

1 Corinthians 8:1 – 9:27

<p>^{8:1} Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that 'we all have knowledge.' Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. ² If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; ³ but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. ⁴ 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.' 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 are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ 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? ¹¹ For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. ¹² And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.</p>	<p>things sacrificed to idols 'we all have knowledge'</p> <p>not about having knowledge being known by God loving God</p> <p>confession: one God, the Father one Lord, Jesus Christ (Dt.6:8)</p> <p>not all have knowledge participation with the idol loving the weaker brother</p> <p>you who have knowledge things sacrificed to idols</p> <p>weaker brother – ruined</p> <p>you sin against Christ</p> <p>weaker brother – not stumble</p>
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<p>^{9:1} Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?</p>	<p>I am an apostle you are my work in the Lord I am an apostle to you you are the seal of my apostleship</p>
<p>² If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.</p>	
<p>³ My defense to those who examine me is this:</p>	<p>my rights</p>
<p>⁴ Do we not have a right to eat and drink?</p>	
<p>⁵ Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?</p>	
<p>⁶ Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?</p>	
<p>⁷ Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?</p>	<p>soldier</p>
<p>Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it?</p>	<p>vinedresser</p>
<p>Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?</p>	<p>shepherd</p>
<p>⁸ I am not speaking these things</p>	
<p>according to human judgment, am I?</p>	
<p>Or does not the Law also say these things?</p>	<p>Torah</p>
<p>⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses,</p>	
<p>‘You shall not muzzle the ox</p>	<p>Torah quotation (Dt.25:4)</p>
<p>while he is threshing.’</p>	
<p>God is not concerned about oxen, is He?</p>	<p>Torah application</p>
<p>¹⁰ Or is He speaking altogether for our sake?</p>	
<p>Yes, for our sake it was written,</p>	
<p>because the plowman ought to plow in hope,</p>	<p>plowman</p>
<p>and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.</p>	<p>thresher</p>
<p>¹¹ If we sowed spiritual things in you,</p>	
<p>is it too much if we reap material things from you?</p>	
<p>¹² If others share the right over you,</p>	
<p>do we not more?</p>	<p>my rights</p>
<p>Nevertheless, we did not use this right,</p>	
<p>but we endure all things</p>	
<p>so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.</p>	<p>not using my rights in the gospel</p>
<p>¹³ Do you not know that those who perform sacred services</p>	
<p>eat the food of the temple,</p>	
<p>and those who attend regularly to the altar</p>	<p>the Temple parallel</p>
<p>have their share from the altar?</p>	
<p>¹⁴ So also the Lord directed</p>	
<p>those who proclaim the gospel</p>	<p>the Lord’s command in the gospel</p>
<p>to get their living from the gospel.</p>	

¹⁵ But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.	not using my rights my boasting
¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.	I am under compulsion
¹⁷ For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.	my reward if voluntarily I have a stewardship
¹⁸ What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.	my reward not using my rights
¹⁹ For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.	all, to win more
²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;	Jews under Law (Gentile God-fearer?)
²¹ to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.	without Law (Gentile)
²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.	weak (Jew) all, to save more
²³ I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.	I preach the gospel I may partake
²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.	parable: runner
²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.	self-control
²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;	parable: runner parable: boxer
²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.	I preach the gospel I will not be disqualified

Historical and Cultural Background

Idols, Gods, and Demons

- The best meat was eaten in the pagan temples, because of all the sacrifices brought there. Almost all major festivals were celebrated there. Meat was sold in the marketplaces but its price was relatively high. Dr. Gordon Fee argues that the entire section 8:1 – 10:22 refers to ‘the eating of sacrificial food at the cultic meals in the pagan temples... Then, in 10:23 – 11:1 he concludes with the matter of idol food sold in the market and eaten in private homes... The eating of cultic meals was a regular part of worship in antiquity. This is true not only of 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 celebrate of various kinds... 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... and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.’¹
- Paul’s reference to ‘gods’ (8:5) must be understood in context of the larger discussion in 8:1 – 11:1. Beings called ‘gods’ exist but are not peers to the one true God. Rather, ‘gods’ are the supernatural beings to which the physical idols point. Paul regarded them as demonic.
- Paul agrees with Moses on this point, who said that Israel sacrificed to *demons* in the wilderness: ‘They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread’ (Dt.32:17). Luke via Stephen also refers to demons (Acts 7:42 – 43).

Isthmian Games

- In 9:23 – 27, Paul draws on the Corinthian backdrop of the Isthmian Games. He speaks of a race, prize, everyone who competes in the games, a perishable wreath, I discipline my body, not be disqualified.

Israel’s Story

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the Jewish Exodus story before as a precursor to their own spiritual parallel story.

- *Passover Deliverance*: Christ is our passover lamb who delivers us from sin (1 Cor.5:7 – 8)
- *Unleavened Bread*: We are to be ‘unleavened bread.’ Just as God cleansed Israel of leavened bread, and as Christ cleansed his body (individual) of sin, so Christ cleanses his body (corporate) of sin. (1 Cor.5:7 – 8)
- *Community Responsibility*: The community must participate with Christ in the cleansing of his community, just as Israel participated with God in the cleansing of their community (1 Cor.5:13).
- *Commandments*: Paul gave the Corinthians a ‘ten commandments’ list (1 Cor.6:9 – 10), like Moses gave Israel at Sinai.
- *God’s Dwelling Place*: God came to dwell among the Corinthians by His Spirit (1 Cor.6:16 – 20), like God came to dwell with the Israelites in the tabernacle.
- *One God, One Lord*: In this section, Paul quotes the Shema creed of Deuteronomy 6:8 (1 Cor.8:6), identifying ‘the one God’ as the Father and ‘the one Lord’ as Jesus Christ.

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, also edited by Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1987), p.359 - 361

Questions

1. Summarize the previous session. In this series, I studied 10:1 – 11:1 *before* 8:1 – 9:27.
2. How does Paul talk about the body in this section?
 - a. *He limits what you can do with your body*: Eating is a bodily gesture that meant union with and allegiance to a false god (demon) in the context of idol temples.
 - b. *He challenges us to use our bodies for the sake of others*: Paul also pushes his body and challenges himself for the sake of others and the mission of Jesus.
3. Why would some Christians in Corinth be going into the idol temples of Zeus, Ares, Aphrodite, etc.?
 - a. Some might have been drawn in by the social pressure or spiritual worries about appeasing a god.
 - b. Some had ‘knowledge’ that the idols weren’t real, which is what Paul responds to in 8:1 – 13.
 - c. Some thought that demons were not real at all (see 10:1 – 11:1).
4. Who are ‘the weak’ in 8:1 – 13? What clues do we have to describe them?
5. In 9:1 – 18, why does Paul speak about his rights as an apostle? He uses himself as an example of someone who does not use their ‘rights.’
 - a. In 9:1 – 14, he talks about foregoing the financial support that Jesus said was ok.
 - i. Is he serious about the ‘threshing ox’ quotation from Dt.25:4 in 1 Cor.9:9 – 10? Did he really think it applied to himself and the apostles? Well, what the example serves to highlight is that he is the lesser, the Corinthians are the greater. The ox serves the humans. The humans are to take care of the ox.
 - ii. Is Paul saying that he is a priest of sorts, like the Israelite priests in the Old Testament? He does not say that he is a priest and the Corinthian Christians are ‘ordinary Israelites’ so he stands in between them and God. **Big Point Here.** He says what he does is like serving at the altar in the Temple. They are the altar, the temple (3:10 – 15). He is the lesser, they are the greater.
 - b. In 9:15 – 18, what does Paul think his reward is? We’re not sure what he expects, but he gets a reward for going above and beyond Jesus’ command. Jesus allowed him to benefit materially and financially from the people he taught. Paul declined to take that support. He was a tentmaker and earned his own way, instead.
6. In 9:19 – 22, trace the Gentile vs. Jewish dynamic through the section
 - a. All in 9:19
 - b. Jewish in 9:20a
 - c. Those under the Law in 9:20b = Gentile converts to Judaism
 - d. Those not under the Law in 9:21 = Gentile pagans
 - e. Weak in 9:22a = who must be *Jewish* based on the chiasmic structure
 - f. All in 9:22b
7. Why is it specifically Jewish believers in Jesus that are ‘weak’?
 - a. That’s how the Gentile Corinthian Christians were looking at them. It’s not Paul’s actual opinion.
 - b. He challenges ‘the strong’ in 10:22 by saying, ‘Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than he, are we?’
 - c. In 8:10, he says that ‘strength’ could direct a person in a wrong direction. He says, ‘will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?’ This phrase means eating in an idol temple (see Gordon Fee). The person might interpret that to mean that worshiping Jesus and worshiping Poseidon can really be synthesized. That is not strength. That is an abuse and distortion of strength.
 - d. In 9:19 – 22, he defends ‘the weak’.
 - e. In 10:14 – 22, he defends the essential position of ‘the weak’, that there are demons involved in the idol temples. So it turns out that the Jewish insight into the demons is correct.
 - f. Application: Let’s stick with the *Jewish – Gentile cultural difference* because it is still relevant, before we move on to consider how far to apply this.
 - i. How do we learn from Messianic Jews today, and keep reaching out to people of Jewish background? See Appendix A below (**leader, print this out beforehand**). How would you feel about making these changes to your life or worship routine? If you were to try to reach out full time to Jewish people, that is what you’d probably need to do. If you wanted to participate part time in contextualized ministry to Jewish people, that is what you’d need to learn for those occasions.

- ii. If you wanted a solid New Testament understanding of why that's important, and how to do it, please read (or listen to) any of N.T. Wright's material on Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*. That book is not a treatise on how to individually be right with God, which is how Protestants tend to read it. *Romans* is about how Gentile Christians need to understand the Hebrew Scriptures, respect Judaism, continue to reach out to Jewish people in appropriate ways, and allow for a diversity within the church of Jewish believers and Gentile believers in ways that protect and honor the cultural expression of Jewish belief in Jesus.
 - iii. Notice that you might feel some resistance to experiencing Christian faith in a different cultural form. Or you might feel resistance to trying to say Shoah instead of Holocaust because it's less familiar. Or you might feel resistance to questioning American nationalism. Those are places where we might insist on *our rights*. That is where we need to look at the apostle Paul to see how he was willing to give up certain of his rights to call and welcome others into God's family, show his appreciation of them, and respect them.
 - iv. Reminder that we do not have the 'right' to overlook spiritual realities (demons in idol temples) or Jesus' commandments. Paul said that he is 'not being without the law of God but [is] under the law of Christ' in 9:21.
8. Mission to others, contextualizing the gospel message
- a. Application: If you want to press further with the question of contextualization and its shape and its limits, we would have to get into much deeper waters. That is formally the discipline called 'missiology.' It's one of my favorite subjects! Contact me for more info.
 - b. Questions that tend to come up with this passage:
 - i. What about eating ancestor worship meals in Asian culture? My belief is that it really does depend on what observers around us believe. If everyone else can take it as a sign of honor, it's okay with me. If people take it as a sign of loyalty, allegiance, and fealty, then no. If people take it as something is going on with actual spirits, then no.
 - ii. What about secret societies like the Masons? Although I'm no expert in the Masons, I would say No. The whole premise of the organization is questionable.
 - iii. What about Haitian voodoo? According to my friends at Haiti Partners, both Haitian and non-Haitian, there is a way to affirm certain values in voodoo as a culture: planting trees, decisions as a community, drums as a musical instrument. Of course you want to stay away from the demons!
 - c. Social effectiveness – you can't join everyone else at standard holidays, celebrations, etc.? Isn't it just about food, which is harmless? No. It's about *what we do with our bodies in certain spiritual and social contexts*
 - i. The Corinthian Christians needed to go to, or even create, neutral spaces where they could eat (more meat) with their non-Christian friends.
 - ii. Illus: We need to create neutral spaces where non-Christians can be with us. Like when my wife and housemates were trying to reach out to young people in our neighborhood. They would often hang out together outside smoking marijuana and swearing. When we tried to hang out with them, they would either laugh at us or ignore us. So we spent \$7,000 remodeling our basement to turn it into a teen outreach and hangout space. We moved a boiler around, cleared and cleaned a big area, and then advertised to friends that we could use thing to reach out. We got a TV, a Dance-Dance Revolution, board games, a foosball table, and some furniture. Our housemate Leslie was the primary person who hung out with the youth during certain times, for homework help and hangout times. That period of time lasted for 6 months or so. During that time, 4 – 5 teenage boys went with Leslie fairly regularly to church worship services!

Appendix A: Messianic Jews and Some Cultural and Theological Tendencies

The following is taken from <http://www.messianicworship.com/html/differences.html>²

- Messianics observe traditional Jewish holidays such as Purim, Chanukah, etc. Christians do not.
- Messianics observe the biblical feasts of Vayikra (Leviticus) 23 such as Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Rosh HaShanah (Feast of Trumpets), Sukkot (Feast of Booths) and Passover. Christians do not.
- Messianics do not observe Christian holidays that were borrowed from paganism, such as Christmas and Lent or were simply concocted.
- Messianics do not use Easter bunnies, Easter eggs, Christmas trees, etc., (which are part of Christian tradition in many parts of the world although they are not part of official Christian theology).
- Messianics worship on the biblical Sabbath, i.e., Friday evening till Saturday evening, not Sunday. HaShem says the Sabbath is an eternal covenant between Him and the descendants of Israel. (Sh'mot/Exodus 31:16).
- Messianics cant the Shema, and traditional Jewish blessings that most Christians have never heard of, e.g., the kiddush and the Aaronic benediction.
- Messianics cant the Torah portion in Hebrew at worship services.
- Messianic preaching is mainly from the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), although references to the B'rit Chadasha are common.
- Messianic Judaism emphasizes the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, whereas Protestantism and Catholicism hardly ever mention it.³
- Messianic Judaism emphasizes Jewish traditions that do not conflict with the Bible, whereas Protestantism and Catholicism totally ignore those traditions.
- Messianic Judaism asserts that the Torah (literally, "teaching") is still in effect (as modified by Yeshua). Christianity claims that once Jesus "fulfilled the Law" it no longer applies.
- Messianic Jews bar-mitzvah their sons and bat-mitzvah their daughters. Christians don't.
- A Jewish person who converts to Protestantism is referred to as a Hebrew Christian, not a Messianic Jew.
- Messianic Judaism and Protestantism teach the biblical doctrine that salvation is a free gift from G-d, by faith in Yeshua.
- Messianics do not need to be proselytized into Christianity. We already know who Messiah is and what he did to provide salvation for his people.
- Messianics use the same scriptures as Protestants, including the common translations, e.g., NIV and New King James Version. Of course, it is much more common to find a Messianic who has studied biblical Hebrew than a Christian.
- Messianics only baptize believers, not babies, and only baptize by immersion, since the practice described in the B'rit Chadasha is actually derived from a mikvah, a Jewish ritual purification bath.

I would add the following considerations:

- Given that the word 'holocaust' is a compound of the Greek words *holos* and *kaustos*, which when put together mean *burnt offering*, we should understand why many observant Jews refuse to the Nazi action 'the Holocaust.' Equating human sacrifice with a burnt offering was rejected in Judaism when God provided Abraham with a ram in place of his son (Gen.22). It is not only abhorrent, but theologically blasphemous. Jews use the Hebrew word 'Shoah,' meaning calamity, catastrophe, "a momentous tragic event ranging from extreme misfortune to utter overthrow or ruin" (*Merriam-Webster*).
- Given the Gentile anti-Semitism in various 'Christian' countries and in the name of Christianity, I would guess that nationalism and patriotism are difficult subjects for many Jews. The tight links between American Protestant evangelicalism and nationalism in particular may be difficult. Note that in the U.S., secular Jews tend to be the leading voices championing civil rights, individual human rights, etc.

² See also <http://shema.com/messianic-judaism/what-is-it/> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messianic_Judaism and <http://bethyeshuaboston.com/> (187 Church St., Newton MA).

³ Mako's note: As evidence, most Protestant systematic theologians tell the biblical story as 'creation – fall – redemption (Christ) – consummation.' The long history of God and Israel are totally ignored in that presentation. The underlying reason is because most Protestants adhere, explicitly or implicitly, to penal substitutionary atonement and therefore mark biblical time in terms of changes in the *legal status* of God's people. I tell the biblical story as 'creation – fall into corruption – diagnosis (Israel) – cure (Christ and mission) – consummation.' I believe in the medical substitutionary atonement ('reconciling exchange', which is part of the Christus Victor atonement package).