

## One LORD, Jesus the Messiah

The Apostle to the Gentiles once said:

**1 Corinthians 12:3** <sup>3</sup> Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "**Jesus is Lord**," except by the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul says that no one, speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, can say “ Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς” but rather the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to confess “Κύριος Ἰησοῦς”. It is the church’s earliest confession of faith – “Jesus is LORD!” Paul says in **Romans 10:9**

**Romans 10:9** <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth **Jesus as Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

We are often tempted to carelessly read over these “Spirit-induced,” New Covenant proclamations without stopping in awe and amazement to fully appreciate what God has empowered us to confess before Him and His world (cf. also **Phil. 2:11; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:2**). This morning I want to basically us to stand still awhile and meditate on what this confession is saying about who Jesus is and how the church has tried to sum up what she believes the Holy Scriptures are teaching about Jesus.

We will look at a statement Paul makes in **1 Corinthians 8 (v. 6)** upon which he grounds a practical lesson on how a faithful believer in Jesus Christ should live out his or her faith in the midst of a surrounding pagan culture. More specifically, Paul will address the question on the hearts of many Christians in Corinth regarding what they are to do with eating meats that have been dedicated to pagan deities. It might help to give a little background here.

In the first century as the church begins to emerge within prominent cities in the Roman empire she is in essence taking up residence in an already crowded pantheon of gods, which are integral to the lives of Roman citizens. In fact, Paul told these citizens in the Areopagus, **Acts 17:22** "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects." So when the Christians speak of their God, Jesus, they weren't really doing anything, at least at first, out of the ordinary in that very pagan culture. To add one more god to an already crowded plurality of gods was hardly offensive.

The gods of the Romans were so central to their lives that it was customary to dedicate all their food and drink to their specific god, giving thanks for the gods' provision of their needs. They might do this by taking a portion of the food or wine and set it aside as giving it to the gods as their portion. But no matter what specific god an individual citizen worshipped as their individual patron deity of their home all Roman citizens, by Paul's day, were required to also add

Caesar to their worship confessing “Caesar is Lord!” It was a common practice in the trade villages throughout the empire to require those who bought and sold their goods to offer a pinch of incense in worship of Caesar before any transactions could take place. For without it no one would be able to buy or sell their goods (cf. **Rev. 13:17**).

Now think what it must have been like to be raised in this culture, having spent your whole life watching mom and dad daily offer the food of the home to the household gods before sitting down for a meal. Each time you went to market you heard people discussing out in the open air the many gods they worshipped. What god this meat was offered to. Whose god this wine had been dedicated to. It would have been very common language that you would have heard all your life. But then someone told you about Jesus and His exclusive claim on you as the one true God and LORD. A common result of proclaiming Jesus is LORD throughout these Roman cities was in fact the disruption of idol worship. We read about this in **Acts 19:23-27 (READ)**.

Now if you had come out of this idol worship for awhile and had time to process all that it entailed about what those pagan gods really are (namely, nothing) in comparison to the one true God you might come to believe that you can freely go into a market and buy whatever you wanted to eat, even from those foods which were offered up to the various pagan gods, with no sense that you were doing anything offensive to the true God because after all He was the maker of all things (**1 Cor. 8:4-6; 10:25-26**). Paul considered himself as siding theologically with those who thought this way (**1 Cor. 8:8-9, 10:23**). However, “not all have this knowledge” (**1 Cor. 8:7-13**). Even though we are free to eat anything as coming ultimately from the hand of God, if that freedom causes our dear brother, “for whom Christ died” (v. 11), to stumble in their faith then I will never eat meat again (v. 13). Why? As Paul says in **Gal. 2:20**:

**Galatians 2:19-20** <sup>19</sup> "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup> "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

These verses then help you see how coming under the exclusive LORDship of Jesus has completely transformed how we think and live about everything. There is no single decision in life that we are called upon to make that we don't first stop and consider what the will of Jesus our LORD has to say about it. We belong to Him! We think His thoughts after Him. If our freedom would cause a dear brother for whom Christ died for to stumble in their faith then by the love that Jesus loves us with now trumps all our freedoms. Having been set free from the Law of sin and death, you are now under the Law of Christ, which is to lovingly bear the burdens of your brother or sister in Christ the way Jesus bore your burden (cf. **Gal. 6:1**). Though you might be completely free nevertheless you are called to submit your complete life to Christ's LORDship and the gospel so that by all means you might save some (cf. **1 Cor. 9:19-23 READ**). In so doing you are doing all to the glory of God (cf. **1 Cor. 10:31-33 READ**).

Now the world looks at us for living this way and declares us to be fools. “You are not our own man, like I am. You don’t have the freedom to think for yourself the way I do.” But God has a very different judgment of the situation. He says that the man who says in his heart there is no god is the fool (**cf. Pss. 14:1; 53:1**). The world looks at the same LORD that we look at and says:

**1 Corinthians 1:18** For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

We, upon whom the end of the ages has come (**cf. 1 Cor. 10:11**), see Jesus is LORD of all and that makes all the difference in the world how we now live our lives in this world. **But just what do we mean by the confession that “Jesus is LORD”?**

To get at who Jesus is and to understand what exactly we are confessing we must turn back to **1 Cor. 8:6** and think about what Paul is doing here. Even though Paul’s use of this theologically pregnant declaration is primarily practical here, the basis of the practice is richly grounded in deeply profound theology. Paul is quoting a verse from the Old Testament that was so prominent among the people of God that every faithful Jew prayed it twice every day of his or her life. The Shema: Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (**Deut. 6:5**). To pray the Shema, especially in the midst of a pagan culture was to take God’s yoke upon you – to come under His LORDship and to see the world through His eyes – to think His thoughts after Him – to submit yourself in complete confidence and trust that He is the true God over all creation, that He delivered you, along with the rest of His people, through the Exodus and He is faithful and can be trusted to bring all of His people, including you, into the Promised inheritance of the land of Canaan. Paul sees the followers of Jesus in the same situation in Corinth.

Now, it is important in understanding what Paul is doing here to remember that the OT for the Jew in Paul’s day was the Greek translation of the OT, called the Septuagint. And the LXX would translate this verse as “*kurios ho theos, hemon kurios heis estin.*” Of course, you can hear how the Hebrew is translated by the Greek and what would have been on the mind of all Greek-speaking Jews when Paul wrote **1 Cor. 8:6**. The way the personal name of God – Yahweh – is translated in Greek is “*kurios,*” or what we are commonly used to in our English translations as LORD in all capital letters.

You can already begin to see what Paul has done in **1 Cor. 8:6** when he quotes the Shema and then takes the person of Jesus and inserts Him into this famous confession. Now, remember how shocking this was for a first century Jew, even a Pharisee of Pharisees, a Hebrew of Hebrews! For the Jews who had gone through the punishment of the exile into Babylon and come back into their homeland by the decree of Cyrus, King of Persia, they were completely healed of all forms of polytheism – they were faithful monotheists. There is absolutely no evidence, archaeologically or historically, that the Jews of the second temple or of Jesus’ day, had any flirtation with the worship

of many gods – the exile healed Israel of this disease forever. So for a Jew to say what Paul says in **1 Cor. 8:6** and to use the Shema of all confessions, the central confession of the Jewish people, and then to insert Jesus into that confession to essentially declare that in the man, Jesus, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the God of the Exodus – the God who was bringing His people Israel through the wilderness into the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey, had come.

Paul sees a parallel between the Christians in Corinth living among pagans in the Roman Empire and the Israelites, who had recently come out of Egypt and are about to enter into the Promised-Land, which itself is filled with pagans. The Corinthian Christians have recently gone through their own Exodus and are currently living as wilderness pilgrims “in exile” as they anticipate entering at some future date the Promised Land of a New Heavens and a New Earth. The same way the Israelites had to learn how to live amongst pagans without making God jealous, so the new Israel has to learn how to live faithfully to God in their pagan environment. So here we see Paul taking the Jewish concept of God that he has grown up with and having to rethink it in light of Jesus’ coming to earth as to His true identity and what Paul realizes is that the God who had called Israel, as Abraham’s seed, and who promised through the prophets to come to His people to bring them not only out of exile to Babylon but was coming to them to bring them into final peace and rest in the New Heavens and the New Earth had come in the Messiah Jesus. This means that Paul can take the confession that says, “Hear O Israel, the LORD (*kurios*) is God, the LORD (*kurios*) is one” (**Deut. 6:5**) and say about Jesus in relationship to His Father “there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him, and one LORD (*kurios*), Jesus the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (**1 Cor. 8:6**).

Now think about what this means when we now go back to read the OT. When you read the OT and you see LORD in all caps you can see that Yahweh who is speaking and acting throughout the story of Israel will one day come to Earth in the person of Jesus in order to bring to you the final salvation that He has promised. He will take up your humanity and perfect it in righteousness and then make His way to the cross to take your place of condemnation to die for your sins that you might freely be given His righteousness and forgiveness of your sins. God is coming to save you as He promised. He is coming to fix what Adam messed up. He is coming to do what faithless Israel was incapable of doing. He is coming to redeem you His people – to bring you back to God – and when Jesus appears on earth – the glorious good news that is announced to the world is that in Him God has come. Yahweh has fulfilled His promise at last!

Before we end, there is another passage which we can look at more quickly – **Phil. 2:9-11** – to see that we are not simply reading into what Paul is doing here in **1 Cor. 8**. Notice that Paul speaks about Jesus as the LORD whom everyone will one day bow before. What is Paul talking about? Look at **Isa. 45:18, 21, 22, 23**. A passage that every Jew would have known very well and would have looked forward to when Yahweh would come to bring righteousness and justice to the Earth

and everyone would bow down before Him and swear their allegiance to Him alone. For the Christian, Yahweh has come to Earth and His name is Jesus. Paul pictures a future day when not only Christians but every human being will be made to bow their knees at the name of Jesus and confess that Jesus, the Messiah, is Yahweh (LORD).

Paul, the faithful Jew – the Pharisee of Pharisees – who is monotheistic to the core of his being and would rather die than give up his faith in the one true God of all heaven and earth nonetheless understands that this man, Jesus, was and is no mere man. He was and is none other than God in human flesh. What God was therefore doing at Jesus' resurrection was declaring for all the world to see that the true God of the universe, the sovereign LORD over Heaven and Earth, and this One whom He raised from the dead is the same person, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is One person – Yahweh who promised to come – and He has taken on a new nature that is fully human in order to come to His people as close as He can come in order to provide a full and complete salvation that can only be made by the God-man.

In fact, this union of the human and divine natures into the one divine person tells us what the nature of Jesus' work must have been. If our problem was simply that we misunderstood the Law and all we needed was a better understanding of what God truly required then all God would need to send was another rabbi, a teacher of the Law of God. If our problem was that we were unfaithful and just need an encouragement to be more faithful to God then all God would need to send was a cheerleader or a motivational speaker. If our problem was that we were being beat up by Satan and threatened with demonic imprisonment then all God would need to send was an angelic warrior to fight our battles for us. But our problem was much worse. We offended the Holy God of all creation, the LORD of glory. He is not only the Creator of the whole world, but the Creator of Israel, His chosen people, chosen to display His love to the whole world. He promised that through them He would come to make all things right again and bring the whole creation to its proper rest and purpose. And he has done that in Jesus the Messiah.

Let's look at one final verse this morning to sum up what we have found – **Rom. 1:3-4**. God the Son is eternally begotten of the Father – in other words, as long as the person of the Father has existed, so the Son has existed because they are of the same substance – they are one God, one LORD. But the human nature of Jesus has not existed for all eternity. That was created and came into existence at a point in time (around 4 B.C.) and in the dusty, dank stable in Bethlehem. Most of the world had no idea who He was, even those closest to Him. But at His resurrection God clearly announced who He was and is – **v. 4** – He is declared “Son of God with power,” Jesus the Messiah is Yahweh (LORD) – *Kurios Iesous!* – Hear O New Israel, Jesus is our God – as the Father and the Holy Spirit are our God, our God is One!

**Amen! -SDG-**