

1 Corinthians 8

Pastor: Paul permitted Gentile Christians to eat idol food, a clear violation of the Mosaic Law.

“Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For 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 are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him. However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Messiah died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Messiah. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”

ch 8 Among the important topics needing to be discussed between the Apostle Paul and the Corinthians, particularly witnessed in 1 Corinthians 8 and in 10:14-33 following, was the issue of meat taken from idol sacrifices.¹ What was to happen in the event that any of the Corinthians ate meat that had been sacrificed to idols? 1 Corinthians 8 is a place where there is useful scholarly discussion as to how many Corinthian slogans Paul had to actually address (1 Corinthians 8:1, 4, 8), as well as there being some less-than-subtle chiding of the attitudes and motives of the presumed “knowledgeable persons among them.

The content of 1 Corinthians ch. 8 widely concerns a sector of claiming Believers in Ancient Corinth, who thought that their knowledge in the One True God was so strong, that they could freely associate at pagan temples, and partake of the meat that had been sacrificed, without any apparent consequences. They would have appealed to various Tanach or Old Testament sentiments about idols being futile and worthless, and that the God of Israel was the only Deity that existed, thus making eating meat offered before an entity that did not exist immaterial. Paul does not disagree on some of the points they raised, but he does address the consequences of how their actions were likely to affect others among the community of faith, and hence how they could enable others to relapse into paganism.

Twentieth and Twenty-First Century people tend to be at a serious disadvantage, in not often realizing how Greco-Roman temples were frequently places for social activities and associations, which involved eating meat that had been offered in sacrifice to an idol.² Even with them having received Yeshua into their lives, and having acknowledged the God of Israel as the One True Creator, Believers from Greek and Roman backgrounds could be invited by various colleagues or acquaintances to social gatherings at local pagan temples and shrines. Animals, that had been offered in pagan sacrifice, would not only have been available to eat at such occasions, but would also have been butchered and ended up for sale in the local marketplace for general consumption.³ With both 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:14-33 following in view, Craig Blomberg appropriately summarizes,

“Most meat sold in the town marketplace came from sacrificial animals that had been slaughtered at pagan temple ceremonies. Did these rituals somehow automatically taint the food? Could Christians buy it? Could they eat it if it was offered to them at friends’ homes? What about the various social events—weddings,

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

² “‘Temple Restaurants’ and Food Sacrificed to Idols,” in Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1871; also the Greco-Roman Temple blueprint in Morris, *1 Corinthians*, pp 126-127; the summary “Dining in Roman Corinth,” in Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, pp 191-195; the summary “A Closer Look: Idol Food,” in Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, pp 75-76.

³ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 120; Soards, pp 169-170.

parties, clubs, and so on—which often used the temple dining halls for their festivities? Could Christians participate and eat meat at these events? What about more overtly religious rites in these temples? The issue clearly was not as simple or innocuous as it might at first glance seem to Westerners today.”⁴

One of the major attractive features of a pagan temple or shrine, which can elude modern people, is how, as Ben Witherington III puts it, “Temples were the restaurants of antiquity. There is archaeological evidence at the Askleion in Corinth of a dining room with couches along the four walls and a table and brazier at the center.”⁵ Recognizing how a pagan fellowship meal of sorts, was a definite feature of First Century Mediterranean life, can highlight the importance of the Apostolic decree and its prohibition of “things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication (Acts 15:29), not just from an ethical standpoint, but how from a social standpoint **it really did intend to see that the old pagan spheres of influence for the non-Jewish Believers would be off limits.** One can sense an echo of Exodus 34:14-16 throughout a survey of 1 Corinthians 8:

“[F]or you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons *also* to play the harlot with their gods” (Exodus 34:14-16).

Even with various Biblical directions from the Tanach, such as Exodus 34:14-16 telling the Ancient Israelites to avoid Canaanite idolatry because it would cause them to apostatize and it would be the end of Israel—it has to be recognized how later the Jewish philosopher Philo had to condemn an ancient Jewish allure with paganism and its apparent artistry, something of a corollary to what is seen in 1 Corinthians 8:

“But not only are wealth, and glory, and all other such things, mere phantoms and unsubstantial images, but also all the other deceits which the inventors of fables have devised, puffing themselves up by reason of their ingenuity, while they have been raising a fortification of false opinion in opposition to the truth, bringing in God as if by some theatrical machine, in order to prevent the everlasting and only true existing God from being consigned to oblivion, are so likewise. But such men have adapted their falsehood to melodies, and rhythm, and metres, with a reference to what is persuasive, thinking that by these means they should easily cajole all who read their works. Not but what they have also joined to themselves the arts of statuary and painting as co-partners in their system of deceit, in order that, bringing over the spectators by well-fabricated appearances of colors, and forms, and distinctive qualities, and having won over by their allurements those principal outward senses of sight and hearing, the one by the exquisite beauty of lifeless forms, and the other by a poetical harmony of numbers—they may ravish the unstable soul and render it feeble, and deprive it of any settled foundation” (*Special Laws* 1.28-29).⁶

In spite of the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:20, 29), and even how a figure like the Apostle Paul would later admonish the Corinthians, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14), the issue of whether or not a Messiah follower could eat in a temple of idolatry (1 Corinthians 8:10), was being reasoned through here—and not hypothetically.

Even with the presence of the Apostolic decree intending to see that the First Century non-Jewish Believers were largely severed from their spheres of social and religious influence, being totally removed all at once for many of them, was surely not going to be possible.⁷ There were likely times when Greek or Roman Believers, especially among those who were more well-to-do, such as those involved in local business, were going to be found having to go to a pagan temple to conduct some sort of transaction with another. And with

⁴ Blomberg, pp 159-160.

⁵ Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, 188.

⁶ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 536.

⁷ Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp 78-79; Blomberg, 167 are not too favorable to the Apostolic decree being implemented among the Corinthian Believers, instead limiting its application to those in Syrian Antioch. Also Prior, 141.

Against: Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, 190 who does think that Paul was happy to implement the Apostolic decree in Corinth.

this, it could be very easy to get pulled into eating a meal, attending a reception, or participating in some kind of party or festival. David E. Garland indicates,

“To shun gatherings that lubricated social and economic relations would make Christians conspicuous outcasts who held outlandish, antisocial, perverse religious beliefs. More prominent Corinthian Christians would have been understandably reluctant to draw hard-and-fast lines that would alienate such important persons in their lives and exclude them from society.”⁸

Pagan fellowship meals, ranging in their importance from being entirely religious, to being family or business related, were very important in a city like Ancient Corinth. Gordon D. Fee draws out how what took place in Corinth, even similar to how eating meals entreating some supernatural favor or action, was something that the Israelites themselves did:

“[T]he eating of cultic meals was a regular part of worship in antiquity. This is true not only for the nations that surrounded Israel, but of Israel itself. In the Corinth of Paul’s time, such meals were still the regular practice both at state festivals and private celebrations of various kinds. There were three parts to these meals: the preparation, the sacrifice proper, and the feast. The meat of the sacrifices apparently was divided into three portions: that burned before the god, that apportioned to the worshipers, and that placed on the ‘table of the god,’ which was tended by cultic ministrants but also eaten by the worshipers. The significance of these meals has been much debated, but most likely they involved a combination of religious and social factors. The gods were thought to be present since the meals were held in their honor and sacrifices were made; nonetheless, they were also intensely social occasions for the participants. For the most part the Gentiles who had become believers in Corinth had probably attended such meals all their lives; this was the basic ‘restaurant’ in antiquity, and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.”⁹

Witherington further draws out how, at least for the Corinthians, a common process for how the general population would get access to meat, would be in association with pagan sacrifice:

“Some, if not most, of the meat available in the market had a history of being a temple sacrifice. But one could buy many other things in the market—fish, sheep butchered there in the *macelleum*, and various grains, vegetables, and fruits. The poor person did not often eat meat...If the poor got meat, it was likely at such a feast as part of a celebration involving eating in temple precincts or as a bequest given by the more well-to-do in honor of a god.”¹⁰

Many of the Corinthians believed that the God of Israel, the God of all Creation, was bigger than all of the other *presumed* gods or lords (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:5), and so it really did not matter if they ate meat that had been involved in temple sacrifice. However, those believing themselves to have “knowledge” (1 Corinthians 8:1-3), were probably not among the poor in Corinth, who would have infrequently eaten such meat. Instead, those believing themselves to have “knowledge” were likely persons of substance who (apparently) needed to attend pagan gatherings for their business or social interests. An interpreter like David Prior, who actually concludes that the Apostle Paul would not have enforced the Apostolic decree in Corinth, does, however, raise the awareness of what some of the thinking of various Corinthians could have been:

“[W]hat possible propriety could there be for those set free in Jesus Christ to develop pernicky scruples about food, especially when thereby they virtually cut themselves off from everybody else in Corinth? Not only would they become a laughing-stock, but all effective evangelism would be virtually annihilated.”¹¹

And, indeed, the scene in 1 Corinthians 10:14-33 which follows, involving either accepting or declining an invitation to eat in a pagan home, is likely concerned with the issue of evangelism (discussed further).

⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 357.

⁹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp 360-361.

¹⁰ Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, pp 189-190.

Ibid., 190 goes into how the Ancient Mediterranean diet was not as meat-oriented as the present Western diet is.

¹¹ Prior, 141.

The Apostle Paul is clear that Messiah followers are to “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14) or “shun the worship of idols” (RSV). But, this section of his correspondence with the Corinthians is indicative of how he has to reason through with a certain sector of them, not only to cross-examine their arguments and positions, but for them to see if the actions being performed by them are at all helpful or beneficial for others in the faith community. Witherington offers the following useful summary:

“The situation seems to have three components. First, some of the Corinthians who claim to have ‘knowledge’ are rejecting Paul’s earlier prohibition of going to pagan temples, even in the case of the dinner parties being held there. Second, in their letter to Paul they are defending their right to go to a temple for a meal with the words ‘there are no such things as idols, and food is irrelevant so far as our standing with God is concerned.’ Their argument is based on their Christian *gnōsis* [γνῶσις] (knowledge) that only God is God and food is morally neutral. Therefore, eating in temples dedicated to so-called gods is harmless. Their position entails a rejection of Paul’s advice since he already ruled on this matter. Third, bad as their rejection of Paul’s earlier dictum is, this group of Corinthians is going a step further in the wrong direction by encouraging, perhaps even causing, some Christians (‘the weak’) to join with them in meals at temples, with the result that their Christian character and lives are being destroyed and their moral consciousness is being defiled.”¹²

Witherington goes on to advise that the terms or implications which one sees regarding the “**weak**” (1 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 10, 11, 12), *not* be read in terms of the later discussion seen in Romans ch. 14, which is a widely different issue altogether.¹³ The two groups present in the discussion of 1 Corinthians 8, and whether or not it was acceptable for the Corinthian Believers to partake of meat sacrificed to idols at a local temple or shrine, were actually the “**weak**” and the “**knowledgeable**” (1 Corinthians 8:1, 7, 10, 11). (Paul does have the liberty to vary his application of those who were “**weak**,” “**knowledgeable**,” and also “**strong**” [cf. Romans 15:1], in various contexts.)¹⁴ So serious was the issue of participation in local idolatry by Messiah followers, that those of the assemblies at Pergamum and Thyatira were both admonished by Yeshua for this sin:

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of immorality*” (Revelation 2:14).

“But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Revelation 2:20).

The late First Century C.E. *Didache*, with the intention of the Apostolic decree in view, would also admonish, “Now concerning food, bear what you are able, but in any case keep strictly away from meat sacrificed to idols, for it involves the worship of dead gods” (6:3).¹⁵

Is there any relationship to the eating of meats from animals sacrificed to idols, and the Torah’s dietary code regarding clean and unclean? Obviously, such as during the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., when it is stated how both “swine and common animals”¹⁶ (1 Maccabees 1:47, NETS) were sacrificed on the Temple Mount, this involved more than just pigs. It would have also involved animals which were listed as clean in the food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, such as sheep, goats, cattle, and various forms of fowl, but when offered in pagan sacrifice would obviously be considered *koinos* (κοινός): common, profane, or

¹² Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, pp 186-187.

¹³ Also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 360.

¹⁴ This has been analyzed in the author’s commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

¹⁵ Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 355.

¹⁶ Grk. *húeia kai ktēnē koina* (ἕεια καὶ κτήνη κοινά).

defiled.¹⁷ In the context of a Corinthian Believer eating at an idols' temple, whatever fare was being served—be it pork or beef or chicken—was considered contaminated and off limits for God's people.¹⁸

Understanding the scene of 1 Corinthians 8 is certainly important for evaluating an Apostolic theology of eating—and **within Paul's discussion are some highly imperative assertions made about the nature of the Father and the Son** (1 Corinthians 8:4-6), **connected to the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema***. The issue of eating or not eating in an open temple of idolatry is, as will be noted, different from the scene which will follow in 1 Corinthians 10:14-33, of Believers being served meat in a private home by idolaters.

8:1 As 1 Corinthians 8:1 reads in a Messianic version like the TLV, "Now concerning idol sacrifices, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." The term of importance is *eidōlothutos* (εἰδωλόθυτος), "**someth. offered to a cultic image/idol, food sacrificed to idols**" (BDAG),¹⁹ notably appearing in Acts 15:29 and 21:25. The significance of this term, in association with the Maccabean crisis, and subsequent apostasy from the God of Israel, is to be recognized:

"The tyrant Antiochus, sitting in state with his counselors on a certain high place, and with his armed soldiers standing about him, ordered the guards to seize each and every Hebrew and to compel them to eat pork and food sacrificed to idols [*kreōn hueiōn kai eidōlothutōn*, κρεῶν ὑείων καὶ εἰδωλοθύτων]" (4 Maccabees 5:1-2).

A variety of commentators,²⁰ and modern versions such as the RSV/NRSV/ESV and TNIV/2011 NIV (as well as CJB/CJSB), consider 1 Corinthians 8:1 to include a Corinthian slogan that Paul had to address. This is sometimes associated with those who had previously said in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "Everything is permitted for me" (TLV). Following the NRSV rendering of 1 Corinthians 8:1, one sees the interaction that has been taking place between the Apostle Paul and the apparent "knowledgeable" among the Corinthians:

Paul: Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that

Corinthians: "all of us possess knowledge."

Paul: Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

While *oidamen hoti pantes gnōsin echomen* (οἶδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γινώσκιν ἔχομεν) or "we all have knowledge" (HCSB) is rightly thought to be a Corinthian slogan to which Paul responds, given how such a claim can be easily abused, Garland interjects a variant of this being a Corinthian slogan, instead proposing that Paul has *modified* this slogan, interjecting "all" to make a point:

"Paul seems to have tweaked the Corinthian argument by adding the 'all' in his affirmation that 'we all have knowledge.' The 'we' and the 'all' include himself, and this assertion does not simply reiterate a Corinthian position but reflects a basic Christian convention (cf. Rom. 2:2). He uses the various permutations of the phrase 'we know that' to cite well-known Christian doctrine or generally accepted facts. Christians possess knowledge and have moved from darkness into light (cf. Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 1:5; 2 Cor. 4:6; 8:7; 1 John 2:20). He begins the discussion by reminding them that they are on an equal footing in the discussion...All Christians have knowledge."²¹

Arrogance has arisen among the apparent knowledgeable in Corinth, with "knowledge" (*gnōsis*, γινώσις) even placed in quotation marks " " in the RSV and ESV of 1 Corinthians 8:1:

"Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' 'Knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up" (RSV).

¹⁷ Cf. BDAG, 552.

¹⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 385, is one of the few commentators who actually mentions the issue of the kosher dietary laws here, thinking, "Kosher laws may be a matter of indifference, but idol food is not," basing this claim on 1 Corinthians 7:19 preceding.

¹⁹ BDAG, 280.

²⁰ Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 79; Thiselton, pp 620-622; Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:900.

²¹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp 366-367.

“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up” (ESV).

The thought of 1 Corinthians 13:8, which follows, is appropriate to note here: “Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.” Knowledge is something, in comparison to the love that God requires His own to have toward Him and toward one another, which can be passing. The verb employed in 1 Corinthians 8:1, *phusioō* (φυσιόω), means “fig. **to cause to have an exaggerated self-conception, puff up, make proud**” (BDAG).²² The Goodspeed New Testament has, “Knowledge gives people airs; love is what builds up character.” As Paul had said in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing,” an action which originates from love.

The tenor of 1 Corinthians 8:1 with “Now concerning” (NASU) or “Now about” (NIV), *Peri de* (Περὶ δε),²³ indicates that the issue being discussed in ch. 8 is something that the Corinthians had indeed written or communicated to Paul about, ch. 7 previously having begun with, “Now concerning [*Peri de*] the things about which you wrote...” It is rightly thought that those who believed themselves to be knowledgeable, and hence had little personal issue as Believers in Israel’s Messiah of going to eat in a pagan temple or shrine, were socially distinct from the “weak” Corinthians. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner confirm,

“The two groups involved are probably distinguished socially, with those receiving and accepting invitations to temple dinners and denying that the eating of idol food has any spiritual significance being from the upper echelons of Corinthian society. These are the social climbers who are impressed by their own philosophical sophistication and the lack of sophistication of those complaining about them. Those considered ‘weak’ by that first group probably come from the lower social levels and reflect less sophistication and/or respectability.”²⁴

At the beginning of the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul lauded his audience, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Messiah Yeshua, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge [*en panti logō kai pasē gnōsei*, ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνῶσει]” (1 Corinthians 1:4-5). It is appropriate that we distinguish such proper, godly knowledge in Yeshua, with the *gnōsis* for which the apparent “knowledgeable” in 1 Corinthians 8 are chided. Anthony C. Thiselton interjects, “It may very well be that the Corinthian ‘knowledge’ had a gnostic, antirealist tinge in perhaps suggesting that to participate in eating **meat associated with offerings to pagan deities** would demonstrate their indifference to, and indeed victory over, demonic forces.”²⁵ The presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth may have had some important points, maybe even of some substance, although only on a certain level, for the Apostle Paul to consider. But, knowing that he may not totally win with these individuals in arguing solely on the basis of idolatrous concern, Paul would have to address what would happen to others encountering the actions of such “knowledgeable” ones. Garland further observes,

“Although the Corinthians may have vaunted their knowledge—they knew that there was nothing to idol food—Paul opens his discussion of idol food by asserting that knowledge is not their special domain...All Christians possess knowledge, but not all Christians know as they are meant to know. Knowledge can be incomplete and/or misapplied. Knowledge misapplied can lead to the wrong kind of edifying (1 Corinthians 8:10) and can destroy others (1 Corinthians 8:11). Knowledge that permits one to steamroll over the scruples of others or to harm them or the church {meaning: Body of Messiah} in any way is not Christian knowledge.”²⁶

8:2 The Apostle Paul is very critical of those among the Corinthians who purport to have knowledge, the REB having for 1 Corinthians 8:2, “If anyone fancies that he has some kind of knowledge, he does not yet know in the true sense of knowing.” More literally, the opening clause *ei tis dokei egnōkenai ti* (εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνώκειαι

²² BDAG, 1069.

²³ “And concerning” (YLT).

²⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, 369.

²⁵ Thiselton, 622.

²⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 368.

τι), “If anyone thinks to have known anything” (Brown and Comfort),²⁷ implying that the knowledge in view was of a human-mental than of a Divine-experiential-relational sort. The New Jerusalem Bible paraphrases 1 Corinthians 8:2 with, “Someone may think that he has full knowledge of something and yet not know it as well as he should.” The NLT goes a little further, “Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much.”

Earlier, the Apostle Paul has stated, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise” (1 Corinthians 3:18). Human knowledge, be it of terrestrial things, and most especially of Heavenly things, will never be what it could be, because of mortal limitations. Leon Morris is correct to state, “Knowledge here on earth is, at best, incomplete. No matter what a man *thinks he knows* (the perfect tense [*egnōkenai*, ἐγνώκειναι] implies full and complete knowledge), *he does not yet know* (if the aorist [*egnō*, ἐγνώ] is inceptive, he has not even begun true knowledge) *as he ought* (‘must’, *dei* [δεῖ]). There is no point in priding oneself on what is inevitably partial and incomplete (cf. 13:9).”²⁸

Marion Soards suggests that for 1 Corinthians 8:2, the clause *kathōs dei gnōnai* (καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι) is better rendered “as it is necessary to know according to God” or “as God requires one to know.”²⁹ Ciampa and Rosner offer the more general thoughts, “Probably, in light of 13:12, the point is that they are infatuated with abstract theological or philosophical knowledge but remain woefully deficient in their knowledge (and love) of God. True theological understanding, and certainly true knowledge of God, does not lead one to act in a way which is insensitive to others and offensive to God.”³⁰ No one should ever think, based on the spiritual, theological, and intellectual depth of the Pauline letters, that the Apostle was ever opposed to knowledge. *But, Paul was opposed to knowledge that served little interest for the Body of Messiah and one’s relationship with the Lord.* As he will later state in this letter, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Only God is the One who truly knows (Romans 11:33-36).

8:3 Paul expresses the foundational truth of how “if anyone loves God, he is known by Him” (1 Corinthians 8:3). **It is far more important for a person to be known by God** (cf. Matthew 7:23; Galatians 4:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:19), **than for a person to just “know.”** Morris interjects how, “Paul has given a very gentle rebuke to those who gave too high a place to knowledge.”³¹ Fee goes a little further, stating, “True *gnōsis* consists not in the accumulation of so much data, nor even in the correctness of one’s theology, but in the fact that one has learned to live in love toward all.”³²

While being known by God and enveloped by God’s love toward His own, make the stuff of many times of private prayer and devotion for contemporary Believers, what Paul communicated to the Corinthians here, had a purpose for the situation in view. Ciampa and Rosner, especially given the assertions which will be made in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 following, make a connection with the thrust of the *Shema*, and its monotheistic exclaim:

“The reference to the love of God in the context of a controversy over idolatry and monotheism probably echoes Deuteronomy 6:4-5, where the confession that the Lord is the only God is immediately followed by a command to love him with the totality of one’s being. The love of God, reflected in sincere, wholehearted, and exclusive worship of him, is the fundamental mark of his people. To be ‘known by God’ is to be the object of his gracious elective purpose, to be one of his special people, called to serve him in the world and to be held accountable for one’s faithfulness to the mission assigned by God.”³³

8:4 Being known by the One True God (1 Corinthians 8:3), as opposed to just knowing things about this God (1 Corinthians 8:2), is the most important thing. 1 Corinthians 8:4 begins Paul’s reasoning with the presumed knowledgeable in Corinth: “Therefore concerning the eating of idol sacrifices, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one” (TLV). It is widely recognized by interpreters how

²⁷ Brown and Comfort, 596.

²⁸ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 121.

²⁹ Soards, 172.

³⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, 377.

³¹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 122.

³² Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 368.

³³ Ciampa and Rosner, 378.

there is some connection with the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 intended,³⁴ detectable in 1 Corinthians 8:4, as well as in 1 Corinthians 8:6. Some appeal to “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” is hardly surprising, where the supremacy of the God of Israel as the only God is being reasoned through, and where the relationship of the Messiah of Israel to this God is also to be asserted.

First to be noted is how the statements, made in 1 Corinthians 8:4 probably do include some Corinthian slogans, adhered to by those presumed “knowledgeable,” to validate their behavior in eating in idolatrous temples. Thiselton indicates how this section “contain[s] quotations either from Corinth or from pre-Pauline catechesis.”³⁵ Following the RSV, one can see Paul’s discussion with the Corinthians:

Paul: Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that

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

The importance of recognizing slogans, present in 1 Corinthians 8:4, is due to the negative actions the presumed “knowledgeable” have been performing. Ciampa and Rosner direct, “Both Corinthian statements may be seen as inferences drawn from the *Shema*. They are not merely theoretical inferences, of course, but affirmations (or, rather, denials) that serve to guide the behavior of those who make them.”³⁶ Soards, however, does not differentiate between two separate slogans present in 1 Corinthians 8:4, but noting how a version like the NRSV does this, goes on to state, “in verse 4 Paul is introducing and stating a logic and line of thinking that he will elaborate in the following verses.”³⁷

The slogans or slogan, present in 1 Corinthians 8:4, do reflect some realities asserted by the Tanach. Idols have no existence or power, being vain things (Isaiah 41:29; 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:3-11; 16:19-20; Psalm 115:4-7; 135:15-17; cf. Acts 14:15). Paul actually lauded the Thessalonians, “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). While Paul would agree, to a wide extent, with the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth, about the futility of idols, it is also clear that such “knowledgeable” have missed some very important components of this. Richard B. Hays offers the proper observations,

“Both slogans are consistent with the standard preaching of Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity, which proclaimed the one God and decried the worship of idols. Thus, even more clearly than in the previous cases, these slogans express a theological perspective with which Paul does not disagree; his quarrel is with the Corinthians’ *application* of the slogans. Because the idol has no real existence, they contend, idol worship is a meaningless gesture. Therefore, if Christians find it socially advantageous to eat idol meat, what difference does it make?”³⁸

The tension, in both the Tanach and Second Temple Judaism, is how while idols are vain and futile and worthless, idols *also* represent a demonic reality (Deuteronomy 4:19; 32:15-17, 21; Isaiah 19:3; Psalm 106:37), with dark spiritual powers sitting behind them. Paul himself says this later in this very letter: “No, but *I say* that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons” (1 Corinthians 10:20). And in further correspondence, he refers to Satan as “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). So, while the images of idols, be they of gold, silver, stone, or wood, are vain and futile in light of the God of Israel as Supreme Creator—dark principalities and powers do sit behind those images, with the people who worship them ultimately serving the Adversary. Morris astutely advises how for this passage,

“He is certainly not giving his own full idea on the matter, for he later says that what is sacrificed to idols is actually sacrificed to devils (10:20). There are spiritual beings behind the idols, though not the ones their

³⁴ Bruce, *1 Corinthians*, 80; Blomberg, 161; Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, 198; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 140; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 373.

³⁵ Thiselton, 628.

³⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, 380.

³⁷ Soards, 172.

³⁸ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, pp 138-139.

worshippers thought. But here this is not the point. Paul is prepared to agree that the gods the heathen worship are no gods. In all this ordered universe there is no reality corresponding to idols.”³⁹

While the Apostle Paul would have agreed, albeit conditionally, with the statements “we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one,” there is a definite advantage of the statements of v. 4 being read as a Corinthian slogan or slogans. Soards states as much, in acknowledging how “In 10:20 Paul will state his own clear conviction that behind pagan idols is the reality of demons. Since this seems somewhat different from the assertion that idols are nothing in the world, it may be that his own thinking and teaching are not being presented in the statements recorded in verse 4.”⁴⁰ The remarks made in 1 Corinthians 8:4 about idols being vain and futile, compared to the One God, are incomplete from Paul’s perspective, but were apparently complete from the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth.

8:5 The Apostle Paul will begin to turn the logic of the presumed “knowledgeable,” and their actions, against them, in a very interesting manner of affirmation. Paul agrees, as they would, how, “Granted, there are so-called ‘gods,’ in heaven and on the earth, as there are many gods and many lords” (1 Corinthians 8:5, Common English Bible). Paul notes the presence of *legomenoi theoi* (λεγόμενοι θεοί), “ones being called gods” (Brown and Comfort),⁴¹ as there are many presuming to be gods or lords to which human beings could direct worship or adoration. Both Paul and the presumed “knowledgeable” would be in agreement, how worship of these entities was prohibited (Exodus 20:4-5; Leviticus 19:4; Deuteronomy 4:15-20). Indeed, the assertion of Deuteronomy 10:17 is, “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God...”

There is no doubting in Paul’s mind that the idols the pagans of Corinth served were to classify as so-called “gods” and “lords.” However, for the righteous, Paul asserts that there is One God for them to serve, worship, and obey. And, it needs to be conceded how some of the presumed knowledgeable in Corinth, would probably have recognized how behind idols would have sat dark spiritual forces (1 Corinthians 10:20). Yet, because of their apparent “knowledge” (1 Corinthians 8:2), would it really matter if they ate at a sacrifice offered to a god at a pagan temple, since as servants of the One True God, they were allied to Him and to His final victory?

8:6 Paul’s confession that there is one God and one Lord, which would at least confirm the stated slogan or slogans of the “knowledgeable” Corinthians (1 Corinthians 8:4), is the very reason why their actions of eating meat sacrificed to idols is so wrong. Paul recognizes how for the faith community of Believers, “for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, *Yeshua* the Messiah, through whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (1 Corinthians 8:6, TLV). The claims that are made here, about the Father and Son, are often regarded as being some kind of pre-Pauline credal formula used by the First Century *ekklēsia*,⁴² although some think what is being stated here is original to Paul.⁴³

It is frequently, and we should think correctly, acknowledged among examiners, how the statement of 1 Corinthians 8:6 is based on the language of the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema*, with the Father being represented as “God” and the Son as “Lord.” In the estimation of a theologian like Craig S. Keener, the affirmation of 1 Corinthians 8:6 is highly important, as it demonstrates a significant recognition of *Yeshua* of Nazareth as Divine, by His first followers. He describes,

“Despite the doubts of some that Paul refers to Jesus’s role in creation here, Jewish people viewed wisdom...as a divine attribute, through which God designed and created the world; less than three decades after Jesus’s resurrection, Paul and his [assemblies] already see Jesus filling this role...Such a rapid identification of a movement’s founder as divine seems unprecedented, certainly for a monotheistic movement committed to the *Shema*’.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 122.

⁴⁰ Soards, 172.

⁴¹ Brown and Comfort, 596.

⁴² Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp 373-374; Thiselton, 632.

⁴³ Ciampa and Rosner, 381.

⁴⁴ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, pp 74-75.

More liberal theologians, and/or examiners holding to a low Christology, would simply assume that in many passages where Yeshua is presented as being Divine, Yeshua is just being equated as the figure of Wisdom (Grk. *sophia*, σοφία; Heb. equiv. *chokmah*, חִכְמָה), present in Proverbs, the Apocrypha, and in the works of Philo. As is seen in the Colossians 1:15-20 hymn, specifically, many of the concepts and vocabulary used of the figure Wisdom are present, but some are specifically subverted to affirm Yeshua as being Divine and uncreated. Sirach 1:4, for example, states that “Wisdom was created before all things.” Colossians 1:17, in stark contrast, states, “He {Yeshua} is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”⁴⁵

In 1 Corinthians 8:6, the Apostle Paul is witnessed reworking the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, as not only does he testify that there is One God, the Father—but that there is also One Lord, Yeshua the Son. This is the Deity to whom all of the righteous are to pay heed. Notice the discernible linguistic connections between Deuteronomy 6:4 in the Septuagint, and how its language has been appropriated to apply to both the Father and Son:

Deuteronomy 6:4 (LXX): *Kurios ho Theos hēmōn Kurios heis estin* (κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν)

1 Corinthians 8:6: *All' hēmin heis Theos ho Patēr ex ou ta panta kai hēmeis eis auton, kai heis Kurios Iēsous Christos di' ou ta panta kai hēmeis di' autou* (ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἷς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ)

In various theological circles, it has been witnessed that 1 Corinthians 8:6 has been known as a kind of “Christian *Shema*,” in that the One God of Israel and the One Lord Yeshua the Messiah are identified side by side with one another. The relationship that the Father and the Son have is presented by Paul in terms of the monotheistic declaration of the Deuteronomy 6:4 exclaim: *Shema Yisrael, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad* (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד). The Son is the Father’s agent of Creation to be sure (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17), but He is identified in 1 Corinthians 8:6 as the One Lord, *heis Kurios* (εἷς κύριος). What makes this important, of course, is how the title *Kurios* was employed in the Greek Septuagint for rendering the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה)—**a status applied directly to the Messiah!** The memorial name of the Eternal God, which was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:15), is something that is possessed by the Messiah (cf. Philippians 2:10-11). In the view of Fee, we see how,

“In the same breath that he can assert that there is only one God, [Paul] equally asserts that the designation ‘Lord,’ which in the OT belongs to the one God, is the proper designation of the divine son. One should note especially that Paul feels no tension between the affirmation of monotheism and the clear distinction of the two persons of Father and Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶

The early Believers affirmed the Son’s relationship to the Father in terms of the Son being the LORD or YHWH of the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema!* In recent Christological studies, this has been explained as the Son being integrated into the Divine Identity of the Godhead. Richard Bauckham states, in his book *Jesus and the God of Israel*, that for 1 Corinthians 8:6, “Paul rewrites the *Shema*’ to include both God and Jesus in the unique divine identity,”⁴⁷ which would obviously force a person to recognize how Yeshua the Messiah is to be considered the LORD God, and not just some kind of supernatural exalted being, yet ultimately not being God. Yeshua’s integration into the Divine Identity, presented in terms of the *Shema*, would guard against any idea that the early Believers thought that there were multiple gods in the Heavens, but obviously that the One God of Israel involved more than the Father. Bauckham further explains,

⁴⁵ For a further review, consult the relevant sections of the commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

⁴⁶ Fee, 375.

Against: Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 459 who does not think that the usage of *Kurios* here should be associated with the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH, and does not even mention the presence of Deuteronomy 6:4.

⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 213.

“In stating that there is one God and one Lord, Paul is unmistakably echoing the monotheistic statement of the Shema’ (‘YHWH our God, YHWH, is one’), whose Greek version in the Septuagint reads: *kurios ho theos hēmōn kurios heis estin*. He has, in fact, taken over all of the words of this statement, but rearranged them in such a way as to produce an affirmation of both one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ...The only possible way to understand Paul as maintaining monotheism is to understand him to be including Jesus in the unique identity of the one God affirmed in the Shema’...Paul is not adding to the one God of the Shema’ a ‘Lord’ the Shema’ does not mention. He is identifying Jesus as the ‘Lord’ (YHWH) whom the Shema’ affirms to be one. This, in Paul’s quite unprecedented reformulation of the Shema’, the unique identity of the one God *consists of* the one God, the Father, *and* the one Lord, his Messiah (who is implicitly regarded as the Son of Father).”⁴⁸

The Father to be regarded as the One God, and the Son as the One Lord (*Kurios*/YHWH), would require not only Yeshua the Son to be considered Deity—but would also require the Godhead as *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) to be plural.⁴⁹ The language proposed by a scholar like Bauckham, that the Son shares the same Divine Identity as His Father, is to be greatly appreciated. What would be intended by the claim, “the Father, from whom are all things,” is that the Father as God is often identified as Creator (Acts 4:24; Romans 11:36; Hebrews 2:10). The Son is widely associated as being the Father’s means of creation, “and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.” While Divine agency in Creation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2) seemingly involved some level of submission (not subordination) from the Son to the Father in this, as the Son obeys the Father and submits to the Father—the Son is seen to be identified with titles that would have normally been exclusively reserved for the Father.

In terms of the circumstances Paul was addressing in Corinth, it is Yeshua the Messiah “through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (RSV) or “through whom we are what we are” (God’s New Covenant-Cassirer). So, in affirming the Father and Son as the Deity to whom all must be loyal, with 1 Corinthians 8:6 being worked around the monotheistic claim of the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema*, the being of a man or woman in Messiah is to be *di’ autou* (δι’ αὐτοῦ) or “through Him.” If the Messiah is the One through whom Believers *are* or *exist*, then the redeemed are hardly to be regarded as some sort of free agents (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:29-30). **Everything, that the redeemed are to do, is to be with what Yeshua has accomplished in mind.** This necessarily would beg the question: *Would the Messiah attend social events in an idol’s temple* (1 Corinthians 8:10-11)? And the answer to this would be a definite, “No.” As the Apostle Paul will later say to the Corinthians, “Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Hays further elaborates,

“Christian thought begins from a confession that binds us specifically to the one God of Israel and declares our personal union with and allegiance to this one God. We exist ‘for him,’ not for our own purposes. To the extent that this confession of the one God echoes the *Shema*, we should also hear the echo of that text’s call to... {quoting Deuteronomy 6:5}.”⁵⁰

Indeed, as Deuteronomy 6:5 exclaims, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

8:7 Paul is in tentative agreement with the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth, in that there is only one God (1 Corinthians 8:4), further affirming how this Deity is present in God the Father and Yeshua the Messiah (1 Corinthians 8:5-6), having just reworked the terminology of the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema* to accommodate for both the Father and the Son. It can be assumed that the presumed “knowledgeable” had known these concepts from Paul and his teachings, and so because of their apparent recognition of the supremacy of the One True God, they believed that they could violate the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:20, 29) and eat of idolatrous sacrifices in a pagan temple or shrine.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp 112-113.

⁴⁹ Consult the various observations made in the article “What Does the Shema Really Mean?”, appearing in the author’s book *Confronting Critical Issues*.

⁵⁰ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 140.

The reality of there being only one God and one Lord (1 Corinthians 8:5-6) has, however, not set in for all of the Corinthian Believers. Paul directs the presumed “knowledgeable,” “But that ‘knowledge’ is not possessed by all; but some, accustomed until now to the idol, eat food as that which has actually been offered to an idol, and so their conscience, being still weak, is defiled” (1 Corinthians 8:7, Montgomery New Testament). While it is appropriate that a few versions place “knowledge” in 1 Corinthians 8:7 in quotation marks “ ” (also Moffat New Testament, Kingdom New Testament), the major issue is actually *hōs eidōlothuton esthiousin* (ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν), “as an idolatrous sacrifice eat [food]” (Brown and Comfort),⁵¹ or “eat food as an idol sacrifice” (TLV). This would mean that among the former pagans of Corinth, not only had the truth of the God of Israel being the One True Creator not taken complete hold in their hearts and minds, but such individuals when eating normal, everyday meals, carried unnecessary guilt in thinking that whatever they were eating may have been an idol’s fare.

Seeing that some of the Believers in Corinth were removed from the worldview that the gods and goddesses of Greco-Roman mythology really did have influence over their lives—**unlike the one God and one Lord** (1 Corinthians 8:5-6)—was not an instantaneous process. Perhaps being superstitious or overly concerned about their former masters, even down to the point of thinking that their normal meals were some kind of idol’s sacrifice, **the last thing such individuals needed was to see fellow Believers actually socializing in an idol’s temple.**

8:8 How should readers approach 1 Corinthians 8:8, “But food will not bring us before God. We are no worse off if we do not eat and no better off if we do eat” (TLV)? Is this a statement of Paul, where he is saying how what one eats is ultimately immaterial, because God is supreme over all? Or, is this the thought of the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth? A version like the NRSV does reflect the view of various examiners that a Corinthian slogan to which Paul must respond appears: “‘Food will not bring us close to God.’ We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.” It might even be better to take *all* of 1 Corinthians 8:8 as a Corinthian slogan to which Paul must respond. Garland correctly advises, “We should not take this statement...to hint that Paul sides with those who think that eating idol food is unobjectionable.”⁵²

Paul would say later in Romans 14:17, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” and there are surely things much bigger in the Kingdom of God than the fare one eats. In the event that a Corinthian Believer might eat meat sacrificed to idols, forgiveness from Him would surely be available. But as the discussion continues, we can see that Paul did not at all endorse the Corinthian Believers going out and eating meat sacrificed to idols. Statements that Paul would have made to the Corinthians during his time with them (Acts 18:1-22), in teaching them about the higher imperatives of loving God and neighbor—in comparison to eating or drinking—could have been easily misapplied and hijacked by those presumed “knowledgeable,” looking for any reason that they could in wanting to eat of idolatrous sacrifices at a local temple.

The advantage of looking at 1 Corinthians 8:8 in total, as a Corinthian slogan, is that the Apostle Paul—who would agree with what is stated only to the point where the Kingdom of God does not begin and end with what one eats—**would not agree that it does not matter if Believers are seen eating in an idol’s temple.** Witherington directs, “The slogans in v. 8 are probably from the Corinthians’ letter. Their point is that food is morally neutral, that there is no moral or religious advantage or disadvantage to eating such food. Paul would agree with this if it were simply a matter of eating at home and if one were not observed by other less bold Christians.”⁵³ Yet, the public behavior and activities of those who have professed trust in the One God of Israel, manifested in God the Father and Yeshua the Lord (1 Corinthians 8:5-6), and its affect on others who have professed such truth, is at stake.

8:9 Paul is not at all happy with the attitude of the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth here, issuing the firm advice, “But be careful that this liberty of yours does not become a pitfall for the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9, REB). Paul does not speak very positively regarding *he exousia humōn autē* (ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὐτῆ), “this

⁵¹ Brown and Comfort, 596.

⁵² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 385.

⁵³ Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, 199.

freedom of yours” (Common English Bible), in what should correctly be taken as a rebuke, not an affirmation. Thiselton indicates, “Nothing could signal more clearly that Paul addresses *the specific use, understanding, and manipulation of a right* which characterized *a certain stance at Corinth*.”⁵⁴ The thought that Believers could actually go eat of an idolatrous sacrifice in a local temple or shrine, and use the reason that the One True God was the only all-powerful Deity as validation, was a *presumed liberty* which had the severe chance of damaging the faith of others. One can certainly detect a distinct parallel with the teaching of Yeshua:

“[B]ut whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!” (Matthew 18:6-7; cf. Mark 9:42).

Paul’s own approach, to the freedom or apparent rights of a redeemed Believer, would be addressed further in 1 Corinthians ch. 9, where the discussion involved his personal ethics of service toward others, both inside and outside of the Body of Messiah.

8:10 If a professing Believer in Corinth would be seen eating at a pagan temple or shrine, perhaps having been invited there by a friend for a social gathering⁵⁵ or a business endeavor to be discussed, than a newer Believer, recently saved from such paganism, might actually relapse. Even though it would seem odd or irregular to modern Western people, to be invited to a local temple or shrine to socialize over a meal, this was something present in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. Referenced by various 1 Corinthians examiners, from the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, is the statement, “Chaeremon requests your company at dinner at the table of the lord Sarapis in the Serapaeum to-morrow, the 15th, at 9 o’clock” (1.110).⁵⁶

Paul’s words to those who thought they had liberty to eat in a place of idolatry are seriously critical due to the negative fallout that could happen: “For if any one should see you, the possessor of ‘knowledge,’ reclining at table in an idol’s temple, would not his conscience, if he were weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols?” (1 Corinthians 8:10, Montgomery New Testament). The REB has an interesting approach to 1 Corinthians 8:10: “If one of them sees you sitting down to a meal in a heathen temple—you with your ‘knowledge’—will not his conscience be emboldened to eat meat consecrated to the heathen deity?” Garland’s conclusion about what could happen to the weak, is most accurate:

“From this person’s limited perspective, the eating is legitimized by the precedent of the knowers. The resulting syncretism opens to the door to polytheism, so contrary to Christian core beliefs. The ubiquitous idolatry in this culture would exert a strong undertow that would drag the person with a weak conscience back into the dark world of demons.”⁵⁷

Later, Paul will address what is to take place when a Corinthian Believer might be invited to the private home of a local pagan to share a meal (1 Corinthians 10:23-30). But, the venue of 1 Corinthians 8 is a **public venue**, where all would be watching.

Some intention between what has been stated earlier in 1 Corinthians 8:1, and what is recognized here in 1 Corinthians 8:10, is present. Both 1 Corinthians 8:1 and 8:10 employ the verb *oikodomeō* (οἰκοδομέω), which would broadly relate to, as summarized by *AMG*, “to build up, establish, confirm. Spoken of the [Body of Christ] and its members who are thus compared to a building, a temple of God, erected upon the one and only foundation, Jesus Christ...and ever built up progressively and unceasingly more and more from the foundation.”⁵⁸ Paul has previously stated in 1 Corinthians 8:1, *hē de agapē oikodomei* (ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ), “but love builds up” (RSV/NRSV/ESV), and here in 1 Corinthians 8:10 states *oikodomēthēsetai* (οἰκοδομηθήσεται), often rendered as “strengthened” (NASU) or “emboldened,” but which as a future passive indicative of *oikodomeō* can also be rendered as “will be built up.” So, with the presumed “knowledgeable”

⁵⁴ Thiselton, 650.

⁵⁵ Cf. Bruce, *1 Corinthians*, 81.

⁵⁶ Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part I (London: Oxford, 1898), 177. Accessible online at <<https://archive.org/stream/oxyrhynchuspapy05huntgoog#page/n4/mode/2up>>.

⁵⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 388.

⁵⁸ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, pp 1030-1031.

caught by various weak among the Messiah followers in Corinth, eating at a pagan temple—far from building up the Body of Messiah, such apparent “knowledgeable” will instead be responsible for building up weaker Believers *unto utter ruin or destruction!*

8:11 Paul could have just told the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth, to avoid pagan temples and shrines, but because of their position of idols being vain and futile, he has had to instead direct their attention to the consequences of their actions. When a weaker Believer, who has not fully come to the realization of there being only one God and one Lord (1 Corinthians 8:5-6), sees others dining in a pagan temple or shrine, Paul makes the assertion, “So he is lost, this weak man, lost by your ‘knowledge.’ This brother for whom Christ died” (1 Corinthians 8:11, Montgomery New Testament). The REB has the more paraphrased, “This ‘knowledge’ of yours destroys the weak, the fellow-Christian for whom Christ died.”

The negative action is represented by the verb *apollumi* (ἀπόλλυμι), which is variably rendered as “destroyed” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NIV), “ruined” (NASU), “perish” (KJV/NKJV), “lost” (New Jerusalem Bible), and with the Phillips New Testament paraphrase, “bring spiritual disaster.” The verb *apollumi* is used elsewhere to describe eternal punishment (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:10).

Paul’s thought in 1 Corinthians 8:11 might be more hypothetical than real, as a relapse into paganism from the weak would probably have to be much more than just a momentary action—similar to the presumed “knowledgeable” *momentarily* eating at a pagan temple—as a regular pattern of return to past sins would probably need to occur, in order for one to be eternally condemned. A short-term spiritual disaster, for sure, would be present. But, if not rectified by the presumed “knowledgeable” changing their actions, then a long-term spiritual abyss for all parties in view, was likely to be seen.

8:12-13 While being convinced of the individual harm the presumed “knowledgeable” would incur to themselves, by eating at a pagan temple or shrine, was likely futile—**the corporate harm toward others in the Body of Messiah**, and indeed **the sinful offense committed against the Messiah Himself**, is emphasized by Paul: “You sin against Christ if you sin against your brothers and sisters and hurt their weak consciences this way” (1 Corinthians 8:12, Common English Bible). Born again Believers, especially those in First Century Corinth, are not individuals off and on their own; they are fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, who are to build up one another in the truths of the faith, standing in solidarity with one another.

Actions like eating in a pagan temple would affect others, and ultimately be an indication of whether or not one was truly loyal to Yeshua. As Thiselton puts it, “it is all the more a terrible affront and betrayal for a ministry which in principle should reflect the *loving self-giving of ‘rights’ for the benefit of the other* to degenerate into the very opposite: *an aggressive bruising which bruises Christ.*”⁵⁹ Paul himself was willing to totally give up the eating of meat, because apparently there were some who thought their regular, normal meals might be tainted by idolatry (1 Corinthians 8:7), and he did not want anyone to be unnecessarily taken away by the enemy. So he says, “Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall” (1 Corinthians 8:13, TNIV).

1 Corinthians 8 application It is absolutely true, as the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth would have said, “An idol has no real existence in the world, and there is only one God” (1 Corinthians 8:4, CJB/CJSB). But Paul would later assert how there were demonic powers behind such idols (1 Corinthians 10:20). And, knowledge of the One True God, the Father and Son (1 Corinthians 8:5-6), does not all of a sudden mean a license to perform actions that are harmful to the faith of others in the community, and also to oneself. Knowledge of who the One True God is, means very little if a person is not known by Him (1 Corinthians 8:2-3)!

The presence of Messiah followers, on the scene of history, is to actually help facilitate the eschatological reality of all nations on Planet Earth recognizing the God of Israel as the only true Creator, as witnessed in various Tanach prophecies, albeit frequently in judgment.⁶⁰ One of the most important summations of what will take place in association with the restoration of Israel’s Kingdom, will indeed be the nations at large turning from their idols, and acknowledging the supremacy of Israel’s God:

⁵⁹ Thiselton, 655.

⁶⁰ Isaiah 19:21; 49:26; Ezekiel 21:5; 28:22-24; 29:6; 30:19, 25-26; 32:15; 35:4, 9, 12, 14-15; 36:23, 36; 37:28; 38:23; 39:6-7.

“But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth. They will all abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into their error” (Tobit 14:5-6, NRSV).

Clearly, the actions of the presumed “knowledgeable” in Corinth, in going to various social gatherings or dinners at local temples and shrines (1 Corinthians 8:10), were not going to help with the mission of seeing pagans abandon their gods and goddesses and turn to the Lord God of Israel. If anything, their actions would have an adverse affect on others (1 Corinthians 8:11), and would severely weaken their public testimony of being different from the pagans around them—not to mention to be in direct violation of the Apostolic decree about the non-Jewish Believers avoiding pagan spheres of social and religious influence (Acts 15:20, 29).

Today, in the largely Judeo-Christian West, there is not an exact equivalent present, to dining in an idolatrous temple, in much of our collective European-American culture. It does need to be recognized, however, that the more Eastern and Asian influences which are seen in the West, the more careful and cautious Believers need to be about where they might choose to dine and socialize. If one were to go to a Chinese or Indian restaurant with an idol or shrine or various images, even if some of them were present more for decoration than not, would the tenor of 1 Corinthians 8 be violated? Ciampa and Rosner certainly do point out, “While the issue of eating food offered to idols strikes many Western readers as irrelevant, it continues to be a live issue in many Asian contexts.”⁶¹ Yet perhaps unlike the First Century Corinthians, however, many of us going to a Chinese restaurant with an idol present, may be able to claim ignorance of not knowing about such images.⁶²

⁶¹ Ciampa and Rosner, 367.

They go on, however, to probe various matters of *adiaphora*, which we should think widely sit outside of the realm of what Paul was actually addressing:

“Can it be wrong for one believer to watch R-rated movies but alright for another to do so? Or for one to observe the Sabbath but not for another? Or for one to use Eastern medical treatments? Or for one to drink alcoholic beverages? And so on” (Ibid., 368).

⁶² A related issue would involve the consumption of meat that has been slaughtered according to the Islamic tradition of *halal*, although some might consider it different, at least in that Islam is considered to sit within the Judeo-Christian and Abrahamic religious sphere.

Consult the FAQ, “Halal Meat (Islam).”