

Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

The Church at Brook Hills

Matt Mason

July 28, 2013

1 Corinthians 8 & 10

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for setting us free from the bondage of sin and death. Ask God to continue to grow each of us individually and our faith family corporately in knowledge of Him. Pray for God to guide all of our actions and words to be honoring to Him. Ask God to help us all avoid becoming a stumbling block to others. Pray for Him to grant us wisdom to navigate questions about what is permissible but not profitable. Pray the focus of our lives will be to serve God and point others to Him.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the ministry of The Christian Service Mission located on 3rd Avenue South in Birmingham (csmmission.org). Christian Service Mission is a Christ-centered community transformation organization addressing poverty in a holistic way with Christ at the center of their work. We are also praying for Dawson Memorial Baptist Church and Gary Fenton, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for the nine Mid-Termers being sent out this fall from The Church at Brook Hills. These women will be serving in different*

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areas of the world as teachers, accountants, community developers, and health care providers to name a few. Mid-Term offers individuals and families the opportunity to strengthen the Long-Term work of our partners in other contexts for 2 months to 2 years. Join us this week as we pray for this new batch of Mid-Termers being sent out from our faith family. To learn more about each Mid-Termer, visit globalblog.brookhills.org. We are also praying for our Short-Term Team, led by Heather Hancock, serving in India with Long-Term Missionary Kristina O.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

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1 Corinthians 8 and 10

Conviction Friction, Then and Now

- This passage separates believers into two groups, which means we instinctively start to think of which group we might be in. (1 Corinthians 8:7, 9-13; 10:24, 25)
- Paul's intent—more importantly, God's intention in this passage—isn't to weaponize either of these groups against the other.
- The controversial practice that's being discussed in Chapters 8 and 10 is what to do about food offered to idols. May they eat it? If so, does it matter where they eat it?

What Corinth Knew

- Food is food. Rock is rock. God is one. (8:1, 4-6)

What Corinth Missed

- You are known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)
 - Knowledge isn't the goal of Christian faith. Love is (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:2; 13:2; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Peter 1:5-7).
 - If you love God, it's because, before you loved God, you were known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:3; cf. Galatians 4:9)
 - One of the great effects of daily reflection on the gospel is that it blows up our spiritual superiority complexes. (1 Corinthians 4:7; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27, 29)
- Knowledge without love kills. (1 Corinthians 8:1, 7-13)
 - The Corinthians had one agenda for the "weak" brothers: teach them the way of knowledge. (1 Corinthians 8:1, 4-6)
 - Make yourself a slave of the law of love and know true freedom. (1 Corinthians 8:13; 9; 10:23-24, 32-33)
- Idols may be nothing. But idolatry is demonic. (1 Corinthians 10:1-22)
 - Paul draws a connection between outward signs of God's saving power in the Old Testament (Red Sea, manna, water from a rock) and outward signs of His saving power in the New Testament (baptism, Lord's Supper).
- What does this have to do with Chapter 8's eating of idol food in the idol temples? (1 Corinthians 10:14-22)

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- Demons get pleasure from the worship that takes place in pagan temples. (1 Corinthians 10:20)
- Outside of its idolatrous context, idol food becomes simply food and belongs to the one God (1 Corinthians 10:25; Rom 14:14).

So, How Do We Apply This?

1. Let's prayerfully, wisely, and humbly shepherd those who have converted to Christianity from formal pagan backgrounds to break with the idolatrous practices they previously engaged in.
2. Let's take heed lest we ourselves fall into informal idolatry, which can take a hundred forms in our lives.
3. Let's walk in love with fellow believers, seeking to serve, encourage, and strengthen them.
4. Let's actively look to Christ and trust in His finished work on our behalf.
5. Let's break the ties that can form between our hearts and false gods/saviors.
6. Let's daily depend on the Holy Spirit's power to sanctify us.

Message Summary

In 1 Corinthians 8 & 10, Paul addresses a question posed by the Corinthian believers regarding food offered to idols. Since they knew that the idols were not real, many of the Corinthian Christians thought it was acceptable to eat such food at the temples. Because of the relationship between idol food and the demonic forces associated with idols of all kinds, Paul teaches that believers should neither eat food at the temples nor eat food that has been identified to have connections to idols. Paul also instructs the Corinthians to lovingly limit their personal freedom for the sake of "weak" brothers and sisters instead of flagrantly exhibiting their liberty in front of such believers and potentially causing others to stumble. Love for God should drive our love for others and inform how we live. God alone is worthy of our worship, and our choices should demonstrate this to the world.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

When coming to passages like 1 Corinthians 8 that addresses food offered to idols, those in your small group might struggle to find relevance, particularly when we do not see temples to pagan gods and goddesses in our hometown or when we do not have to wrestle with the moral implications of buying food from our grocery stores because the food was first offered to idols. While Paul addresses a particular situation in this letter to the Corinthian church, discuss with your small group how this passage relates to believers today. Identify the central thesis or theses of 1 Corinthians 8 & 10. What principles from this passage apply to all believers of all cultures and times? Recognizing that many cultures around the world do worship idols and sell goods that have been part of their religious activities, how does this passage apply to believers in these parts of the world?

Because context is key to understanding 1 Corinthians 8 & 10, briefly explain the culture and paganism of Corinth in the first century A.D. Discuss why it was such an issue to eat idol food in the temples. Included below are a few details about the culture to assist you.

- Eating at pagan temples was common. Festivals, community social events, and private celebrations (i.e., weddings, birthdays, funerals, etc.) took place at the temples and involved meals where the food had been offered to idols. Christians would not be able to participate in much of civil life if they chose to avoid eating at the temples.

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- The Corinthian believers had been converted from paganism. They had once worshiped gods and goddesses and had participated in the community events at the temples.
 - Some Corinthian believers rationalized eating the food at the temples by appealing to knowledge (1 Cor. 8:1-6). They knew the idol was not real and, therefore, considered it acceptable to eat the food offered to it.
 - Following Christ involves personal sacrifice. Many of the Corinthians faced giving up their family and social connections because of their relationship with God. It would have been tempting to justify their actions and to make compromises with regard to eating at temples because of social pressure from family members, friends, and business acquaintances.
- To be Corinthian was to participate in the social activities of the temple. Those who became Christians wrestled to delineate between what was cultural and what was religious, what was permissible and what was unacceptable because of their faith in Christ.
- In 1 Corinthians 8, the Corinthians seemed to be asking why they *should not* eat idol food, not whether or not they *could* eat it. They wanted to know Paul's explanation for why this particular action is taboo.
 - In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul addresses eating idol food in the temple.
 - In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul examines idol food that is purchased at the market or eaten in the homes of others.
- Included in the Corinthian church was a group termed "the weak" who had a former association with idols, had convictions regarding eating idol food, and considered it defiling to eat such food. Others in the church ate idol food without question.
 - Although this passage seems to address similar issues as Romans 14-15, Romans involves social issues related to the interactions between Jews and Gentiles while 1 Corinthians 8 & 10 specifically focuses on Christians, idol food, and idolatry.
 - In short, Paul instructs the believers not to participate in meals at the temples and not to eat food that is announced as idol food because Christians are not to take part in any idolatrous practice. However, Paul does not prohibit Christians from eating with their pagan friends; they were free to eat the food unless they were told that it was idol food.

Consider Paul's approach in dealing with the Corinthians about this particular issue of idol food. He avoids beginning with a list of dos and don'ts. He does not come out of the gate lambasting them for their sin. He begins by appealing to their love for God and for each other. How can we learn from this approach when addressing sin with fellow believers? What are the benefits of approaching disobedience in this manner?

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 as a group. While we should seek to know God and to know His Word, is knowledge an accurate read of someone's spirituality? Why or why not? Compare and contrast a Christian who has much head knowledge with a Christ-follower who maybe does not know as much but who attempts to apply what he or she does know. We should seek knowledge of God and His Word, but knowledge should lead to a change of thinking, a change in what we desire, and a change in our actions and relationships with others. If it doesn't, then what is the purpose of having such knowledge in the first place? Give everyone in the group a piece of paper and have them draw two lines like the ones below. Challenge the individuals in the group to rate from one to ten (with one being the lowest) how much they know about God and Scripture and to rate how their knowledge has transformed their thinking, affections, and life. Next, ask them to consider what it would take for them to move one point in each of these areas. For example, if I am currently a three in transformed thinking, affections, and life, then one step I could take might involve memorizing and meditating on Scripture that relates to an area in which I struggle. Another step might include making time each day to pray for God to transform my desires, to help me love a particular person, or to show me how to better reflect Him in a particular situation.

Knowledge about God & Scripture

Transformed Thinking, Affections, & Life

1

10

1

10

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In 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Paul affirms the correct statements made by the Corinthians that the idols were not real and that God is one. Therefore, they did not attach any significance to eating idol food; it did not mean anything spiritual to them because they knew the idols were nothing but handmade pieces of metal. However, he points out that the Corinthians missed the point with their simplistic thinking. All of these idols are rivals of the One True God, for people worship them instead of God. Furthermore, all idols represent the demonic reality that is in the world, and God's people are not to participate in any activity with demons (1 Cor. 10:20-22). God does not take idolatry lightly, for He alone is worthy of worship. How should our knowledge of God affect our understanding of idolatry? While forms of idolatry do the people in your small group face? How do we know whether or not we have made an informal idol out of someone or something? How can we equip each other to resist temptation?

Included in the sermon are six applications from 1 Corinthians 8 & 10. Discuss these applications as a small group and flesh out what it looks like to put each of these into practice in your everyday life. How can you avoid simply obtaining knowledge about 1 Corinthians 8 & 10 and actually live out what it says?

As we make disciples of all nations, we encounter individuals whose backgrounds include Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, New Age beliefs, etc. Before and after coming to a saving faith in Christ, they will likely attempt **syncretism**, which is weaving together different beliefs and practices. For example, a woman in Thailand might question whether or not she can be a Christian and still have a spirit house in her yard and take offerings to the Buddhist temple with her family members. A Muslim man may wish to continue praying five times a day at the mosque with his family, yet pray to Jesus instead of Allah. Especially for those whose culture and religion are intertwined, it will include a worldview shift to understand that they can be Thai and a Christian or an Afghani and a Christian. Why does Paul reject syncretism in 1 Corinthians 8 & 10?

Do you interact with any internationals who live in your community? If so, what do they believe? How can you share Christ with them in a way that highlights that the only way of salvation is through Christ (Jn. 14:6)? How can you help them understand that they can be from their country and culture yet become a Christian? How can you help them understand that Christianity is not just a religion for Americans or Westerners? If there are internationals in your community, consider praying for opportunities to build relationships with them, and pray for them to hear and respond to the gospel while they are in this country.

While syncretism can be an issue for those who come to Christianity from other religions, syncretism is also an issue for American believers. We often allow our culture to inform our beliefs rather than measure culture against the plumb line of God's Word. The prosperity gospel is an example of how the American church has tried to insert just enough Jesus into our lives to justify us living the way that we want. Explain that the Bible does not teach a "Jesus and" doctrine. We do not Jesus *and* money, Jesus *and* a spouse (or just a date), Jesus *and* the Pottery Barn house, Jesus *and* the perfect body, etc. Discuss with each other different ways that the American church as well as the people in your small group have allowed culture to inform what they believe and how they live. How do we guard against this?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- How does 1 Corinthians 8 & 10 apply to believers in a culture that does not have a pagan temple system or sell food that has been offered to idols?
- What is the purpose of gaining knowledge? How does knowledge lead to pride? How do we combat pride in this particular area, especially since we do not want to be ignorant people but want to grow in knowledge? How should knowledge of God and of Scripture contribute to inside-out transformation of

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the Christian? What steps can you take to grow in knowledge about God and to allow such knowledge to transform your thinking, affections, and actions?

- What should be the relationship between knowledge and love for others? How can knowledge harm others? For example, misapplied or incomplete knowledge that leads a person to steamroll over another (such as with the weak in 1 Corinthians 8:7-13) is not loving. Knowledge must be directed by love not pride. How do we guard against a knowledge that kills?
- Does your current lifestyle indicate that knowledge, love, or neither knowledge nor love is your goal? What would it look like if your aim was to love God and to love others (both fellow believers and the unsaved)? How would your life be different if this was your aim? How would your priorities need to shift in order to make this happen? What would change with regard to how you spend money or time?
- How should we respond when we have a conviction that other Christians do not share? How are we called to interact with brothers and sisters who do not share our convictions? Why should we be willing to limit our personal freedom for those have convictions we do not share? At what times should we sacrifice our personal freedom for such brothers and sisters?
- Discuss the differences between legalism and a conscientious desire to walk in holiness. How can we as believers avoid legalism as we pursue righteousness? What are the dangers of legalism?
- Discuss the significance of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 8:3. Paul makes a distinction between knowing God and loving God. How do these two actions relate, and how are they distinct?
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-7. How does mention of the Exodus fit into Paul's discussion of idol food and idolatry? Why is this example important?
 - The people experienced dramatic displays of God's power such as the parting of the Red Sea, yet this did not prevent them from engaging in idolatry and creating a golden calf to worship (Ex. 14; 32). Similarly, we have experienced Christ's power in saving us and bring us from life to death, yet this does not inoculate us against temptation and idolatry in our own lives. What steps can we take to resist temptation in our lives?
- While we do not typically encounter the idolatrous practices of first century Corinth in America, we all face the temptation of falling into informal idolatry. What things or people do we put before God? What consumes our thoughts and attention? These are the things we worship. Discuss what forms such idolatry can take in our lives? How can we recognize when we are guilty of idolatry? How do we fight against making an idol out of marriage, certain people, money, our own self-sufficiency, etc.?
- What are tangible ways that you can serve, encourage, and strengthen fellow Christians? What are concrete ways that you can come alongside a fellow brother or sister who struggles with sin in a particular area? Define and describe accountability that is grace-based and not works-based.