

Loving (the One, True, and Triune) God
1 Corinthians 8:1 – 6 | 08.07.2016 | Body Life @OBC

It is difficult to say what the most pressing need of our day is . . .

If you turn on the news . . . you will be convinced from the left and the right that it is the president of the United States

If you read social media . . . race relations and policing are still tense.

If you cast your eyes overseas . . . the global terror threat continues to loom.

If you look into the culture . . . you might rank the zombifying-effect of entertainment and technology as the number 1 threat to meaningful relationships

And then there is the ongoing holocaust of abortion, the attack on religious liberty, and the impending threats of national debt / disease / transhumanism.

These don't even get to the personal crises we face – adultery, abuse, alcoholism, unemployment, unwed pregnancy, and unfulfilled dreams for yourself or others.

All of these are clear and present dangers . . .

And Yet . . . in the face of all these plights I would make the audacious claim that there is a problem that dwarfs them all.

That problem is

a genuine lack of interest in the triune God
a gross diminution of his power, his love, and his holiness.
And a general ignorance of all things related to the God of Scripture.

In the world and the church . . . The greatest problem is

. . . the same now as it was when Cain slew Abel or

. . . when the Aaronic priests failed to treat God as holy and were consumed for offering strange fire

. . . or when the church in Corinth claimed to know God but denied the power of his gospel . . . by continuing to associate with idols even as they

The greatest problem is ignorance of God that leads idolatry and immorality.

One of the weirdest and most wicked things I've ever seen took place on the beautiful shores of the Mediterranean Sea . . .

Our mission team spent two days sharing Christ at New Age festival . . . where secular Israelis came to escape the city and commune with nature!

On the opening night . . . the leading priestess read from the Psalms as she called upon the water, wind, earth, fire to come and bless them.

Never before or since had I seen such outright syncretism – the fusion of biblical truth with outright pantheism – the belief that nature is god; god is in nature.

That night I went back and read 2 Kings 17 . . . the chapter leading up to Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal . . . and I was struck that what happened on a hillside 3,000 years ago still goes on.

And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. ¹⁰They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, ¹¹and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, ¹²and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them 'You shall not do this.'

Bro + Sis: Idolatry doesn't just happen on the pages of Scripture.

And it doesn't just happen at a New Age festival miles from Mount Carmel.

It happens everywhere we go . . . Every time we cheer our favorite team, open our laptops, gaze at our children, or day dream about our hobby.

We are put in touch with things that pull our hearts towards

This is the push and pull of idolatry

The idols which are deaf, mute, and powerless . . . allure us to serve them.

The phone that sits in your pocket is not an inert tool you use as you wish; It pulls you to open it and promises you life will better with it . . . than without

As Calvin famously put it . . . our hearts are idol-making factories!

Thus in a world made by a holy God . . . our greatest need is to know him.

And our greatest threat?? The idols that destroy our knowledge of God.

Therefore . . . we do not come to 1 Cor 8 as spectators to ancient problem, but as worshipers tempted to exchange God for the idols of our day!

1 Corinthians 8 – 11

1 Corinthians 8 brings us to a new section of Paul's letter, one that continues thru chapter 11.

It shouldn't surprise us: some of the problems addressed earlier in the letter come up again.

But Paul also introduces new challenges, as v. 1 begins a new section –

“Now concerning food offered to idols.”

So . . . to get a sense this new section . . . we need to answer a few questions

1. Where are we in the letter?

So far . . . We've seen Paul address the divisions in the church in ch. 1 – 4

This was followed by three chapters devoted to holiness, where he called the Corinthians to glorify God with their bodies.

Now in ch. 8 – 11, P again calls the C's to glorify God **with their love**.

Just as **1 Cor 6:19 – 20** served as an anchor verse in the last section: "You have been bought with a price, /.: Glorify God with your body"

1 Corinthians 10:31 anchors this section: So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God."

These two verses are ones you should memorize until they become the default setting of your life: **I am here to glorify God.**

But in context, the eating and drinking referenced here is less about doing the mundane things of life to glorify God.

It speaks about the way eating worships God and loves others!

So . . . chapters 8, 9, 10, 11 swirl around the contrast between eating meat sacrificed to idols and eating the Lord's Supper.

Chapter 8 & 10 deal explicitly with eating food in pagan Corinth.

Chapter 10 & 11 then engage the Christian's meal – the Lord Supper

In chapter 9 Paul makes an autobiographical arg. to forsake your rights for in order to love others.

In all . . . the theme of ch. 8 is Loving God and Loving Others.

And this serves as an entry point into chapters 8 – 14, which all deal with how the body of Christ loves one another.

Chapters 8 – 11 with regards to food and personal relationships

Chapters 12 – 14 with regards to worship and spiritual gifts

So that gives a bit of roadmap of where we are in 1 Corinthians, but we need to ask a second question . . .

2. Where are Christians coming in contact with food sacrificed to idols?

I put it in terms for proximity for two reasons.

First, the teaching of Bible is unswerving with regards to idols.

In the OT, the second commandment: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”

As Paul will develop in 1 Corinthians 10, Israel struggled to resist the pull of making idols throughout its history. And ultimately, God brought judgment on them for worshipping the things their hands have made.

In the NT, when Jesus (God’s image made without hands) came, the command avoid idols continued.

Twice in Acts we find the Apostles instructing the Gentiles to . . . “abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:29; cf. 21:25)

Clearly, 1 Corinthians does not issue new teaching; it clarifies previous instruction, . . . This reminds us just because something is taught, doesn’t mean it’s caught.

And as we’ll learn . . . the Cs were keeping this command in theory, but not in practice.

[2] 1 Cor indicate 3 different settings where meat sacrificed to idols might show up.

8:9–10 – The issue here is not so much eating meat sacrificed to idols as it is to sitting down in the temple or the restaurant assoc. with the temple

This is different from going to the marketplace and picking up meat whose origin is unknown. We see this in **10:25–26**. READ

For Paul . . . the problem is not the meat itself. The problem is the conscience assoc with idol worship. In the marketplace, if the origin is unknown, eat freely.

Just the same, if you go to someone’s house & they offer you meat, don’t question it.

However, if they make it known that it was offered to the goddess Demeter . . . don’t eat.
READ vv. 27 – 28

So . . . In these verses, we find three settings and three different ways Paul applies the teaching re: meat sacrificed to idols.

Still . . . we need to ask another question . . .

3. So what is Paul addressing? And is it the same as Romans?

In situations where Christians are freely sitting down to table in the temple knowingly eating food sacrificed to idols. . . he's urging them to consider how this affects others.

More strongly, he is calling these Christians to repent of their idolatrous ways

They are using their 'knowledge' that idols are nothing and making reservations for dinner with the devil.

Not to get beyond our passage too far, but it's necessary to see where he is going:

1 Cor 10:18 – 22: Consider the people of Israel [he's just recalled Israel history of idolatry] are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

So, the situation in 1 Cor 8 – 10 is far more severe than Romans 14. Often we read these two passages together. And we should.

But the major problem in Romans concerns the difference between Jews constrained by OT laws and Gentile Christians who were not.

In Corinth, the issue is related to meat sacrificed to idols not Jewish food laws. So, P gives a strong warning against eating any meat KNOWN to be sacrificed to idols.

In other situations . . .

Like buying meat in the market or dining at a friend's house, there was freedom.

Even if the meat was sacrificed to idols – and probably most meat in Corinth did come from the temple leftovers – Paul was saying don't worry about it.

Rightly understood . . . such meat was not intrinsically polluted – **v. 4**
But the Corinthians were taking that truth . . . and misusing it.

It would be like saying . . .

Porn is only looking at different colored pixels, it's not real. What's the problem?

Or I know **sports & leisure** can be idols . . . but I *KNOW* God is MORE important
. . . So why do I need to guard my schedule and prioritize Sunday worship?

Paul would say . . . beware these idols which you *KNOW* aren't real . . . they have the power to REALLY destroy you . . .

And this is the argument he begins to lay out in chapters 8 – 11

4. What was the pull towards the idol's temple?

If the Corinthians had been taught to flee idolatry
And If they believed that idols were truly nothing . . . as Paul cites in 8:4

What led them to eat in the idols temple?

We get part of their logic by looking at the ideas that Paul quotes

. . . “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.”

The Corinthians rightly understand the weakness of these idols,

And yet . . . instead of repelling them from idols, these C took that theological truth and moved TOWARDS the idol. **What gives? What is the attraction?**

One way to answer that is to understand the role idols played in society.

Those who ate meat were not just idol worshipers; they were rich, powerful, well-positioned idol worshipers.

IOW, for Corinthian Christians who were seeking to make something of themselves (ch. 1–4), the feasting in the temple was just a “necessary evil”

And thus for the sake of status, they ate idol-meat without making a fuss. They went along with the crowd, instead of standing out

To use example from the book of Daniel . . .

Instead of being like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . who stood out when they refused to bow down to the idol . . . the Corinthians blended in.

They believed what Paul had taught about God and against idols, but they hadn't yet seen how their knowledge of God was to inform their daily allegiances.

And hence, Paul is writing to them what it really means to know and love God.

Next week . . . we'll consider some of these social challenges and how they apply to us

Today . . . we begin with something more basic – what does it mean to know / love God?

There are . . . **THREE TRUTHS ABOUT KNOWING GOD** in verse 1 – 6 . . .

1. You Will Only Know God Truly . . . If God Makes Himself Known to You

Look at verses 1–3 . . . “We know that all of us possess knowledge . . .”

The words “know” show up 7x in verses 1–3, and 11x in the whole chapter.

The repetition informs us “knowledge” is at the forefront of Paul’s mind, but very quickly we see Paul is critiquing what they KNOW . . . OR what they’re doing with knowledge

As we read, we find Paul quoting the Corinthians & making corrections.

Verse 1 = “we know that all of us possess knowledge.”

The “all possess knowledge” is the quotation and Paul very quickly differentiates two kinds of knowledge.

For Paul: there is a knowledge that fosters pride and a knowledge that fosters love.

v. 1b = This “knowledge” (or so-called knowledge) puffs up.

This is the word Paul used earlier to speak of prideful leaders who asserted themselves in Corinth

It’s the same word he’ll use in ch. 13 when he says “love is not arrogant”

v. 1c = Paul contrasts arrogant knowledge with love that builds up.

We might expect Paul to say “this K puffs up, but this other K builds up”

However, he inserts love because he’s going to show that true knowledge comes from love and produces love.

So there are two kind of knowledge at work in v. 1 and they are each described in verses 2 and 3.

v. 2 = **If anyone imagines that he knows something ... sights on the proud in C . . . he does not yet know as he ought to know.**

Paul is critiquing those Xians

. . . who love to hang their theology diplomas on the wall,

. . . who love to show off their knowledge, and

. . . who seek a position by what they know

Know anyone like that? I do. I have to face him in the mirror every day!

Paul says to me . . . and to any who love to learn . . . **Don't take pride in your learning!**

Now . . . to be clear: Paul is not against learning.

He was as learned as any man in Corinth. He knew multiple languages. Had studied with the best scholars in Israel. When he went to Athens he quoted poets and philosophers (Acts 17). When he was in Corinth, he used his knowledge of the Isthmian games to make cogent application of biblical truth.

On top of that, he had received visions of glory he could not even speak of. He was recognized as an expert of the law. When he was in prison, he continued to study the Scriptures, as he asked Timothy to bring him his parchments.

PAUL WAS NOT ANTI-INTELLECTUAL!!!

BUT HE WAS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO INTELLECTUALISM!!!

He's against anyone who seeks to know God for the sake of personal gain, or
who seek knowledge as an end in itself.

In response to the . . . **'You do not KNOW as you ought if you do not LOVE'**
. . . self-styled intellectual . . .

This is his overarching message in 1 Cor 8 – 11.

But first, he needs to establish where knowledge of God comes from.

So . . . for you scholars, he's going to us a true biblical epistemology . . .

Answers the question: How do we know what we know?

Notice what he says, **“If anyone loves God, he is known by God.”**

Two facts worth noting:

1. Those who know God . . . will love God.

To know God without love is to be totally ignorant of who he is.

To know God without love is to only know facts about God.

Church . . . facts don't save! Only personal faith in a loving Lord saves.

That's the first thing . . . the second . . .

2. Those who know and love God, do so because God knows them

This is the doctrine of unconditional election & everlasting preservation all in one.

Paul isn't saying God in his omniscience knows them because he knows all things.

He's saying the all-knowing God set his love on those whom he chose before time.

This morning . . . If you find in your heart a personal, loving knowledge of God . . .
. . . know that it came from God himself.

You did not find him by your erudite learning . . . he found you by his eternal love.

The source of your knowledge is not your education; it is his election!

And for those who love God and those who want to love God but often stumble,
. . . he is telling you to marvel at God's knowledge.

It doesn't depend on you. It comes from God.

So the first truth . . .

You Will Only Know God Truly . . . If God Makes Himself Known to You

And the payoff . . . is that nothing in creation can say this.

Your idol may love you . . . if you serve it, sacrifice for it, surrender to it.
But the true God doesn't love you based on your service or your knowledge.

He loves you b/c he loves you . . . and he sent Christ to die for you so that you would
know him . . . as the His Spirit pours love into your heart so you would respond rightly.

This sets up the second truth . . .

2. Loving God Rightly . . . Means More Than Right Theology

From vv 4 – 5, it is clear the Corinthians understand that there is only one God,

. . . and yet in their right understanding they continued to traffic IN THE PLACES WHERE IDOLS WERE WORSHIPED.

. . . the problem was not that they had dealings with pagans, but that they participated without reservation in the civic religion in Corinth.

IOW while their newfound belief in one God may have brought them to church on Sun . . . the implications of Christ's Lordship had not transformed their daily lives yet

We might call this the division between sacred and secular.

In their theological knowledge they knew God of Israel was the only God . . .
But in their practical living they did not yet know how to live with Christ as Lord.

So . . . Paul affirms their statements of exclusivity. . .

4 “an idol has no real existence” and “there is no God but one”

But instead of congratulating the Corinthians on their Sunday School answers, he presses them to see how their theology . . . requires them to live differently

In verses 7 – 13 . . . he warns them that trafficking in pagan temples contradicts their confession of faith AND leads others to follow their example.

We will tackle those things next week . . .

. . . today we need to see the bridge between loving God and loving others

. . . and it comes from a personal view of the triune God

. . . where Christ is Lord of all things . . . Lord of creation & redemption.

3 You Will Only Continue in God's Love, if you surrender to all his Lordship

In v. 5 Paul says, "For although there may be so-called gods . . . **READ**

In this he does two things . . .

1. He doesn't argue whether idols have existence or not.

In one sense, they do. . . for they *WERE* having an effect on the church.

In another sense, b/c God is one and he rules over all . . . they have no power.

Paul doesn't get tangled in a debate about idols . . .

Instead, like Elijah at Mt Carmel, he rolls all the so-called gods and lords, visible or invisible, into a pile where he will consume them with the holy fire of X's Lordship

2. So, the second thing he does, is to use language of lords and gods to set up **v. 6**.

And what does that verse say?

It begins with a strong contrast – "**Yet for us . . .**"

. . . The contrast hints at the corrective he's about to give.

He follows this contrast with one of the most beautiful statements about God in Scripture.

There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist
And one Lord, Jesus Christ, thru whom are all things & thru whom we exist

If you notice, there is an intentional shape to these words.

One God the Father is parallel **to one Lord Jesus Christ**.

Both are involved in the creation of all things, but the prepositions reveal diff. roles.

As John explains in his Gospel:

When the F spoke the world into existence; the Son was the Word he spoke.

In this way,

The Father architected, designed, and decreed the world.

The Son accomplished, enacted, and fulfilled all the Father declared.

And the Spirit ??

Well, He was sent by the Father and the Son . . . to bring it to pass.

In this way, One God created all things . . . but he did so as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In our passage, Paul only mentions the Father and the Son . . .

Not because he is denying or ignoring the Spirit . . .

But b/c he is either picking up an early Christian creed or Deuteronomy 6:4 or both

From the shape of the text, some commentators and translations (HCSB) make v. 6

An early creed . . . or even an exposition of the Shema.

The Shema reads: “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one.”

v. 4 affirmed the “oneness of God,” now we are seeing how Christ enters that equation.

As a faithful son of Israel, Paul doesn’t deny the oneness of God.

Rather, he places Jesus Christ into the identity of Yahweh.

You might call it: **Christological Monotheism or Christian Theology**

The one God of Israel IS . . . God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So P takes the words of Moses (**Deut 6:4**) & applies them the Father and the Son:

. . . so that the one God and Lord of Deuteronomy 6 IS

. . . God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

In truth . . .

Paul is not giving us a full Trinitarian theology . . . b/c his goal is not academic

He wants us to worship God in all of life . . . and to love God and love others!

Therefore, he is turning to this theological confession

. . . and showing how a personal relationship with the Triune God

. . . WORKS to overturn the allurements of idols and the promises of false gods.

And how is that ??

How does this triune understanding of God help us fight idolatry ???

I can think of a few ways, but as we close in on the Lord's Supper, let's consider just one

Knowing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit RECALLS the infinite BEAUTY of God's personality ... and the infinite BANKRUPTCY of trading him for anything else.

For us: God is not a heavenly thing we must submit to or else.

That's the God of Islam . . . and the caricature painted by New Atheists!

Our God is a tri-personal God of intimate love and blessed knowledge. . .
. . . He has made all things and made us in his image to know and love him

And nothing in creation . . . will satisfy or secure us like he can.

And what's more . . . he has made us anew in Jesus Christ.

We not only exist as his creation, but as Paul says in the end "we exist in him"

This existing is far more than mere biological life . . . thru Christ we have eternal life.

We who have been made new in Christ are to live in personal relationship with him

. . . whether we come to worship or go to work

. . . whether we go out with friends or come to the Lord's Table

Indeed . . . as we say "yes" to more of him, we will want to say "no" to more of the world.

ATST . . . as we say "no" to the world, we will be able to say "yes" to more of God.

This is why we come to the Lord's Table today . . . not because it is our duty.

It is our delight . . . to remember who God is . . . who we are in Christ

. . . to be reminded who God has made us to be . . . what we really need!

We need to know God . . . And Hallelujah! . . . this is WHO is with us today.

By his Word ... by his Spirit ... and by his Table we remember the Lord until he comes!