

Dr. Gary Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 22, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 9 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 22, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 9, Biblicalelearning.org

In his lecture on 1 Corinthians 8-11, Dr. Meadors examines **Paul's response to the Corinthian issue of eating food sacrificed to idols**, particularly focusing on chapters 8 and 9. He explains that **Paul addresses the tension between the "strong" who have knowledge that idols are nothing and the "weak" whose consciences are not yet at that understanding**. Meadors emphasizes that **the strong must be careful not to cause the weak to stumble by participating in idol worship**, even if they believe they have the right to do so. The lecture also **explores Paul's discussion of apostolic rights in chapter 9 as an example of voluntarily setting aside rights for the sake of the gospel and the community's well-being**, highlighting the difference between duty and actions that go above and beyond. Finally, Meadors introduces the concept of **conscience as a witness to one's worldview and values**, setting the stage for further discussion in subsequent lectures.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 22 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Pauline Epistles → 1 Corinthians).



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3. Briefing Document: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 22, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 9

Briefing Document: 1 Corinthians 8-9 Analysis (Meadors)

Overview: This briefing document summarizes Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture on 1 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, focusing on Paul's response to the issue of food sacrificed to idols and the related discussion of apostolic rights. Meadors emphasizes the complexities of this issue, particularly the tension between the "strong" (those with knowledge that idols are nothing) and the "weak" (those with a conscience that still attributes significance to idols). He also delves into the nature of conscience and how it relates to worldview and values, before examining Paul's example of voluntarily declining his apostolic rights in Chapter 9.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. The Problem of Food Sacrificed to Idols and the "Strong" vs. the "Weak" (1 Corinthians 8):

- **Knowledge vs. Weak Conscience:** Paul acknowledges that "we know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one'" (paraphrasing 1 Cor. 8:4). However, Meadors highlights that "not everyone possesses this knowledge, and some have a weak conscience as regards that."
- **The Danger of Exercising Rights Without Consideration:** The "strong" believers in Corinth, possessing this knowledge, felt they had the "right" and "authority" ("exousia") to participate in social events and banquets in pagan temples, even consuming food that had been sacrificed to idols. Meadors cautions that "while they may have the right and the status to be involved in that, they have got to be careful that that participation, that status does not cause a stumbling block to others who are not able yet to follow the line that you can do that."
- **Stumbling Block and Destruction of the Weak:** Participating in these activities, even with a clear conscience based on knowledge, could "embolden" those with a "weak conscience" to eat food sacrificed to idols before they had fully grasped the insignificance of idols. This could lead them to act against their conscience, disrupting their spiritual development. Meadors states, "Therefore, you will destroy them because you will mess up the mechanism and the process of changing their minds." He clarifies that "they're destroyed in their process of discernment," not necessarily in terms of eternal salvation or physical death.

- **Sinning Against Christ:** By causing a weaker brother or sister to act against their conscience, the strong are "wound[ing] their weak conscience" and, consequently, "sin against Christ by doing that."
- **Responsibility of the Strong:** Meadors emphasizes that "people with knowledge have got to learn how to maneuver the community without manipulating the community into maturity." This involves patiently educating and transforming the community's worldview and values.

2. The Nature and Function of Conscience:

- **Conscience as a Witness:** Meadors defines conscience as a "witness," not a judge or an entity in itself. "Conscience is a witness to the norms and values that you recognize and apply." He credits F.F. Bruce for influencing this understanding.
- **Conscience and Worldview/Values:** Conscience is intrinsically linked to an individual's "worldview and values." It acts like "little policemen" that signal "pain" or conflict when actions or thoughts contradict the established worldview and value system.
- **Re-education and Conscience:** During conversion, which is a "huge re-education," there will be "tension with your conscience" because it is still aligned with the old worldview. As the new worldview and values are "absorbed and owned," the conscience adjusts and no longer raises objections.
- **Cauterized Conscience:** Meadors warns that one can "cauterize your conscience" by adopting a flawed worldview and value system, leading the conscience to endorse harmful actions.
- **Conscience is Not a Self-Justifier:** He critiques the common notion of using conscience as a sole guide, stating, "Well, my conscience doesn't bother me, so it's okay. That's not the issue. The question is, is it right or wrong? Is it good, better, or best? I don't care about your conscience. I care about your worldview and values. Where are they? Are they right?"

3. Apostolic Rights, Liberty, and Community Ethics (1 Corinthians 9):

- **Paul's Assertion of Apostolic Rights:** Paul shifts the focus to his own "apostolic rights" and "liberty," asking rhetorical questions like "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" He emphasizes that the Corinthians themselves are "the result of my work in the Lord" and "the seal of my apostleship."

- **Purpose of Discussing Rights:** Meadors suggests that Paul's discussion of his rights serves as an illustration to the "elite" in Corinth, potentially reminding them that others, like himself, also possess rights, perhaps even of a higher standing (Roman citizenship, apostleship).
- **Voluntary Declining of Rights as an Example:** Paul emphasizes that despite having these rights (e.g., the right to financial support), he has "not used any of these rights." This voluntary self-sacrifice serves as a powerful example for the "strong" believers in Corinth regarding how to handle their own freedoms for the sake of the community.
- **Reward for Going Above and Beyond Duty:** Meadors highlights Paul's statement, "For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast about that. Since I am compelled to preach, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." He explains that there is "no rewards for doing your duty." Reward comes from going "above and beyond the call of duty," as exemplified by Paul preaching the gospel "free of charge."
- **Deliberate Decision to Serve All:** Paul's willingness to adapt himself to different groups ("To the Jews I became like a Jew... To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all people") demonstrates his commitment to winning as many people as possible for the gospel. Meadors clarifies that these were not "moral accommodations" but cultural ones, requiring maturity and a focus on the "end game."
- **The Discipline of Self-Control:** Paul uses the analogy of athletes in a race to illustrate the need for "strict training" and self-discipline to obtain the lasting "prize." He concludes with the image of "strike[ing] a blow to the body and mak[ing] it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Quotes:

- "be careful, however, about the exercise of your rights...take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block."
- "It's not just because they have a good worldview they're free to do what they want, but more than likely, Paul is bringing back up the issue of just because you have that social status and because you have the right, the exousia, the authority to participate doesn't mean that it is the best thing for you to do as a Christian."
- "For if someone with a weak conscience...sees you with all your knowledge eating in an idol's temple...Won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to

idols? Therefore, you will destroy them because you will mess up the mechanism and the process of changing their minds."

- "Conscience is a witness."
- "Conscience is not an entity in and of itself. It's an aspect of the created capacity for self-reflection—a witness, not a judge."
- "Let worldview and values be your guide. Conscience will remind you if you're keeping your worldview and values."
- "They're emboldened, acting without a changed perceptual set...They're emboldened to actions that they shouldn't do. Why shouldn't they do them? Not because they're wrong but because they aren't ready to handle it."
- "They're destroyed in their process of discernment."
- "One's process of discernment is destroyed when actions precede re-education."
- "Therefore, if what I eat is causing my brother or sister to fall into sin..."
- "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?"
- "I have not used any of these rights...For I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast about that. Since I am compelled to preach, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel."
- "If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward. If not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What, then, is my reward? Just this: I may offer preaching the gospel free of charge, and so make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel."
- "We are not rewarded for doing our duty but for how we go above and beyond the call of duty."
- "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone. To win as many people as possible...I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means, I might save some."

- "Do you not know that in a race, all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? So, you need to run in such a way as to get the prize...I do not run like someone running aimlessly. I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to the body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Conclusion:

Meadors' lecture provides a nuanced understanding of Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 8 and 9. He emphasizes the importance of considering the impact of our actions on those with weaker consciences, even when we possess knowledge that grants us certain freedoms. His detailed explanation of conscience as a witness tied to worldview and values offers valuable insight into the internal dynamics at play in such situations. Finally, Paul's example of voluntarily setting aside his apostolic rights serves as a powerful illustration of prioritizing the well-being of the community and the advancement of the gospel above personal entitlement.

4. Study Guide: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 22, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 9

Study Guide: 1 Corinthians 8-9

Key Concepts and Themes:

- **Knowledge vs. Love:** The tension between the "strong" who possess knowledge about idols being nothing and the "weak" whose consciences are still sensitive to idolatrous practices. Love and concern for the community should supersede the exercise of individual knowledge.
- **Stumbling Block (Skandalon):** The danger of the strong Christians' actions becoming an obstacle or temptation for weaker believers to act against their conscience.
- **Conscience as Witness:** Understanding conscience not as a judge or entity in itself, but as an internal witness to one's worldview and values. It reflects what a person believes to be right or wrong based on their understanding.
- **Worldview and Values:** The foundational framework through which individuals interpret and assign meaning to the world. Transformation in Christ involves the renewing of one's worldview and values.
- **Christian Liberty and Rights (Exousia):** The freedom and authority that believers possess, but the call to exercise these rights responsibly and with consideration for others. This concept is explored both in the context of the "elite" Corinthians and Paul's apostolic rights.
- **Self-Sacrifice and Accommodation:** Paul's example of voluntarily foregoing his apostolic rights for the sake of the gospel and to avoid hindering its progress. This includes adapting his behavior to connect with different groups of people.
- **Duty vs. Reward:** The distinction between fulfilling one's obligation (duty) and going above and beyond, which is where true reward lies in Christian service.
- **Community Ethics:** The importance of considering the impact of individual actions on the wider Christian community and prioritizing its spiritual well-being.
- **Apostolic Authority and Rights:** Paul's assertion of his apostleship and the inherent rights associated with it, used as an analogy to address the issue of rights within the Corinthian church.

Quiz:

1. Explain the central problem Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 8 regarding food sacrificed to idols. What are the differing perspectives within the Corinthian church?
2. According to the lecture, what does it mean for the "strong" to be a "stumbling block" to the "weak"? Provide an example based on the source material.
3. Define conscience as presented in the lecture. What is it not, and what is its primary function in relation to one's worldview and values?
4. Describe the relationship between worldview, values, and conscience. How does a change in one affect the others?
5. Why does Paul emphasize that the "weak" brother or sister is "destroyed" by the "strong" believers' unthoughtful exercise of their knowledge? Is this referring to eternal damnation?
6. What is Paul's main point in 1 Corinthians 9 by discussing his own apostolic rights? How does he choose to exercise or not exercise these rights, and why?
7. Explain the distinction Paul makes between performing one's duty and going above and beyond in Christian service. How does this relate to the concept of reward?
8. Give an example from 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul demonstrates his willingness to accommodate different groups of people. What is his ultimate motivation for doing so?
9. According to the lecture, why is the discussion of apostolic rights in chapter 9 not a digression from the topic of food sacrificed to idols? How does it contribute to Paul's overall argument?
10. What does the lecture suggest is the best approach for ministry leaders in guiding a diverse congregation with varying levels of understanding and sensitivity on issues like participation in cultural practices?

Answer Key:

1. Paul addresses the issue of whether Christians should eat food that has been sacrificed to idols. Some Christians ("the strong") believed that idols are nothing and therefore eating such food is permissible, while others ("the weak") with

more sensitive consciences felt it was wrong due to its association with pagan worship.

2. Being a "stumbling block" means that the actions of the "strong," even if permissible for them due to their knowledge, could tempt the "weak" to participate in something their conscience condemns, leading them to act against their beliefs before they are ready. For example, a "weak" believer seeing a knowledgeable Christian eating in an idol's temple might be emboldened to do the same, even though they still believe it's wrong.
3. Conscience is defined as an internal witness, a God-created capacity for self-reflection that testifies to the norms and values that an individual recognizes and applies. It is not a judge that determines right and wrong, but rather a mechanism that alerts a person when their actions or thoughts conflict with their established worldview and values.
4. Worldview and values form the "grid" through which a person understands the world and determines what is acceptable. Conscience acts like "policemen" within this framework, signaling a conflict when incoming data or potential actions contradict the established worldview and values. A change in worldview and values, such as through conversion, will eventually lead to the conscience aligning with the new understanding, though this is a process.
5. When the "strong" believers' actions lead the "weak" to violate their conscience, they disrupt the God-created process of worldview, values, and conscience working together for discernment. This "destroys" their ability to navigate ethical decisions and make sound judgments based on their evolving understanding, not necessarily leading to eternal loss or physical death.
6. Paul discusses his apostolic rights in 1 Corinthians 9 to illustrate the principle of voluntarily setting aside one's rights for the sake of the gospel and the community. Although he has the authority and right to financial support as an apostle, he often chooses not to exercise this right to avoid hindering the gospel and to set an example of self-sacrifice.
7. Performing one's duty refers to fulfilling the basic obligations and responsibilities of Christian life or ministry. Going above and beyond involves exceeding these basic requirements through extra effort, sacrifice, and generosity motivated by love for God and others. Paul suggests that true reward in Christian service comes not from merely doing what is expected, but from voluntarily surpassing it.

8. One example is Paul becoming "all things to all people" (Jew to the Jews, under the law to those under the law, etc.) in order to win them for Christ. His motivation was to communicate the gospel effectively and to save as many people as possible, even if it meant adapting his behavior in ways that were not morally compromising.
9. The discussion of apostolic rights is not a digression because it provides a powerful illustration of how someone with significant rights and status (like the "elite" in Corinth) can choose to limit those rights for the benefit of others. Paul's example of self-sacrifice in exercising his apostolic privileges directly relates to the call for the "strong" to consider the "weak" in their own exercise of liberty.
10. The lecture suggests that the best approach involves educating the congregation on the ongoing process of transformation through the renewal of their minds and the development of a shared Christian worldview and value system. Leaders should handle matters of knowledge and practice delicately and truthfully, guiding the community towards unity and mutual understanding rather than allowing those with more knowledge to manipulate or disregard those with weaker consciences.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the tension between knowledge and love in 1 Corinthians 8-9, as presented by Dr. Meadors. How does Paul attempt to resolve this tension in his instruction to the Corinthian church?
2. Discuss Dr. Meadors' interpretation of conscience as a "witness" rather than a "judge." How does this understanding impact our approach to ethical decision-making and our understanding of spiritual growth?
3. Examine the concept of "rights" (exousia) as it appears in 1 Corinthians 8 and 9. How does Paul connect the rights of the "elite" Corinthians with his own apostolic rights, and what is the underlying message regarding the responsible use of freedom and authority within the Christian community?
4. Evaluate Paul's example of self-sacrifice and accommodation in 1 Corinthians 9. What are the implications of his actions for Christian ministry and for individual believers in their interactions with diverse groups of people? What are the potential challenges and boundaries of such accommodation?

5. Explore the significance of Dr. Meadors' distinction between "duty" and "reward" in 1 Corinthians 9. How does this teaching challenge common cultural understandings of achievement and service, and what are its implications for Christian motivation and spiritual maturity?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Stumbling Block (Skandalon):** Something that causes someone to sin or fall away; an obstacle to faith or ethical behavior.
- **Conscience:** The God-given capacity for self-reflection that acts as an internal witness to one's recognized worldview and values.
- **Worldview:** A fundamental set of beliefs and assumptions about reality that shapes how a person perceives and interprets the world.
- **Values:** Principles or standards that guide a person's behavior and judgments; what they consider important or morally good.
- **Liberty/Freedom:** The state of being free from constraints; in this context, often refers to the perceived right of knowledgeable Christians to participate in certain practices.
- **Rights (Exousia):** Authority or power to do something; in this context, refers both to the social standing of the "elite" and the inherent privileges of apostleship.
- **Weak Conscience:** A conscience that is still sensitive to past beliefs or practices and may be easily troubled by actions that another person with more knowledge deems acceptable.
- **Edify:** To build up, strengthen, or encourage, especially in a spiritual or moral sense.
- **Discernment:** The ability to judge well and make wise decisions, particularly in moral and spiritual matters.
- **Apostle:** A person sent out with authority, especially one of the twelve disciples of Jesus or Paul. In a broader sense, it can refer to messengers of the gospel.

5. FAQs on Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 22, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 9, Biblicalelearning.org

Frequently Asked Questions on 1 Corinthians 8-9

1. What was the central issue Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 8-9? Paul addressed the question of whether Christians could eat food that had been sacrificed to idols. This issue was complex because some Christians, whom Paul calls "the strong," understood that idols were nothing and therefore eating such food was permissible. However, other Christians, "the weak," with more sensitive consciences, viewed this practice as participating in idolatry. The social context of Corinth, where temple banquets were intertwined with social status and the meat market had limited options, further complicated the matter.

2. What does Paul mean by "knowledge" and how does it relate to this issue? For Paul, "knowledge" in this context refers to the understanding that there is only one God and that idols have no real existence. The "strong" Christians possessed this knowledge and believed it gave them the liberty to eat food sacrificed to idols. However, Paul argues that while this knowledge is true, its application must be tempered by love and concern for the "weak" believers who do not share this understanding. Knowledge without love can lead to the spiritual harm of others.

3. Why does Paul emphasize the concept of "conscience" in this discussion? Paul defines conscience not as an independent entity or a judge, but as a God-given capacity for self-reflection that acts as a witness to one's worldview and values. A "weak conscience" in this context signifies a worldview and value system that has not yet fully grasped the insignificance of idols. If a "strong" believer eats in an idol's temple, it can embolden a "weak" believer to do the same before their understanding has changed, leading them to act against their conscience and potentially damaging their process of spiritual discernment.

4. What does Paul mean when he says the actions of the "strong" could "destroy" the "weak" brother or sister? Paul is not suggesting eternal damnation or physical death. Instead, he argues that the actions of the "strong" can disrupt the "weak" believer's God-created process of discernment. By encouraging them to participate in practices they are not yet convinced are acceptable, the "strong" can create internal conflict, wound their conscience (the witness to their existing worldview), and hinder their ability to properly process and integrate new understandings of faith.

5. How does Paul connect the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols with the concept of "rights" or "liberty"? The "strong" believers in Corinth likely felt they had the "right" or "liberty" to eat this food based on their knowledge that idols were nothing. Paul acknowledges that they might possess this freedom. However, he cautions them about the exercise of these rights, stating that their liberty should not become a stumbling block to others. He uses the example of his own apostolic rights, which he chose not to fully exercise in order to not hinder the gospel. This demonstrates that having a right does not always mean it is beneficial or loving to exercise it, especially if it negatively impacts the community.

6. What is the significance of Paul's discussion of his own apostolic rights in 1 Corinthians 9 in the context of food sacrificed to idols? Paul uses his own example as an apostle who has rights (e.g., the right to financial support, to marry and be accompanied by a believing wife) but chooses to forgo them for the sake of the gospel. This serves as a powerful illustration to the "strong" believers. Just as Paul voluntarily declined to exercise his legitimate rights to avoid hindering the gospel, they too should be willing to restrict their freedom to eat food sacrificed to idols if it causes spiritual harm to their weaker brothers and sisters. His example highlights the principle of self-sacrifice and prioritizing the well-being of the community over individual rights.

7. What distinction does Paul draw between "duty" and actions that go "above and beyond the call of duty" in 1 Corinthians 9? Paul argues that there is no inherent boast or reward in simply fulfilling one's duty. For him, preaching the gospel was a compulsion, his divinely appointed task. He could only boast and receive a reward when he went "above and beyond" his duty, such as preaching without seeking financial support. He connects this to the issue at hand by implying that the "strong" believers' duty might be to exercise their freedom, but going "above and beyond" in love would mean voluntarily restricting that freedom for the sake of others.

8. How does Paul's principle of becoming "all things to all people" relate to the issues discussed in chapters 8 and 9? Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 reflects his deliberate decision to adapt his behavior and identify with different groups of people (Jews, those under the law, those not under the law, the weak) for the sake of winning them to Christ. This principle underscores the importance of empathy, cultural sensitivity (without compromising moral truth), and strategic accommodation in ministry. In the context of food sacrificed to idols, it suggests that while the "strong" might understand the theological freedom, they should be willing to accommodate the sensitivities of the "weak" by abstaining from practices that could cause them to stumble, all for the greater purpose of the gospel and the unity of the church.