

1Corinthians 8:5-13 "Don't Be A Stumbling Block"

1CO 8:4-6 "So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

We closed last week with the statement that, "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one."

This was in response to the question Paul received from these Corinthian believers who felt that they needed more insight into whether or not they had the liberty or freedom in Christ to partake of such food if it had been sacrificed to these idols.

One group evidently felt they did, while in all likelihood others had reservations about such a liberty. But Paul cautions them that even if they had such knowledge, which allowed them to eat this food sacrificed to idols, they must not take such knowledge and use it in an unloving way so as to hurt the conscience of another Christian.

Regarding that knowledge, Paul says in verses 5 and 6 that, "even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

What Paul is saying is that he recognizes that the pagan world views these gods to be real. And yet in reality they're not. He uses the term, "so called gods", which infers that they may have names and functions and a respect by the world. In fact, Paul even concedes that in the minds of these people there are many gods and many lords.

I mean look at the history of this world and even in the one book which is God's very word. How many gods does it speak of? The false gods found in the O.T. alone are a testimony of how much the pagan world depended on something bigger than themselves to rule their lives.

Molech , Baal, Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Dagon, Marduk, Bel, Nebo, Tamuz. All of these are mentioned in the O.T. Scriptures. This doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of the amount of other gods which were worshipped in those days. There were hundreds and thousands of gods to which these people's bowed.

When we come to the N.T. we find that there were many gods of the Graeco-Roman world such as Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis Athena, Demeter, Hermes, Poseidon, Zeus and so on. Even the emperors, Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar were deified.

But simply because man recognizes them as gods that doesn't mean they really are. They are "so called gods" as men call them gods. Does blessing your food by the god of the sun, for example, make it blessed? Well, how can you bless something when that god doesn't really exist, but in name only?

And so, Paul is trying to make the point that living in a fantasy world doesn't make that world real except in the minds of those who happen to live there. Simply because they give names to such gods and make idols in their likeness doesn't make them real any more than making a doll and calling it Barbie, makes it a real person.

What is real is the one true God who has proven Himself real. He is the one who created this world. It doesn't get any more real than that.

1CO 8:6 "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

This is a very interesting portion of Scripture because encapsulated here is the foundation of our belief that there is only one God and yet He has revealed Himself in a plurality of persons who has created all things.

The prophet Malachi records this in MAL 2:10 "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?"

When Jonah was asked by the sailors, who were in the boat with him, that was about to go down as God was going to sink it so as to get Jonah to Nineveh via a big sea creature, they asked him who his God was that was doing this to them.

JON 1:9 "He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

There is only one God. God was never in competition with other gods vying for power as to who would be the first to create the universe.

But notice the way in which Paul describes this one God. He identifies Him as "the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live;..."

What an interesting name for a God. Father. What an awesome thing to consider that He is such an intimate God that He desires to be understood as one who really is a Father. All throughout the O.T. when the people of God considered this one true God they knew Him to be such a loving Father.

ISA 63:16 "But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name."

And Paul says, in verse 6 of our text, "our heavenly Father is the one from whom all things came and for whom we live; ..."

Everything that exists comes from God. In fact, our very existence, our very life comes from God and we are to live for Him. Unfortunately, mankind has decided not to live for Him, but for themselves. And yet, they'll worship pieces of wood or stone or any other created thing in this world to the exclusion of the one true God.

When Paul was teaching the Athenians who this one true God is he started the same way. He started with the fact that this one true God is the One who created us and from whom all things exist.

ACT 17:24-27 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.
28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'"

For the believer this is our privilege; to serve the living God who gave us life, together with eternal life with Him. This is our purpose and our destiny; to be with Him forever. But it is to work itself out in this life and in this world as well, as we live to His honor and glory in thanks for being so great a God and Father who has given us salvation in His Son.

And this is why Paul adds, "and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

What Paul has just done in making this statement is to put Jesus Christ in the exact same place as the Father in terms of His essence; and that being very Creator God.

Look at the verse again.

1 Corinthians 8:6 one God, *the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him*; and one Lord, *Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him*.

Notice also, that Paul calls Jesus, Lord. The word Lord is the Greek word *kurios* which comes from *kuros* meaning supremacy. In the same sentence where Paul calls the Father our one and only God, he then calls Jesus Christ the one who is supreme.

Well, if the Father is God, how can Jesus Christ be supreme? How can He be the one who is above all? Only if He too is God. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus told His disciples.

JOH 10:27-30 "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Jesus does not mean to suggest that He is the Father and that the Father is Jesus. He is saying that just as the Father is God, and that only God can forgive sin, He (that is Jesus) being God, can forgive sin and redeem His people as He and the Father, being very God, are accomplishing this for His people.

There is only one God, but as we said earlier, He has revealed Himself in a plurality of persons; three distinct persons to be precise. In our text we see only two persons, since these are the persons whom Paul happens to be talking about. But we know that all three persons are God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Peter speaks of all three as it relates to our salvation.

1PE 1:1 "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, through the *sanctifying work of the Spirit*, for obedience to *Jesus Christ* and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

But notice how Paul continues to show how Jesus Christ is none other than God Himself. On the one hand he says that all things, physical and spiritual, came "from" the Father. In other words, everything originated from Him. But, it was "through" Jesus Christ that everything came to be.

In our finite way of understanding things the Father is the source of all things, and Jesus is the means by which all things came to be. This is obviously an over simplification, but that is the intent.

The apostle John puts it in a similar way in the beginning of his gospel where he is obviously speaking of the Word who became flesh, Jesus Christ Himself.

JOH 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

The writer of Hebrews concurs.

HEB 1:2 "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

Again, don't lose sight of the awesome truth that only the one true God could have created the universe and all things in it.

ISA 45:18 "For this is what the LORD says - he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited - he says: "I am the LORD, and there is no other."

This is none other than Jesus Christ through whom the world was created. He is God Almighty. And when Paul wrote to the Colossians about Jesus Christ being creator this is exactly the way he put it.

COL 1:16-18 "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and

for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

This brings us full circle to the One who is supreme, the Lord, Jesus Christ. And since there is only one Lord and God Paul is driving home the point that there can be no other gods. And yet, interestingly enough Paul concedes that not everyone understands this. Not everyone has this knowledge, including some Christians, to where they can articulate it or live in the reality of it.

This by the way, is why I spend so much time teaching the truths of God's word, what is identified as doctrine. Doctrine simply means teaching. And the doctrines to which we hold will affect the way in which we view our great God and how we should be living to His glory.

That's why I've always said, bad doctrine produces bad lives, or the ability to live effectively to God's glory. This is what was happening in Corinth. Some Christians didn't have their doctrine straight. And some of them became fearful and lacked confidence to live for God as a result of it.

Don't ever think that it doesn't make any difference how we interpret the bible. It does, and this is why we must be Bereans as we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth.

But what Paul is saying in our text is that some of the Christians in Corinth did not have the proper knowledge and understanding of who our God is as it related to His supremacy over His creation.

1CO 8:7 "But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled."

In other words, there may be brand new believers who simply have not had enough time to sit under the truth and grasp the awesomeness of who our God is. They have just come out from under the lie that there are other gods in competition with the one true God.

And though they may have been given the truth about God, there is certainly the possibility that their consciences have not caught up with the truth. Have you ever been given a new teaching about

God and yet it took time for you to really grasp it, even though the evidence for such a teaching is overwhelming?

I remember the first time as a young believer when someone suggested to me that God first chose me and predestined me to eternal life before the foundations of the world. My thought was, "no, I chose God when I came to faith in Jesus Christ."

This was almost bewildering since my understanding was that every human being is responsible for seeing the truth of the gospel and then responding to that truth by faith. It was my choice because I saw the truth for what it was, and then embraced Christ as my Lord and Savior.

What I didn't fully understand about the truth of election and predestination at that time was that had God not chosen me and effectually called me, as the Spirit of God regenerated me to life, as He gave me the gift of faith to respond, I would never have believed.

Ephesians 2:1-6 ^{NAU} And *you were dead in your trespasses and sins*, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ But ***God, being rich in mercy***, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ ***even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ*** (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

Why did God have to make me alive before I could believe? Because dead men don't do anything but remain dead. When I began to understand this truth, this ***doctrine***, concerning the grace and mercy of God toward me, it humbled me to the max and it enabled me to see with eyes that He alone gave me.

And so, for the new believer in Corinth who is trying to reconcile this doctrine that there is only one God, how then does he deal with this idea of eating meat sacrificed to these gods and why would he even entertain doing it?, is his question.

Paul is telling the more mature believers to be careful not to confuse and make these babes in Christ sin against their

consciences by flaunting their liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols. In fact, Paul says that when you do this you actually defile their consciences.

What does he mean by this?

Well, imagine being brought up in the church all of your life and being taught that it would be sinful not to come to church in a coat and tie. Your conscience couldn't live with the fact that you could come dressed in any other way.

Let's say that you were never really born again during that experience, but later in life you came to Christ and now you're part of a new church which doesn't teach that you have to dress in a coat and tie.

Now, imagine someone in the church coming along and chastising you for believing such a notion of having to wear a coat and tie, saying that God looks on the heart, for example, and not on the outward appearance.

And in their zeal to make sure you get it right they come over Sunday morning to make sure you dress according to the way they feel free to dress.

Well, you're the new believer and so as not to offend them you come to church in jeans and a pull over shirt. But, in your heart you know this isn't right and you spend the entire service grieving over your decision instead of truly worshipping God.

Your conscience has become defiled because you've ignored and violated what you believed and now you've got feelings of guilt. This is what was happening in Corinth. The truth was certainly true; there are no idols or gods but the one true God. But when that truth is not coupled with love it can actually harm people in their ability to grow in Christ.

Do I have the liberty to dress more casually? Absolutely. But do I not also have the liberty to dress in a coat and tie if I want to? Sure. And so, when it comes to these areas of liberty we must treat them in that way and be sensitive to other believers.

ROM 14:22 – 15:1 "So whatever you believe about these things [liberties] keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves."

What is interesting to note here though is that the truth of God's word should be the determining factor about how we live for God. Because you see, Paul is not suggesting that these babes in Christ in Corinth should spend the rest of their lives having an improper understanding about idols.

He would want them to grow up in Christ in the truth. But he would temper that with the love that should accompany that truth. And that also goes for things which would not fall into the category of liberty or freedoms we have in Christ.

Even those truths which are essential to the faith should be taught in love. And where a young believer is having trouble understanding it we should be patient and loving in the process, knowing that there were probably things we struggled with until at some point the Holy Spirit made it clear and we began to understand it.

And so, Paul continues.

1CO 8:8-9 "But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. 9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak."

This is the point we just went over. If you have freedoms in Christ, don't force those freedoms on others whose consciences are not comfortable practicing those freedoms. I've known Christians who have a real problem putting up a Christmas tree in their house and giving gifts during that time of year.

Do we as Christians have freedom in that area? Sure. But if another Christian has problems with that I'm not going to flaunt it before them and put them down if they choose not to celebrate the traditions of gift giving or some of the other traditions that surround it.

And yet, whatever traditions we may choose to celebrate we must still do all things to the glory of God. And so, even in our freedoms we don't have the freedom to sin.

And so, I'm not more spiritual if I choose to celebrate the birth of Christ while celebrating the freedom to give gifts and decorate my

house. And, I'm also not more spiritual if I choose to not be involved in any of those things.

1CO 8:9-13 "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall."

Paul is saying to use discretion with your freedoms. Practice your freedoms with the understanding that you are not an island. There are other people to be considered.

You can actually take a freedom and sin against a brother or sister with it. And what is not sinful in and of itself could be sin if you do it in such a way as not to consider the weaker Christian in the faith.

Going into an idol's temple and eating is suggesting that you're out in the public for all to see. Paul says, you may want to reconsider taking such a high profile. Because now the weaker one sees you and may feel compelled to follow in your steps so as not to appear immature and yet his conscience screams that he's doing the wrong thing.

Or worse, he may actually downplay the reality that honoring other gods, while embracing the one true God, is no big deal.

If you know this and you still persist with your freedom you not only potentially sin against that person, Paul says you sin against Christ. And now we place our freedom in a whole new light.

The act of pursuing such a freedom may not be sin, but doing it in a way where it may cause others to sin now becomes sinful. And now, it becomes personal from our Lord's standpoint.

Paul's conclusion. If I know that this will cause my brother to sin then it would be better for both of us if I didn't practice that freedom in a way where my brother or sister would be involved.

1CO 8:13 "Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall."

What's more important? My right or freedom to eat, or my example to help my brother or sister to grow in Christ? And what you'll find is that over time that brother or sister may have been taught the truth enough, as it's coupled with love, where they no longer see such freedoms as sinful and they may even be able to rejoice with you in your freedoms in Christ.

The bottom line is that, from our Lord Jesus' perspective, we should consider others as more important than ourselves in such instances. We are not the end-all when it comes to the body of Christ. Christ is the end-all and we should pursue a life that honors Him and encourages the rest of the body for whom He died.

Our perspective should be, how can I serve my brother or sister in the Lord?, knowing, as Jesus said, that whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Mat. 25:40)

GAL 5:13-14 "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."