

All to the Glory of God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Corinthians 8; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 9:1–6; 1 Cor. 10:5–22; Deut. 6:4, 5; Mark 12:28–31.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (*1 Corinthians 10:31, NKJV*).

First Corinthians 8–10 brings the discussion on sexuality (*in chapters 5–6*) to a conclusion at the same time that it introduces Paul's answers to specific questions asked through a letter (*1 Cor. 7:1*) from the Corinthians. These answers will dominate the remainder of 1 Corinthians.

The transitional nature of 1 Corinthians 7 indicates that sexual immorality (*chapters 5–7*) and idolatry (*chapters 8–10*) are related topics. Indeed, they are often mentioned together in the New Testament (*see Acts 15:20, 29; Acts 21:25; 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:15*).

In general, while in 1 Corinthians 5–7 Paul deals with the problem of sexual immorality, in 1 Corinthians 8–10 his main concern is the issue of idolatry. He states that Christians must flee from both (*1 Cor. 6:18, 1 Cor. 10:14*).

Last week, we saw that by being a temple of the Holy Spirit (*1 Cor. 6:19, 20*), one can flee from sexual immorality. This week, we will see that one can flee from idolatry by doing “all to the glory of God” (*1 Cor. 10:31, NKJV*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.

Knowledge Versus Love

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1–13. Why does Paul contrast knowledge with love, and what is the context here? What point is he making?

Paul uses the theme of food offered to idols in order to address a deeper issue: the lack of love for others (*1 Corinthians 8*). The matter of food offered to idols split the church of Corinth into two groups. Some believed that their knowledge about the nonexistence of other gods gave them the right to eat anything (*1 Cor. 8:4*). These are referred to as the “strong” (*1 Cor. 4:10*). Those who opposed this behavior are called the “weak” (*1 Cor. 8:9–12*). Paul uses such a label because they did not overcome some superstitious beliefs that marked their previous pagan experience. When seeing the “strong” eating food offered to idols, they might conclude that Christianity and idolatry were compatible. So, Paul did not want the “strong” to become a stumbling block to the weak.

The Bible sees the act of eating food offered to idols very negatively (*Acts 15:20, 29; Acts 21:25; compare with Rev. 2:14, 20*). However, Paul does not utter as radical statements as one sees in these passages. This is because his primary concern regards the lack of unity that the misuse of knowledge could cause. Paul is not criticizing knowledge as evil in itself; instead, he’s against the kind of knowledge that leads to arrogance and division in the church. Knowledge without love is not true knowledge at all (*1 Cor. 8:2*). True knowledge arises only when one loves God and is known by Him (*1 Cor. 8:3*).

Quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, Paul shows that believers must know that there is only one God (*1 Cor. 8:4–6*). Interestingly, he follows the same idea one sees in Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, where the statement that our God is one is followed by the command “You shall love the LORD your God” (*NKJV*). For both Paul and Moses, knowledge without love is worthless.

Confident in their knowledge, the “strong” believed that eating food sacrificed to idols was harmless. As we will see on Wednesday and Thursday, Paul conceded to them that right under certain conditions. However, if that became a stumbling block for the “weak” (*1 Cor. 8:9*), it should be avoided. Christians are supposed to practice self-denial out of love for Christ and others.

Paul argues that, without love, knowledge may become a bad thing (*1 Corinthians 8*). In what situations can knowledge without love indeed be bad?

Selfless Love

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1–6. How does this passage provide a practical example of what it means to practice self-denial motivated by love?

At first sight, it looks as though Paul’s defense of his apostleship, in 1 Corinthians 9, has nothing to do with the previous discussion on knowledge versus love. One cannot forget, though, that the Bible was not originally written in chapters. What Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 9 is not disconnected from the preceding material. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 9 offers a practical example of selfless love for Christ and for the brethren. For the sake of love, Paul relinquishes a few rights.

“To eat and drink” (*1 Cor. 9:4, NKJV*). Here food and drink represent financial assistance in general. As an apostle, Paul had the right to receive material support from those to whom he ministered. Other religious leaders in his time used to do just that. But he didn’t; instead, he supported himself by making tents (*Acts 18:3*).

“To take along a believing wife” (*1 Cor. 9:5, NKJV*). A married apostle was allowed to make a missionary journey with his wife at the church’s expense. Examples of missionary couples include Priscilla and Aquila (*Rom. 16:3*) and Andronicus and Junia (*Rom. 16:7*). But Paul was unmarried (*1 Cor. 7:8*). He could get married and then benefit from the right of being accompanied by a wife, with financial support for both.

“To refrain from working” for a living (*1 Cor. 9:6, NKJV*). Paul and Barnabas had the right to earn wages for their missionary work (*1 Cor. 9:4–6*). Paul made tents for a living (*Acts 18:3*), but we don’t know what Barnabas’s occupation was. We know that he was very generous (*Acts 4:36, 37*), and thus, he was willing to support himself.

In 1 Corinthians 9:7–11, Paul develops the idea of 1 Corinthians 9:6 in order to show that it is fair for him and Barnabas to earn a living from the church (*1 Cor. 9:11, 12*). The Lord Himself commanded, “Those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (*1 Cor. 9:14, NKJV; compare with 1 Tim. 5:18*). Nevertheless, Paul says, “We have not made use of this right” (*1 Cor. 9:12, ESV*). Thus, Paul presents himself as an example of self-denial (*1 Cor. 9:1–18*) and argues that this benefits the preaching of the gospel in Corinth (*1 Cor. 9:19–23*).

What are things that, though they perhaps are due you, you might still be better off relinquishing in order to be a more effective witness for the Lord?

Learning From the Past

After providing an example of self-denial from his own experience, Paul turns more particularly toward the issue of idolatry. In a sense, 1 Corinthians 10 develops the idea of 1 Corinthians 9:27, where Paul comments that he exercises self-discipline in order not to become disqualified. He wants the Corinthians to follow his example, but Jesus is the model *par excellence* (1 Cor. 11:1).

Read 1 Corinthians 10:7–11. What sins did Israel commit in the wilderness, and why do the privileges granted to them make their sins even worse?

In 1 Corinthians 10:1–5, Paul alludes to the history of God’s people in the wilderness. The reference to the cloud and the sea brings God’s leading, presence, and protection to mind. In turn, food and drink stand for God’s provision. Paul refers to the experience of Israel in the cloud and sea as a baptism, analogous to Christian baptism. Likewise, by referring to food and drink, Paul alludes to the Lord’s Supper.

In other words, 1 Corinthians 10 teaches that, in a sense, Christians are living the same experiences as Israel did. However, Paul recalls the history of Israel because he does not want that history to repeat itself. Despite all the privileges Israel had, many of the people nevertheless desired evil things (1 Cor. 10:6), such as idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7) and sexual immorality (1 Cor. 10:8). No wonder, then, that “God was not pleased with most of them” (1 Cor. 10:5, NIV).

It is easy to point the finger at ancient Israel and say they committed gross sins. However, Paul argues that Christians are susceptible to practicing similar sins despite their immense privilege of knowing the history of Christ. This is clear in the warning: “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV). The phrase “who thinks” suggests that some in the church did not realize they were in danger of falling into those sins. Do we run the same risk today?

“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” Who among us has not experienced the reality of that warning?

The Bible says that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, “but with the temptation will also make the way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV). Why, then, do we still find it so easy to fall into sin?

Warning Against Idolatry

Read 1 Corinthians 10:5–22. Why must we flee from idolatry?

In 1 Corinthians 10:14–22, Paul resumes the issue of food offered to idols. Offering food to idols may be strange in many cultures today, but it was common in biblical times. When animals were sacrificed to the gods in the heathen temples, part of the animal was given to the officiating priests, who sold the meat. Some of this meat found its way into the public markets. Because this meat was not kept separate from other meat that was also offered for sale in the market, a Christian might unknowingly purchase meat that had been offered to idols. The counsel of the apostle is that such meat may be freely purchased by Christians.

Nevertheless, while meat previously sacrificed in a temple could be eaten by Christians at home (*1 Cor. 8:1–13*), the practice of going into pagan temples and participating in their festivals was clearly forbidden for Christians. The criterion is clear: Christians are allowed to eat that meat at home because the idols are nothing (*1 Cor. 8:4*); however, Christians must not participate in pagan ceremonies because this corresponds to worshiping demons (*1 Cor. 10:20, 21*). Taking part in pagan rituals equals having communion with demons (*1 Cor. 10:20*), just as taking part in the Lord's Supper equals having communion with Christ (*1 Cor. 10:16*).

Thus, Paul says, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons” (*1 Cor. 10:21, NKJV*). As Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters” (*Matt. 6:24, NKJV*).

Paul teaches that God requires wholehearted loyalty. He implies that idolatry provokes “the Lord to jealousy” (*1 Cor. 10:22, NKJV*). For that not to happen, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 8:4–6, provides an infallible rule against idolatry, by alluding to Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God *with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*” (*NKJV; emphasis supplied*). To this idea of loving God above all things in Deuteronomy 6:5, Jesus added, “ ‘ ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ’ ” (*Mark 12:31, NKJV; see also Lev. 19:18*).

An idol doesn't have to be a stone statue. We can make an idol out of just about anything. What idols, if any, do you need to flee from in your own life?

Overcoming Idolatry

In 1 Corinthians 8:1–3, Paul argues that love for God keeps one safe from idolatry. This argument is resumed and further developed in 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1. In 1 Corinthians 8:3, he speaks about our love for God. He says, “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being” (*1 Cor. 10:24, NKJV*). This is love for others.

Read Mark 10:17–22 and Mark 12:28–31. What do these two passages have in common, and how do they apply to the situation in 1 Corinthians 10?

Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians 10 precisely what Jesus did in Mark 12:28–31; namely, he binds together the two great commandments of the law: love for God above all, and love for others. In the story of the rich young ruler (*Mark 10:17–22*), Jesus unites these two kinds of love, and does so by respectively alluding to Deuteronomy 6:4 (*see Mark 10:18*) and the second table of the Decalogue (*see Mark 10:19*). The problem of that rich young man is that he loved his possessions more than he loved God and his neighbors (*Mark 10:22*). He valued his treasure on earth above the treasures in heaven. He valued his money above the poor (*Mark 10:21*). He was an idolater.

Following the teachings of Jesus, Paul hints that the principle of loving God above all and the neighbor as oneself is to be applied to the hypothetical situations he mentions in 1 Corinthians 10:27, 28. This means that even lawful things may not be helpful or edifying since they can be offensive to someone else’s conscience (*1 Cor. 10:23*). This principle is masterly synthesized in the words “Do all to the glory of God” (*1 Cor. 10:31, NKJV*). By saying that all must be done to the glory of God, Paul indicates that idolatry can manifest itself in the most varied forms, for anything that usurps the glory that belongs to God alone is a form of idolatry (*Isa. 42:8*).

Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1 serve as a conclusion to chapters 8–10. He makes it clear he did not seek his own advantage, “but that of many, that they may be saved” (*1 Cor. 10:33, ESV*). That is how he imitated Christ (*1 Cor. 11:1*).

How can you learn to better love your neighbor as yourself?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Idolatry at Sinai,” pp. 315–330, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“How much good might be done if we would make a right use of our associations with one another! Every one who has received of the heavenly benefits is under obligation to shed some light on the pathway of others. . . . Then all those who truly love God will cease their idolatry of self.”—Ellen G. White, in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 18, 1884, p. 730.

“Paul urged his brethren to ask themselves what influence their words and deeds would have upon others and to do nothing, however innocent in itself, that would seem to sanction idolatry or offend the scruples of those who might be weak in the faith. ‘Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. . . .’

“The apostle’s words of warning to the Corinthian church are applicable to all time and are especially adapted to our day. By idolatry he meant not only the worship of idols, but self-serving, love of ease, the gratification of appetite and passion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 316, 317.

“If you see that by doing certain things which you have a perfect right to do, you hinder the advancement of God’s work, refrain from doing those things. Do nothing that will close the minds of others against the truth. . . . All things may be lawful, but all things are not expedient.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 215.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 According to Paul, the behavior of a mature Christian can sometimes inhibit the growth of an immature Christian. Think of situations in which this may happen. Why is the principle of loving God above all, and the other as oneself, the only way to deal with this challenge?
- 2 What are some idols that even Christians can end up worshipping, if not careful? What are some good things that we can turn into idols? Also, how do you know if something that you care greatly about has become an idol?
- 3 Paul says he disciplined his body and brought it into subjection so he would not become disqualified when preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 9:27). Based on this week’s study, think about what can disqualify a person as a preacher of the gospel.
- 4 In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul addresses the dangers of idolatry and says, “Flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). Why is idolatry so bad?

The Davis Indians: Part 1

By MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Ovid Elbert Davis was born in Michigan on April 3, 1868. In 1902, he was inspired by Ellen White's counsel to become a missionary, so he completed a ministerial course and accepted a call to work among the indigenous peoples of Alaska and then British Columbia.

On January 19, 1906, the General Conference voted to send Davis to British Guiana (Guiana), where the Adventist work recently had been started. He married Carrie Rosley in April, and the couple went to their new mission field the following month.

Davis distributed literature during his first two years in British Guiana. Then, in 1910, he reported organizing a new church 160 miles up the Barama River. It would become the Rio Paruime Mission. It was also in 1910 that Davis received a request from tribes deep in the interior that had never been visited by white men, asking to be taught the message of salvation.

These tribes had learned about the Adventist work by contact with indigenous people at the mission at Tapagruma Creek. There were reports that an old chief had been visited by a "shining being" who taught them about Creation, the entrance of sin, the story of the promised Redeemer, and Christ's second coming. He also showed them how to worship on the seventh-day Sabbath and live a healthful life. He told him that a man with a black book would come and teach them more.

The journey took Davis two months. In one report, he stated that he had traveled 29 days by boat and an additional 10 days through dense forest.

Davis taught the Word of God to the forest tribes with his "black book" and reported the establishment of three mission bases among them. He noted that 187 people "took their stand to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." He built three church buildings and began to instruct the new believers "on the points of our faith." He also taught them to sing a song in English, "There's Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus."

Davis returned for a second visit in 1911. He complained about a fever and heart problems just before departure. The last entry in his diary that he was able to write in his own handwriting was "Monday, July 17—The day was spent in further instruction and naming the people." Naming people referenced the desire of new converts for a new name representative of their resolve to follow the Christian's God and learn His ways.

This story was adapted from Michael Campbell's biographical article in the online Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists. We invite you to visit encyclopedia.adventist.org to enjoy more stories about Adventist missionaries. Read the rest of this story next week.