give the Weakest Conscience Permanent Control?

No. Paul protects the weak from contempt and pressure while also describing the conscience as weak. Growth remains possible and desirable. The weak must not judge the strong, and the strong must not despise the weak. Love gives time for truth to form conscience rather than coercing imitation or institutionalizing immaturity.

Could Sitting Across the Street Be Disobedience to Preach?

The Gospel was being proclaimed by qualified local Pastors in the language of the hearers. Supporting and praying for that proclamation was participation rather than disobedience. A different response would be required if nobody present could or would announce Christ. The lesson is not universal silence. It is discerning one's best assignment within the body.

Was Bread Used to Manipulate Hungry People?

Manipulation would occur if food were conditioned upon listening, prayer or profession. The bread was offered freely because people were hungry. The Pastor then openly invited those who wished to remain for a Gospel explanation. The fact that most stayed after the bag was empty strengthens the distinction between assistance and coercion.

Does Calling Christ the Bread of Life Minimize Physical Hunger?

John 6 begins with actual feeding. Jesus neither denies bodily need nor permits bodily need to define humanity's entire need. Christian ministry should preserve both truths. A sermon without compassion may conceal the love it announces. Bread without the Gospel may postpone hunger while remaining silent about eternity.

Is the Bethlehem Connection Merely Wordplay?

It should not carry doctrinal weight. Jesus' statement in John 6 establishes the doctrine. Bethlehem and the manger offer fitting imagery that can be enjoyed with interpretive restraint. Homiletical beauty becomes more credible when the preacher clearly distinguishes illustration from explicit Biblical interpretation.

Pastoral and Interpretive Guardrails

- Do not say that the private Christmas tree was immediately taken down. The door to its room was closed.
- Do not confuse the private condominium tree with the public tree near the park and outreach bench.
- Do not combine the daytime pizza and Pepsi with the later hamburger and fries.
- Do not assign the later report of more than seven hundred professions of faith to the first outreach evening.
- Do not label every disagreement or criticism a Biblical stumbling block.
- Do not allow the most restrictive conscience to become the permanent lawgiver for every believer.
- Do not portray the Filipino Pastors as foolish, inferior or merely obstacles to an American conclusion.
- Do not turn the study into a lengthy defense of Christmas trees.
- Do not suggest that Christian love requires the compromise of the Gospel.
- Do not portray bread as bait or salvation as something purchased by aid.
- Do not reduce the Gospel to humanitarian work or use proclamation to excuse indifference to hunger.
- Do not romanticize poverty or make vulnerable people scenery for the visitor's story.
- Do not claim that Luke explicitly interprets Bethlehem or the manger through John 6.
- Use Danielin or my wife in public materials, not a private family nickname.

Application Bank

Knowledge and Argument

- Am I studying to understand and build, or merely gathering ammunition?
- Can I state the other person's concern fairly before correcting it?
- Would I rather be recognized as correct or see this relationship strengthened for ministry?

Christian Liberty

- What permissible practice have I turned into a demand?
- Am I free enough to refrain or only free enough to insist?
- Could my example encourage another believer to violate conscience?
- Is this a temporary accommodation, or am I allowing human preference to replace Scripture?

Doctrine and Boundaries

- Is the issue a Timothy matter of cultural access or a Titus matter involving the truth of the Gospel?
- What truth must I refuse to surrender even when refusal is costly?
- Can I explain the difference between an essential doctrine and a personal preference?

Giving and Compassion

- What small resource have I dismissed as too insignificant to matter?
- Do I evaluate gifts only by amount, or also by sacrifice and need?
- Can a voluntary reduction in my comfort become another person's provision?
- Is practical help offered freely and with dignity?

Ministry and Visibility

- Must I be visible before I believe I am useful?
- Who is best positioned to speak within the language and relationships of this community?
- Am I equipping faithful people or creating dependence upon my presence?
- Will the ministry continue when the visitor, donor or founder leaves?

Compassion and Gospel Witness

- Am I proclaiming eternal hope without practical compassion?
- Am I offering temporary assistance without explaining eternal hope?
- Does my method honor the freedom and dignity of vulnerable people?
- What am I willing to surrender so someone else can see Christ?

Memorable Language for Teaching

- Being wrong is not loving, but being right does not automatically mean I am acting in love.
- Truth tells me what is right. Love asks how that truth should be carried.
- The highest use of Christian liberty may be the freedom to surrender it.
- Jesus did not pay because He was wrong. He paid because His mission mattered more than winning that argument.
- Paul yielded when yielding advanced the Gospel and refused when yielding would alter the Gospel.
- Love may surrender a preference. Love may surrender a privilege. Love must never surrender the Gospel.
- The peso did not purchase salvation. It purchased bread and helped create a moment in which someone could hear about the salvation Christ had already purchased.
- Bread without the Gospel may postpone hunger. A sermon without compassion may conceal the love it proclaims.
- The physical bread was gone. The Bread of Life was still being offered.
- The Christmas Peso became most beautiful when it was no longer mine.
- The greater Christmas question is not what we have the right to put up. It is what love is willing to lay down.
- Christian love does not surrender truth. It surrenders anything else that unnecessarily stands between a person and the truth.

Commentary Synthesis

The Christmas Peso is strongest as one message rather than three unrelated studies. The private tree, the public sign, the pandesal and the bench form a progressive theology of surrender. First Corinthians 8 through 10 provides the Pauline spine. Romans 14 protects conscience and peace.

Matthew 17 supplies the coin and the word notwithstanding. Timothy and Titus establish the boundary between accommodation and compromise. John 6 provides the Christological center. Philippians 2 brings every human surrender beneath the self-giving of Christ.

The sermon therefore refuses both legalism and careless liberty. It does not teach that another person's objection becomes law. It does not teach that correct doctrine makes the manner of its use irrelevant. It does not replace evangelism with relief or relief with preaching. It does not make the visitor the hero. It asks every gift, right and role to serve the increase of Christ.

The final answer is not a rule that believers must always yield. There are Titus moments when truth requires a firm refusal. There are also Timothy moments when love gladly removes a barrier.

Wisdom recognizes the difference. Humility acts upon it.

FINAL ANSWER: Does being Biblically right give me the right to do it? It may establish a genuine liberty, but Christian love still asks whether exercising that liberty here will edify another person, preserve conscience, advance the Gospel and make Jesus Christ increase.