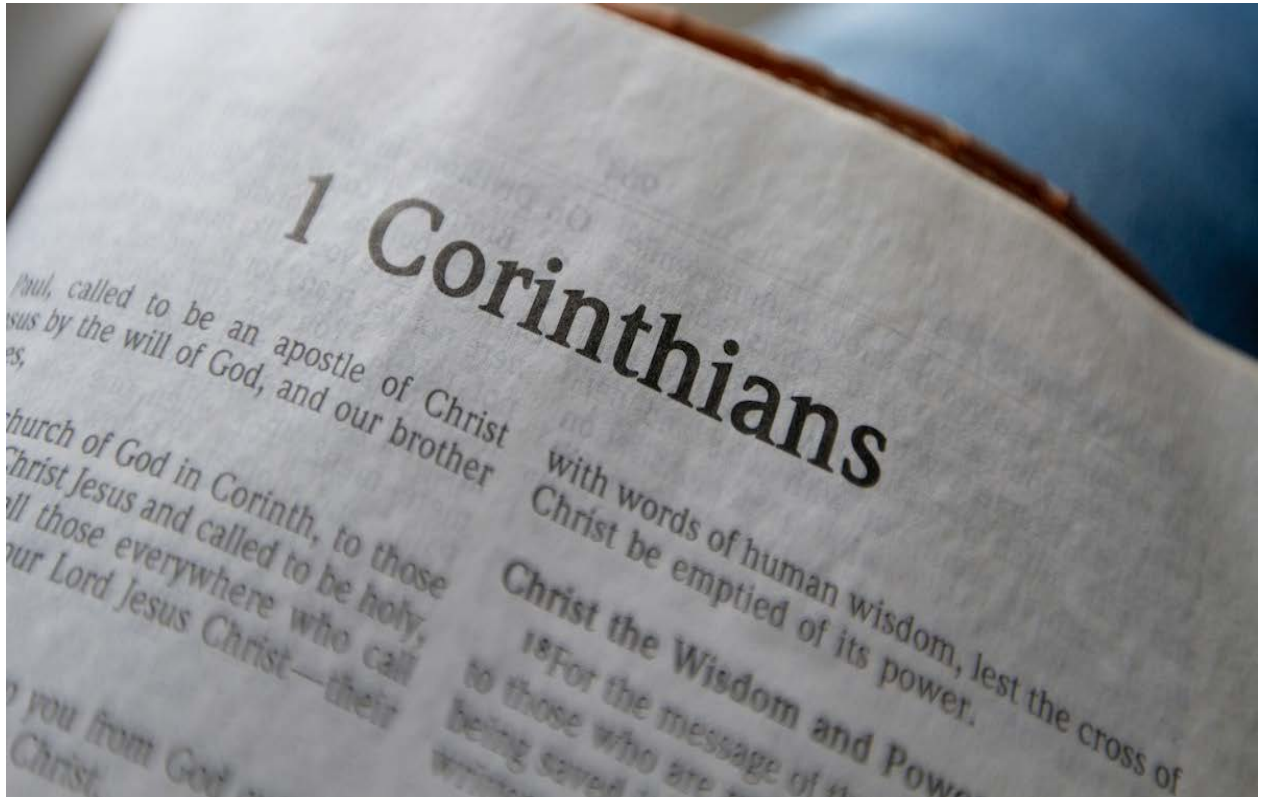


# One God, One Lord

1 Corinthians 8

## 1 and 2 Corinthians Part 9



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

Calling: 1 Corinthians 8  
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 9  
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## Introduction to *1 Corinthians 8*

The Corinthians needed grace to love God and one another.

They were babes in Christ, hung up on their differences of opinion and practice and blinded to the power of grace working through love. So here, in chapter 8, just as he has done since chapter 2, Paul is laying down the solid rock foundation of love.

We deceive ourselves if we vaunt knowledge over love. Or freedom over love. Or ourselves over our brethren in the Lord. Whenever differences are in view, our duty is to humble ourselves in service to those around us, to defer our freedom to their condition in the Lord, and to do only what is loving and edifying, even though it means denying ourselves.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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## 1 Knowing as Loving

*Pray Psalm 18.1-3.*

I will love You, O LORD, my strength.  
The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;  
My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;  
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
I will call upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised;  
So shall I be saved from my enemies.

*Sing Psalm 18.1-3.*

(St. Columba: *How Sweet and Awesome*)

I love You, LORD, my Strength, my Rock, my Savior and my Fort;  
my God, my ever-shelt'ring Rock, You shield my trembling heart.

My Stronghold, LORD, my Saving Horn, I call to You with praise!  
From those who Your salvation scorn You save us all our days.

*Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 8.1.*

*Preparation*

1. How does Paul warn us against “knowledge”?
2. What edifies?

*Meditation*

The Corinthians had asked a question about things offered to idols, whether it was permitted for believers to eat such things. “We’ll get to that,” Paul indicates, “but first things first.”

Evidently this subject was one of the bones of contention between the divided believers in Corinth. We can imagine the debate: “No one who is truly a believer—such as we are—would *ever* eat anything offered to an *idol!*” “Well, hoo, hoo, hoo, look who knows so much! I’m a believer, and I eat food sacrificed to idols because idols are *nothing!* Grow up!”

Each side used its “knowledge” to condemn the other side. Paul saw right through this. The proper end of all knowledge is love, because to know truly is to know Jesus, Who is love and Who fills us to love others by His grace. The kind of knowledge that puffs up and makes one person prideful and condemning is thus either wrong or incomplete.

So before he could address the question of eating foods to idols, he had to set them straight about when we really know and when we don’t. We don’t know as we should if we use our knowledge to vaunt ourselves or put others down. Paul sets up a parallelism in which the second phrase draws the first one more fully into the light of truth. “Knowledge” is thus truly such when it is shaped by “love”; and such knowledge does not “puff up” but rather “edifies.”

Once again, Paul is on the trail to love. You don’t love by tolerating sin in your midst (chapter 5). You don’t love by going to court before unbelievers (chapter 6). You don’t love by ignoring or neglecting your calling (chapter 7). And you don’t love by acting like a know-it-all to condemn your brothers in Christ.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

“Next to your question about eating food that has been sacrificed to idols.

On this question everyone feels that only his answer is the right one!  
But although being a ‘know-it-all’ makes us feel important,  
what is really needed to build the church is love” (1 Cor. 8.1 TLB).

When we focus our attention on loving God and others and keeping His Law through the power of the Holy Spirit, extraneous issues become less important, and the greater issue of love takes the forefront.

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I AM the LORD” (Lev. 19.18).

Jesus said, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10.42-45).

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn. 3.16).

“Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 Jn. 3.24).

“And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 Jn. 4.21).

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom13.8).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Gal. 5.22).

“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith...” (1 Tim. 1.5).

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (1 Pet. 4.8; Prov. 10.12).

Much better to err on the side of “love” that “never fails”, than to be “sounding brass, clanging cymbals”, and amounting to absolutely “nothing” (1 Cor. 13.8, 1, 2).

*For reflection*

1. Is it possible for someone to “know” Jesus but not truly “know” Him? Explain.
2. Peter says we should grow in the “knowledge” of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.18). What would indicate that we were growing in such knowledge?
3. What can you do to make sure your knowledge of Jesus is always edifying and never merely puffed-up?

*He shows, from the effects, how frivolous a thing it is to boast of knowledge, when love is wanting. "Of what avail is knowledge, that is of such a kind as puffs us up and elates us, while it is the part of love to edify?" John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8.1*

*Pray Psalm 18.43-50.*

Concentrate on praising the Lord for His sovereignty, rule over the nations, protection, and shepherding care. Call on Him to bring a great awakening to faith in all nations.

*Sing Psalm 18.43-50.*

(St. Theodulph: *All Glory, Laud, and Honor*)

Lord Jesus Christ exalted, above all earthly strife!

You rule all lands and nations, the Lord and King of life!

They flock to You who never did seek out Your glorious face,

obedient to Your mandate, renewed within Your grace.

You live, our Rock, our Savior, exalted by our God!  
Upon Your foes with vengeance Your holy feet have trod.  
Delivered from Your enemies and lifted high above,  
You rescue and redeem us by Your eternal love.

Let nations rise and praise You, and give You thanks, O LORD!  
Deliv'rance, grace, and favor You grant us by Your Word.  
Bestow Your lovingkindness upon us as before,  
and bless and keep Your people henceforth and evermore..

## 2 To Know and Be Known

*Pray Psalm 139.1-5.*

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.  
You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.  
You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.  
For *there is* not a word on my tongue,  
*But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.  
You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

*Sing Psalm 139.1-5.*

(Ripley: *Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah, O My Soul*)  
You have searched me, LORD, and known me,  
when I sit and when I rise;  
from afar, my thoughts discerning,  
all my path before You lies.  
Every word, before it's spoken,  
You behold and know it well.  
Both behind me and before me,  
Your sweet Presence I can tell!

*Read 1 Corinthians 8.1-3; meditate on verses 2, 3.*

*Preparation*

1. What does Paul say about knowing anything?
2. Who is known by God?

*Meditation*

The Lord Jesus warned that a day was coming when those who thought they knew a thing or two about being a Christian would be shocked and dismayed to discover that they were practitioners of lawlessness and would be cast out of His Presence (Matt. 7.21-23).

Paul's focus in 1 Corinthians 8 is on knowing—how we can know what is right and true. He warned against any knowledge we might acquire or suppose we possess that merely puffs us up and edifies no one (v. 1). In verses 2 and 3 he extends the definition of true knowledge all the way to its proper and defining end and source.

“And if anyone thinks that he knows anything...” That is, if we claim to know anything in a way that ends in me, as if knowledge were determined by what sits well with me, then we don't really know as we're supposed to. How we ought to know is in reference to God and His will, and especially with respect to Jesus, to Whom we belong (Rom. 11.36; 1 Cor. 6.22, 23). The end of all knowing, in other words, is to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. If we know and love Jesus, then we'll know everything else as we “ought to know.”

We know God when we truly love Him (v. 3). And best of all, when we know Him like that and love Him because of *everything* we know, then we can know that He knows us, and we are safe in Him. Knowing Him and being known by Him: This is what God wants most of all for us.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

There was a time when, if asked what God wants most of all for us, we may have answered thus:

He wants me to be good.

He wants me to go to church.

He wants me to tithe.

He wants me to be “sugar and spice and everything nice”;

or if of another gender, at least “snips and snails and puppy-dogs’ tails”.

But alas, none of these things are what God wants most of all for us.

However, what He does want is amazing in its substance—To know Him.

And that we can do. And want to do. And rejoice to pursue.

For truly, we want to know the One Who loves us supremely; and Whom we love above all others.

Paul wrote, that all the things we thought we had ever known are as a mirage. All that knowing was nothing...yet. But the knowing of God, now that is something (1 Cor. 8.2, 3). And when we truly know God, then all the other known things are put in a proper perspective, and become something, when viewed through the lens of life in the Kingdom.

“For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim. 1.12).

“For I know that the LORD is great, and our LORD is above all gods.

Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places” (Ps. 135.5, 6).

Then most graciously, when we know and love God, we are blessed with the knowledge that He knows and loves us (1 Cor. 8.3). Then we can pray, with David, his prayer:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties;

and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139.23, 24).

Safe in His love (1 Jn. 4.18) to know and be known.

*For reflection*

1. How would you explain to an unbelieving friend what it means to know God?
2. Loving God and our neighbors is the evidence that we are known by God. Why does this matter?
3. How can believers help one another to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3.18)?

... “the person who imagines that he knows something”—that is, who becomes proud in what he thinks he knows so that he prefers himself to others and is self-conceited—“does not yet know what he ought to know.” For the foundation of all true knowledge is personal knowledge of God, which produces in us humility and submission; indeed, rather than raising us up, it completely brings us low. For where pride is, there is ignorance of God. This is a beautiful passage that I wish everyone would learn by heart so that they might hold to the rule of right knowledge. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on the 1 Corinthians 8.1-3*

*Pray Psalm 139.23, 24.*

Take some time to wait in silence on the Lord as He searches your soul to convict, encourage, teach, and grow you into Himself.

*Sing Psalm 139.23, 24.*

(Ripley: *Hallelujah, Praise Jeborah, O My Soul*)

Search my heart, O LORD, and know me,



as You only, LORD, can do.  
Test my thoughts and contemplations,  
whether they be vain or true.  
Let there be no sin in me, LORD,  
nothing that Your Spirit grieves.  
Lead me in the righteous way, LORD,  
unto everlasting peace!

### 3 Concerning Idols

*Pray Psalm 115.1-3.*

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,  
But to Your name give glory,  
Because of Your mercy,  
Because of Your truth.  
Why should the Gentiles say,  
“So where *is* their God?”  
But our God *is* in heaven;  
He does whatever He pleases.

*Sing Psalm 115.1-3.*

(Plainfield: *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*)

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!  
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!  
Why should the nations cry, “Where is their God on high?”  
You rule us, LORD, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

*Read 1 Corinthians 8.1-4; meditate on verse 4.*

*Preparation*

1. What did Paul say about idols?
2. What did he say about God?

*Meditation*

Paul returns to the question he began to address in verse 1. Evidently, people on both sides of the issue in Corinth—whether to eat food offered to idols—had become convinced of their view and puffed-up against those who disagreed. Paul shamed them for maintaining this division by saying if they had true knowledge, they would love God and seek to edify their fellow believers, not condemn them because of their different views.

Paul begins with what should have been a point of agreement among the Corinthians: “an idol is nothing in the world”. Idols are material representations of false gods, not the gods themselves. People often treated their idols as though they were gods, but to do so is nothing, since no material thing can be a true god. The worship of such a thing—by making an offering to it, for example—is nothing to trouble a believer. And it’s certainly nothing to bring division into the Body of Christ.

The question gets trickier, and Paul will deal with that a bit further on. But first he laid down the main point not to be lost sight of: only God is God; there are no other gods. Therefore, idols and offerings to them are nothing to trouble, dismay, or divide us.

They *could* be, however; and especially when they take more mundane forms, such as wealth, pleasure, honors of various sorts, and the like. For then the danger is that Christians, claiming to worship the one true God, will collect a variety of idols to which they look for happiness. But these idols are also nothing because they provide no lasting hope and joy. Keep looking to the one true God and Jesus Christ, His Son; and do not give place to idols.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Rock, paper, scissors? Animal, vegetable, mineral? Twenty questions would never be enough to encompass all

the wrong things that people choose as “gods”. All of them being worth nothing. Therefore, are neither to be worshiped or feared.

There is One true God to be feared and worshiped.

“You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20.3).

“The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut. 6.4)

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all” (Eph. 4.4-6).

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...” (1 Tim. 2.5).

Jonah, whilst in the belly of the great fish, when life and death were overlapping, knew in that moment of deepest crisis, the vast difference between God and all else.

He prayed and said:

“Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy.

But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving;

I will pay what I have vowed.

Salvation is of the LORD” (Jon. 2.8, 9).

Concerning idols:

Jonah knew they were worthless.

Paul taught that they were nothing.

We know that “there is no other God but one” (1 Cor. 8.4).

*My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;*

*I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand;*

*all other ground is sinking sand,*

*all other ground is sinking sand.*

(Edward Mote, 1834)

*For reflection*

1. How do material things end up becoming sinking sand and idols for some people? What are they hoping for from such things?

2. Christians can fall into the snare of having things other than God as their source of meaning and happiness. How can you avoid this happening to you?

3. What is our responsibility in the Lord for helping one another “keep [ourselves] from idols” (1 Jn 5.21)?

*[He] is the invisible God, and cannot be represented by a visible sign, so as to be worshipped through means of it. Whether, therefore, idols are erected to represent the true God, or false gods, it is in all cases a perverse contrivance.* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8.4*

*Pray Psalm 115.9-18.*

Give thanks and praise to God Who always keeps us in mind and blesses us in more ways than we know.

Pray that He may cause you to increase in His love and in spreading His grace to others.

*Sing Psalm 115.9-18.*

(Plainfield: *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*)

All who trust in Jesus yield—ever to His Name be glory—

find in Him their help and shield: Ever to Your Name be glory!  
O Israel, trust the LORD! He helps us evermore!  
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious LORD —ever to Your Name be glory—  
will attend us evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!  
Bless all who fear You, LORD, all who obey Your Word,  
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase—ever to Your Name be glory!  
Bless us with eternal peace: Ever to Your Name be glory!  
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore  
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

## 4 One God, One Lord

*Pray Psalm 96.5-7.*

For all the gods of the peoples *are* idols,  
But the LORD made the heavens.  
Honor and majesty *are* before Him;  
Strength and beauty *are* in His sanctuary.  
Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples,  
Give to the LORD glory and strength.

*Sing Psalm 96.5-7.*

(Mit Freuden Zart: *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

All other gods are idols vain; the LORD created heaven.  
Splendor and strength with Him obtain; to Him be glory given!  
All fam'lies, praise this mighty LORD! Give strength and glory to His Word;  
exalt the LORD of heaven!

*Read 1 Corinthians 8.1-6; meditate on verses 5, 6.*

*Preparation*

1. What does Paul say about God the Father?
2. What does he say about God the Son?

*Meditation*

“All other gods are idols vain,” as the psalmist put it. And though they be many, still there is for us who believe one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ. We look no further than this God for our salvation and hope.

There are “many gods and many lords” because people will worship and serve something greater than themselves, whether imagined spiritual beings or tangible things and experiences. But these are only “so-called” gods, though they may not even be recognized as such by those who pursue them. Christians will not recognize such “gods” and “lords” at any level. All our hope and joy are in the one God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have our very existence by God the Father, as does all the rest of creation. His will, His Spirit, His Word are the motive powers of the universe. We look nowhere else for the mercy and grace we require for all our times of need (Heb. 4.16). We are sustained in this life by the Lord Jesus Christ, Who upholds the cosmos and everything in it by His powerful Word (Heb. 1.3), and Who dwells within us by His Spirit. So we look only to Him for our life and hope.

The gods and lords of the unbelieving world come and go. Our Father, His Spirit, and the Lord Jesus Christ endure forever, and we belong to this God. Let this be the unifying power of all our faith and life.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

I used to find diagramming sentences extremely satisfying and helpful.

To pull apart the subject and verb, with their adverbial and adjectival helpers, with the prepositional phrases and objects dangling precariously on the paper was not only fun but became very useful and informative as to the meaning of the sentence.

Verse 6 is just begging to be diagrammed—but since we cannot do that here—instead, let’s write it out in phrases that give it the impact and meaning it deserves.

“Yet for us  
there is one God, the Father,  
*of Whom*  
are all things,  
and we for Him;  
and  
one Lord Jesus Christ,  
*through Whom*  
are all things,  
and  
*through Whom*  
we live” (1Cor. 8.6).

“Have we not all one Father?  
Has not one God created us?” (Mal. 2.10)

“In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.  
All things were made through Him,  
and without Him nothing was made that was made” (Jn. 1.1-3).

Jesus said to His disciples,  
“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also;  
and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (Jn. 14.7).

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.  
For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth,  
visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.  
All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1.15, 16).

God has spelled it all out clearly for us. He has diagramed His plan plainly.  
He has made it very simple and user-friendly. He wants us to know and understand it.  
There are many mysteries in Christianity, and that must be so, or we would not need faith.

Clearly there is One God, One Jesus, One Holy Spirit, and nothing more.  
We are only to serve this Triune God. No other gods need apply for our attention.  
“All other gods are idols vain...” Subject, verb, predicate nominative, and adjectives.  
No danglers...just life.

*For reflection*

1. What would you say to someone who said to you, “There is no God”?
2. Only God can give us peace and joy. How do we keep from looking to things for that which only God can give?
3. Share your love for Jesus with a fellow believer today, to encourage your friend in Jesus’ love us.

*One God made all, and has power over all. The one God, even the Father, signifies the Godhead as the sole object of all religious worship; and the Lord Jesus Christ denotes the person of Emmanuel, God manifest in the flesh, One with the Father, and with*

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*us; the appointed Mediator, and Lord of all; through whom we come to the Father, and through whom the Father sends all blessings to us, by the influence and working of the Holy Spirit. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8.5, 6*

*Pray Psalm 96.1-4, 11-13.*

Praise God for His glory and salvation! Ask Him to show you His glory, as all creation praises His Name. Pray for grace to know, love, and serve Him gladly today.

*Sing Psalm 96.1-4, 11-13.*

(Mit Freuden Zart: *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

Sing to the LORD! O, bless His Name! All nations tell His glory!

Salvation's tidings loud proclaim; let earth rehearse His story!

For God is greatly to be praised; His throne above all gods is raised!

Fear Him and sing His glory!

Let heaven sing with lusty voice; let earth and sea sing sweetly!

Let fields and trees in Him rejoice, for He is coming swiftly

to judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in His faithfulness.

He comes; exalt Him greatly!

## 5 Consider Others

*Pray Psalm 69.1-4.*

Save me, O God!  
For the waters have come up to *my* neck.  
I sink in deep mire,  
Where *there is* no standing;  
I have come into deep waters,  
Where the floods overflow me.  
I am weary with my crying;  
My throat is dry;  
My eyes fail while I wait for my God.  
Those who hate me without a cause  
Are more than the hairs of my head;  
They are mighty who would destroy me,  
*Being* my enemies wrongfully;  
Though I have stolen nothing,  
I *still* must restore *it*.

*Sing Psalm 69.1-4.*

(Greensleeves: *What Child Is This?*)

Save me, O God, deep waters rise and threaten to undo me!  
No foothold in the mire I find; the floods must soon subdue me.  
Hear, Savior, my weary cry; my throat is parched, unclear my eye.  
Foes hunger for me to die and without reason hate me.

*Read 1 Corinthians 8.1-9; meditate on verses 7-9.*

*Preparation*

1. What did Paul warn the Corinthians about concerning their liberty in Christ?
2. What did he say about believers who have a “weak” conscience?

*Meditation*

Paul had already exposed the Corinthians’ tendency to think about themselves above all. This was the cause of their division, their turning a blind eye to wickedness, and their going to court against brethren. He was schooling them in the ways of love, since they were not their own and belonged to Him Who loved them and gave Himself for them. In these verses he continued unpacking the way of love in more detail.

Love does not ask, in the first place, “Can I do this? Is this lawful for me?” Rather, it does not ask such questions *only*. As he wrote to the Philippians, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2.4). We must consider not only what might be lawful or good for us, but how our choices and actions might affect others.

Food is a matter of *adiaphora*—things indifferent as to sinfulness (v. 8). In such areas, Christians are free to do or enjoy certain things, or not. Yet the Corinthians should not allow their freedom to eat food offered to idols to cause a neighbor to stumble (v. 9). Not everyone has reached the same level of spiritual maturity. They must be careful not to mislead someone into moral compromise or give the impression that it’s OK to honor idols at the same time they professed to believe in Jesus as Lord.

In short, think about others, lest you encourage them to violate or harden their conscience in ways that might



have detrimental effects down the road. Put another way, if you have the freedom to do something, though it might cause another to stumble, have the love not to do it.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Twinkies, beef, or asparagus?

Twinkies, beef, or asparagus offered to idols?

Should we partake or not?

But is that the essence of what Paul was talking about?

Again, it was not a matter of the palate or stomach, it was a matter of the heart.

For most truly, if we have the freedom to eat candy corn (but really, who does that?)

we have the responsibility not to if we run the chance of making a weaker Christian stumble.

Jesus had some important words to speak on this same matter:

“Are you thus without understanding also?

Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” (Mk. 7.18, 19).

And then He went on to expound on what does defile us:

“What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mk. 7.20-23).

Not a mention of “don’t smoke, drink, or chew, or go with girls who do”.

We have been so legalized and categorized that we cannot seem to think for ourselves about what God really wants from and for us. We have focused on the don’ts and not on the dos of a heart striving to know God.

Solomon warned, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4.23).

As Jesus said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Lk. 6.45).

All things that are not prohibited by the Law of God are given to be enjoyed, IF it does not make someone stumble. And then all bets are off. Also, God uses our own conscience to guide us as to what we are at liberty to do or consume, and what we are not. As Paul said, “I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24.16).

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5.1).

Free to eat Twinkies if you choose, but not free if it will make another stumble.

Therefore, consider first, your beloved brethren in Christ...and your own health, for that matter.

*For reflection*

1. What are some things that you are free in Christ to do but which might cause a brother or sister in the Lord to stumble?

2. How can prayer help us in thinking not only on ourselves but on the interests and needs of others?

3. How can you know when you might be stumbling into sin? What should you do then?

*Eating one kind of food, and abstaining from another, have nothing in them to recommend a person to God. But the apostle cautions against putting a stumbling-block in the way of the weak; lest they be made bold to eat what was offered to the idol, not as common food, but as a sacrifice, and thereby be guilty of idolatry. He who has the Spirit of Christ in him, will love those whom Christ loved so as to die for them. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8.7-13*

*Pray Psalm 69.13-15.*

Call on the Lord to make you alert to temptation and to give you grace to resist the devil.

*Sing Psalm 69.13-15.*

(Greensleeves: *What Child Is This?*)

O LORD, I make my prayer to You; receive my words, O Savior!

Let lovingkindness see me through, and answer me with favor!

Lord, lift me above the mire; deliv'rance is my one desire!

Let not the floods conspire to swallow me forever!

## 6 Watch Out for That Conscience!

Pray Psalm 32.1, 2.

Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven,  
Whose sin is covered.

Blessed *is* the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,  
And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit.

Sing Psalm 32.1, 2.

(Hendon: *Take My Life and Let It Be*)

Blessed are they whose sins the LORD has forgiven by His Word!  
Pure their spirits are within; them He charges with no sin;  
them He charges with no sin!

Read 1 Corinthians 8.1-13; meditate on verses 10-13.

Prepare

1. What did Paul say about the conscience?
2. What is our responsibility toward the conscience of our brethren?

Meditation

In the soul, three interrelated and interacting spiritual components are continuously at work. At least, that's how the Scriptures encourage us to think about the soul. The *mind* receives, processes, coordinates, and stores information. It is the part of the soul where thinking takes place. The *heart* nurtures and deploys our affections—feelings, attitudes, dispositions, and the like. And the *conscience* holds our default values and choices. It can also be regarded as the seat of the will.

When information, affections, or a choice engage the soul, mind and heart work to sort it out and bring together what we feel and how we think about the matter. But it's the conscience that determines what we *do* with it. Paul says the conscience judges between the mind and heart to process thought and desires into action (Rom. 2.14, 15). The Holy Spirit understands all this, of course, so He directs our thinking toward the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16) and our affections toward love for God and our neighbors according to God's Law. The conscience, trained by the Spirit, "reads" the content of the heart and mind and, based on its settled priorities and values, engages the soul to put our bodies in motion.

All this is strictly analogical, of course. But Paul urges us to take it seriously. *Think* about your weaker brother. Just because he is "weaker"—because his sense of Christian liberty is not as developed as yours—is no ground to look down on or disregard him. Rather, *love* him enough not to throw a wrench into his conscience, so that it functions contrary to where the Spirit has brought him to this point. The danger is our freedom may cause our brother to embrace a *wrong* value and thus bring corruption into his conscience (vv. 10, 11). *Value* your brother's needs more than your own, just as Jesus would (Rom. 12.3). And, for the sake of your brother's conscience, do not act on the liberty you have in Christ. We are our brother's keeper, so watch out for his conscience and do nothing that would lead him to compromise the values the Spirit strives to build into him.

Sin against your brother and you sin against Christ (v. 12). May it never be (v. 13).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

"If food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor. 8.13).

But what if it entails more than what I eat?  
What if it is my bad attitude?  
Or my anger?  
Or how I choose to spend the Sabbath?  
Are those things to be considered as well?

Yes, of course they are. This is not just about food offered to idols. It is about everything that has to do with the way we live out our Christian life before our watching brethren, and the world.

We are to diligently study how to be God's people, approved by Him as workers who do not need to be ashamed of the way we live, but able to rightly understand the Word of God, so we are not an offense or a stumbling block to others (2 Tim. 2.15).

And the means to this end is through reading His Word daily, meditating on it, and praying it into our lives. "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1.2).

Pleading with the Holy Spirit to give us the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). "Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3.1-3).

When we are full of the Spirit, we will be exhibiting His fruit. And His characteristics will not be offensive: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." And as Paul so cogently summed up: "Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5.22, 23).

(Here, just as a tiny aside, it will be good to add that some people in our Personal Mission Field are just not able to be pleased. They may be stumbling away from God, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with us and our witness and walk. They may just be excessively sinful and miserable.)

As Solomon opined, "The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the LORD" (Prov. 19.3). As God said to Samuel, "...for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8.7). God will give us the wisdom to know the difference.

If our one heart's desire is to know God, and to be searched and known by Him (Ps. 139.23, 24), filled with His Holy Spirit, then we can be assured that He will give us that desire. "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37.4). And in so doing runs our greatest chance of never doing anything or "eating any meat" (1 Cor. 8.13) that could cause our brother to stumble.

Because NEVER do we want to:

1. Sin against Christ, or
2. Play any part in the eternal perishing of one for whom Christ died (1 Cor. 8.11,12).

May it never be!

*For reflection*

1. In what sense is Paul using the idea of a "weaker" brother?
2. How can you know whether you are a weaker believer? What can we do to keep growing stronger in the Lord?
3. What are some keys to making sure you're not the cause of a weaker brother stumbling into sin?

*One God, One Lord: 1 Corinthians 8*

*Let Christians beware of approaching the brink of evil, or the appearance of it, though many do this in public matters, for which perhaps they plead plausibly. Men cannot thus sin against their brethren, without offending Christ, and endangering their own souls.* Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8.7-13*

*Pray Psalm 32.3-11.*

Pray that God will make you sensitive to others, that you may not do anything, even though you are free to do so, that would wound a brother's conscience.

*Sing Psalm 32.3-11.*

(Hendon: *Take My Life and Let It Be*)

When in silence I remained, groaning in my sinful pain,  
You Your hand upon me lay; all my strength You drained away,  
all my strength You drained away.

I confessed my sin to You; You forgave me, ever true!  
Let confession's pleading sound reach You while You may be found,  
reach You while You may be found!

When flood waters threaten me, You my hiding place will be.  
O'er them I will rise above, buoyed by Your redeeming love,  
buoyed by Your redeeming love.

Teach me, LORD, how I should live; sound instruction ever give.  
Let me never stubborn be; let Your eye watch over me,  
let Your eye watch over me.

Though the wicked wail and weep, they rejoice whose souls You keep.  
Trusting, we exult with praise, joyfully singing all our days,  
joyfully singing all our days!

## 7 Love God, Love Others

*Pray Psalm 16.1-3.*

Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.  
O *my soul*, you have said to the LORD,  
“You *are* my Lord,  
My goodness is nothing apart from You.”  
As for the saints who *are* on the earth,  
“They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.”

*Sing Psalm 16.1-3.*

(All to Christ: *Jesus Paid It All*)

Preserve me, O my God; I refuge seek in You.  
You alone are all my good, my LORD and Savior true!  
*Refrain v. 11*  
Make me know life’s way! Pleasures fill Your hand.  
Fill my life with joy each day! Before Your face I stand.

The saints within the earth, majestic in their day,  
delight me with the worth of all they do and say.  
*Refrain*

*Review 1 Corinthians 8.1-13; meditate on verses 1, 2.*

*Preparation*

1. What was the great need of the churches in Corinth?
2. What seemed to have been keeping them from this?

*Meditation*

Paul is laying a foundation for his majestic exposition of love in 1 Corinthians 13. The Corinthians had approached him with a variety of problems that had brought division, impurity, confusion, conflict, and consternation into their churches. But back of all these problems was one great unacknowledged need.

The Corinthians needed grace to love God and one another.

They were babes in Christ, hung up on their differences of opinion and practice and blinded to the power of grace working through love. So here, in chapter 8, just as he has done since chapter 2, Paul is laying down the solid rock foundation of love. We deceive ourselves if we vaunt knowledge over love. Or freedom over love. Or ourselves over our brethren in the Lord. Whenever differences are in view, our duty is to humble ourselves in service to those around us, to defer our freedom to their condition in the Lord, and to do only what is loving and edifying, even though it means denying ourselves.

Isn’t that what Jesus did (Phil. 2.5-11)? How can we be followers of Jesus if we’re not willing to practice His way of life in even the most ordinary of situations? Too many Christians today are like the Corinthians. We focus on getting our doctrine right. Or insisting on our practice of worship. Or touting our church’s size and busyness to the “dead” churches in our community. And we hold on to such divisive ways, setting aside love for God and our fellow believers. It’s no wonder we do not have the kind of powerful, united witness that Jesus said would convince the world to believe in Him (Jn. 17.21).

Love God. Love your neighbors, beginning with your fellow believers. Never lose sight of these, and never step outside the guardrails of love laid down in the Law of God and the life of Jesus. Paul’s word to the

Corinthians is his word to us as well.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Knowledge, for knowledge's sake, only puffs up; but lawful love edifies (1 Cor. 8.1).

Puffed Wheat, Puffed Rice, and Puffed Christians are all bland and distasteful. But along with gobs of honey, and puffed with God's love, we can all be used for His glory.

God has given us His Law—precepts, statutes, commandments, testimonies, and judgments—to guide us and keep us where His love can continually reach and bless us (Jude 20,21 TLB). God has also given His Law to lead us into perfect love for Him and for others (Matt. 22.37-41).

“...I delight in Your law...Oh, how I love Your law!  
It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119.70, 97).

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law...Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13.8, 10).

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5.13, 14).

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 Jn. 5.3).

And because they are not burdensome,  
John trusts us with hard words of warning, and gentle words of encouragement:  
“Do not love the world or the things in the world.  
If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.  
For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—  
is not of the Father but is of the world.  
And the world is passing away, and the lust of it;  
but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn. 2.15-17).

Forever puffed to lovingly edify.

*For reflection*

1. Knowledge is not evil, but it can be wrongly used. How are you to use the knowledge God allows you to acquire?
2. How can prayer help you to keep focused on loving God and your neighbors?
3. How does daily reading and meditation in Scripture help us to keep focused on loving God and our neighbor?

*Without holy affections all human knowledge is worthless.* Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8.1-6*

*Pray Psalm 16.5-11.*

Thank God that He has called you to His Kingdom and glory, and within that framework, to your own unique calling and ministry. Seek His strength for today's journey. Call on Him for grace to fulfill your calling, and thank Him in advance for all the good things He will grant you.

*Sing Psalm 16.5-11.*

(All to Christ: *Jesus Paid It All*)

My portion and my cup are You, my Savior dear;  
You help and hold me up and ever keep me near.

*Refrain v. 11*

Make me know life's way! Pleasures fill Your hand.  
Fill my life with joy each day! Before Your face I stand.

I bless Your Name, O LORD; my mind instructs each night;  
You teach me by Your Word and guide me in the right.

*Refrain*

You are ever with me, LORD; in You I shall not fall.  
But rejoicing in Your Word, I abide within Your call.

*Refrain*

Soon Your glory I shall see, for as Jesus rose again,  
You will come to gather me to my home with You in heav'n.

*Refrain*



*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. What is the danger of making “knowledge” the defining mark of faith?
2. What makes a person a “weaker” brother or sister? What is our duty to weaker brethren?
3. How can you identify any areas of weakness in your conscience, and in all your soul?
4. What will it require of you to keep your focus on loving God and loving your neighbors, rather than on things that might create divisions?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

*For prayer:*

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Thank you.