

εἷς κύριος and ἡμεῖς in 1 Corinthians 8:6: An Investigation of the First Person Plural in Light of the Lordship of Jesus Christ

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Abstract

This study discusses the meaning of the first person plural pronoun in 1 Corinthians 8:6. Scholars generally interpret ἡμῖν/ἡμεῖς as all the members of Christian communities indiscriminately. In my opinion, Paul has in mind a more specific group of people. This becomes clear in the context of chapter 8 which reveals that Paul's definition of (Christian) ἡμεῖς differs from the Corinthians' self-definition. The Corinthians disregard Jesus Christ as the only Lord of salvation, while Paul defines ἡμεῖς primarily through the interrelations with εἷς κύριος. I argue that for Paul only those belong to his "we"-group who rightly understand the meaning of Jesus Christ's lordship and who subject their ἐξουσία to the Lord.

Key Terms

Jesus Christ's lordship; 1 Corinthians 8:6; ἡμῖν/ἡμεῖς; the Corinthian community

... but for us one God, the Father, from whom all things, and we to him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things, and we through him. (1 Cor 8:6)¹

In 1 Cor 8:6 Paul depicts in a terse expression the mutual interrelations between God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, "all things," and "us." In this article the primary focus is on the meaning of the first person plural pronoun used three times in the verse. It is suggested in this study that this meaning can be best understood through the lens of the lordship of Jesus Christ.

¹ This is a literal translation of the verbless verse. In some points it differs from the majority of modern English translations; these points will be discussed below.

Although the usage of the first person plural pronoun in the Corpus Paulinum has sometimes been analysed,² the exact meaning of ἡμῖν and ἡμεῖς in 1 Cor 8:6 is somehow neglected in recent discussion on the verse. Scholars generally interpret them as merely “Christians” or as all the members of Christian communities indiscriminately. They take this understanding for granted and the exact meaning of “Christians” remains undefined. It seems, however, that both ἡμῖν and ἡμεῖς³ are used here to point to a much more specific group of people.

The characteristics of this group become distinct in its juxtaposition to the Corinthians’ self-definition which is expressed in some other places of chapter 8 (vv. 1, 4, and 8). The juxtaposition reveals the significant difference between the Corinthians’ understanding of who *they* are and Paul’s understanding of who *we* must be. In my opinion, the difference is determined by the Corinthians’ disregard of the role of Jesus Christ as the Lord of the final salvation. Paul, on the contrary, defines “us” primarily through the interrelations with εἰς κύριος. For Paul, I argue, both the understanding of the meaning of Jesus Christ’s lordship and the subjection to his demands are the indispensable conditions for belonging to the group of “us.”

This study is divided into two parts. The first one is mostly devoted to the analysis of the text of 1 Cor 8:6 itself; this *intratextual* reading focuses on the discussion on the mutual relations of the elements of the verse and helps to clarify the difference between the groups of “us” and “not-us” specifically in light of the salvific work of Jesus Christ. In the second part I focus on the *contextual* reading of the verse within the framework of chapter 8; it helps to determine who can be included in the group of “us” and under which conditions.

² See, for instance, Dick (1900); Baumert (1973); Carrez (1980). The categorisation of Baumert, although made primarily for 2 Corinthians, remains basic for the analysis of “we” in other letters also. In his elaboration of the ideas of Dick, Baumert offers five categories, among which “the general ‘we’” is the most appropriate meaning of “we” in 1 Cor 8:6. But this general “we” in Baumert refers to all “Christians,” whereas the goal of this study is precisely to specify *who* can be included in this “we-Christians” group according to 1 Cor 8:6.

³ It is taken here for granted that ἡμῖν and ἡμεῖς point in 1 Cor 8:6 to the same group of people. Although throughout the letter (and moreover throughout the Corpus), Paul may assign ἡμεῖς to different groups of people, as Baumert and others point out (see n. 1), the dynamic character of the formula expressed in 1 Cor 8:6 leaves, in my opinion, no room for attempts to ascribe different meanings to the same pronouns within this particular verse.

1 Intratextual Reading: The Meaning of ἡμῖν in 1 Corinthians 8:6

1.1 The structural analysis of the verse

First of all, a short grammatical analysis of the verse should be undertaken. In the overwhelming majority of the manuscripts 1 Cor 8:6 is read as follows:

ἀλλ’

ἡμῖν εἰς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν,
καὶ [ἡμῖν] εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ.⁴

The verse starts with ἀλλά. As an adversative conjunction it simultaneously indicates the opposition of the content of v. 6 to what is said in v. 5 but also the unity of Paul’s thought in the two verses. Verse 5 is a concessive phrase in which the use of καὶ γὰρ εἴπερ forms a link with v. 6 as an antithetical clause.⁵ Thus the verses form a single statement.⁶ As it was mentioned in n. 3, some manuscripts omit ἀλλά. In my view, this does not affect the antithetical character of the passage. Indeed, while in v. 5 Paul speaks about θεοὶ πολλοί and κύριοι πολλοί, in v. 6 he proclaims εἰς θεός and εἰς κύριος.

The second element of the verse is the dative ἡμῖν. As far as I know, there is no discussion in modern scholarship concerning the English translation of ἡμῖν in 1 Cor 8:6.⁷ According to Fitzmyer, here the *ethical*

⁴ There are some textual variants of the verse in the extant manuscripts. For instance, ἀλλά is omitted in p⁴⁶, B, 33, sa, Ir^{lat}. Also B has δι’ ὃν τὰ πάντα instead of δι’ οὗ. See Swanson (2003, 114–115). See also some variant readings in C. Tischendorf’s *Novum Testamentum Graece* and Metzger (1994, 557) which, however, seem to present considerably late alterations. I will comment some of variants just mentioned in the text below.

⁵ BDAG (2000, 220) translates καὶ γὰρ εἴπερ as “for even if.” See also Robertson (1934, 1026) who notes the important role of the meaning of καὶ εἰ in the whole construction: “With καὶ εἰ the supposition is considered improbable. With καὶ εἰ the truth of the principal sentence is stoutly affirmed in the face of this one objection. It is rhetorically an extreme case. In 1 Cor. 8:5, καὶ γὰρ εἴπερ εἰσὶν – [ἀλλ’] ἡμῖν εἰς θεός, we have an instance.” See also BDF (1961, §454 (2), 237): “In 1 Cor 8.5f. καὶ γὰρ εἴπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοί . . . ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν εἰς θεός is concessive ‘however much’, as in class. Hom.”

⁶ See similarly in Fee (1987, 371); also in Denaux (1996, 600).

⁷ The majority of modern English versions of the Bible and of the commentaries on 1 Corinthians translate it either as “for us” or (like KJV) “to us.”

dative is used and ἡμῖν means in v. 6 “for us, Christians,” not “for us, human beings”; therefore “we” are “set over against heathen contemporaries” (2008, 342). In other words, the use of ἡμῖν introduces specific characteristics of the group of “us” which distinguish it from the group of “not-us” (which is apparently implied in v. 5). As Rainbow points out, “in this context, where Paul is moving from an indication of pagan beliefs to a statement of Christian faith, ἡμῖν expresses that this is ‘our’ view and not ‘theirs’” (1987, 146).

In some other places in 1 Corinthians Paul also uses ἡμῖν and similar dative constructions in order to determine the distinctive character of a particular group and to point to the grounds of its distinctiveness. For instance in 1 Cor 1:18 it is the message about the cross which is used to make the distinction between “those who are perishing” and “us (ἡμῖν),” “who are being saved.”⁸ From this perspective the distinctiveness of ἡμῖν (that is, of “us”) in 8:6 is to be understood in light of the meaning of the remainder of the verse: it is for “us” only *this* particular God and *this* particular Lord.

The text of the verse that follows ἡμῖν may be divided into two parts which form a parallel structure. Each part of the verse consists of three clauses. The subjects of the first clauses of the parts differ (εἰς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ and εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός correspondingly)⁹ while the subjects of the second and the third clauses are the same (τὰ πάντα and ἡμεῖς in each case).¹⁰ In each part of the verse the relations between the subject of the first clause and the subjects of the second and the third clauses are described; however, the prepositions through which these relations are presented are different. The two parts are connected by the conjunction καί.

⁸ ἡμῖν as an indication of a specific group is used elsewhere in First Corinthians: 1:18; 1:30; 2:10; 2:12; 15:57. See also the similar dative construction in 1:23–24 and 14:22. Grindheim (2002, 695) speaks about the dative which “sets . . . apart . . . an elect group (‘saved’ in 1:18, ‘called’ in 1:24, and ‘perfect’ in 2:6).”

⁹ Whether “God the Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” are the subjects of the corresponding clauses or the predicates, this depends on the way of translation of the verbless formula. The detailed discussion on this issue goes far beyond the purpose of this study.

¹⁰ That Paul has in mind the same τὰ πάντα and ἡμεῖς in both parts of the verse seems for me to be evident: the two parts of the verse are united by one opening ἡμῖν (which refers to both parts) and by the conjunction καί between them; below I discuss this in light of the theological meaning of the parts of the verse.

In the first part of the verse εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ is affirmed. His relations with τὰ πάντα are depicted through the preposition ἐκ while relations with ἡμεῖς are depicted through the preposition εἰς. The difference in prepositions underlines the difference between τὰ πάντα and ἡμεῖς; for ἐκ and εἰς indicate opposite directions: τὰ πάντα—from God, ἡμεῖς—towards God.

The second part of the verse consists of the affirmation of εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός and the description of his relations with τὰ πάντα and ἡμεῖς; these relations differ from the relations depicted in the first part, for here the preposition διὰ is used.

It is worth noting that while ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα and δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα are clearly subordinate clauses, the third clauses of each part of the verse (ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν and ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ) can be grammatically considered as main clauses, along with the first clauses mentioned above. In this case each part of the verse consists of two main clauses in which mutual relations between one God/one Lord and “us” are clearly articulated: ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ and [ἡμῖν] εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός are complemented with ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν (i.e., God) and ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ (i.e., the Lord). In other words, the verse stresses not only God’s/the Lord’s relations to “us” but also “our” reversal relations to one God/one Lord. This aspect of reciprocal relations seems to play the foundational role in understanding of the meaning of “us” in 1 Cor 8:6.

One should not overlook the importance of καί between two parts of the verse. This conjunction strongly connects one God and one Lord in the same way as it connects “many gods” with “many lords” in v. 5. In the opposition to “many gods *and* many lords” Paul proclaims nothing else but “one God . . . *and* one Lord.” Therefore, the unity between one God and one Lord is stressed as a priority issue. The use of different prepositions does not weaken this unity but, on the contrary, strengthens it: God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through their communication with τὰ πάντα and ἡμεῖς are presented as co-workers who exercise different but complementary functions in one single process.

Finally, the significance of εἷς which is used with respect to both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ should be emphasised. Its repetition serves as an opposition to twice repeated πολλοί in v. 5 and once again strengthens the parallel structure of v. 6. It also points to the unique relations of one God and one Lord, on the one side, with τὰ πάντα and ἡμεῖς on the other, and consequently, stresses the unity between the actions of the one God and the one Lord.

Thus, one may recognise in v. 6 the complex combination of mutual relations of its elements. Each element takes its unique place and has unique relations with the other elements. The meaning of each and every particular element of the verse elucidates the meaning of the other elements, and vice versa.¹¹ The grammatical structure of 1 Cor 8:6 becomes in fact the key to its meaning.

Now we may start to analyse how the theological meaning of different elements of the verse may help to understand the meaning of ἡμῶν.

1.2 *God and the Lord in 1 Corinthians 8:6: A functional definition*

At first glance, ἡμῶν in 1 Cor 8:6 might be understood as evidence of “monolatry.”¹² A comparison of the content of 1 Cor 8:6 with the content of 1 Cor 8:5 (where Paul refers to “many gods and lords” of pagan cults) seems to support this view. If the “monolatry” interpretation of the passage is correct, Paul’s statement can be reformulated as follows:

If for “them” (other religious communities) there are “their” gods and lords, for “us” (the members of our community) there is a different (that is, “our”) God and a different (“our”) Lord.

And then ἡμῶν could be understood as a reference to a religious group similar to other religious groups of its milieu and time; this group worships

¹¹ The question of the origin and possible sources of the verse goes beyond the scope of this study, although it has been highly debated for decades. In fact, it is not possible to determine now whether Paul has coined the formula himself or he has borrowed it (or its different elements) from any source. What for me seems to be much more important is Paul’s deliberate arrangement of the elements of the formula. As Dunn (1980, 181) rightly points out, there is “nothing to indicate that they [the elements of the verse] had *already* been united partially or wholly prior to Paul’s writing of 1 Corinthians” [author’s italics]. Although, according to Kramer (1966, 95), the “exact parallelism” serves as an indication that Paul has borrowed the formula, in my opinion, the parallel structure of the verse is for Paul the best (only?) way to express his understanding of mutual relations between God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, the “all things,” and “us,” keeping also in mind God’s/the Lord’s opposition to λεγόμενοι θεοί of v. 5.

¹² The exact meaning of the word “monolatry” can best be deduced from the meaning of its components: the worship of [only] one object; this worship, however, does not exclude the existence of other deities. I find relevant the following understanding of the term: “Henotheism or monolatry . . . recognizes local limitations in the jurisdiction of the god worshipped. He has his domain and other gods have theirs. He looks out for his people and his divine competitors look out for theirs” (James 1932, 130).

its own “god” and “lord” who are similar to gods and lords of other religious groups.

This monolatry interpretation also has a direct effect on the understanding of the extent of the lordship of Jesus Christ. According to this interpretation (which has been elaborated by the proponents of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), Jesus Christ in 8:6 is presented merely as a cultic figure of a particular community, like other κύριοι πολλοί (cf. v. 5) of the Hellenistic world. He is the Lord of the limited group (ἡμῶν) only; he is the “Lord” because the members of this group endue him with the name of “lord.”

However, this “monolatry” or “cultic” understanding of the correlation between ἡμῶν and κύριος in 1 Cor 8:6 does not take into account that the content of v. 6 is intended as a radical antithesis to that of v. 5. Paul does not merely distinguish “[their] gods and lords” and “[our] God and Lord” but explains *why* he exhorts to acknowledge this particular God and this particular Lord as “ours.” They are to be understood as “God” and “the Lord” not because some religious group designates them in this manner, but because their specific *functions* determine their specific *status*. Paul describes these functions through the usage of the set of prepositions which point to the unique role of God and the Lord in both creation and salvation and thus to their *universal* significance.

This deliberate emphasis on the universal functions of one God and one Lord plays the fundamental role in understanding the meaning of ἡμῶν. For Paul, ἡμῶν refers not to those who just have “our” own “god” and “lord” but to those who discern the *true* God and *true* Lord and because of this worship them as “our” God and Lord. These universal functions should be analysed in more detail.

1.3 One God and one Lord in the act of creation

Two elements of 1 Cor 8:6 indicate that one God and one Lord play the universal role in the act of creation. Firstly, the use of τὰ πάντα should be understood in a cosmological sense¹³ as “all things.” But when Paul writes ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα and δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα he not only points to the whole

¹³ The attempt of Murphy-O’Connor (1978) to ascribe to τὰ πάντα exclusively salvific meaning was rejected by the majority of scholars and later by himself. In his postscript to the article re-published in his book *Keys To First Corinthians* (2009) he recognises the co-existence of cosmology and soteriology in the verse with regard to God the Father; however, the absence of cosmological motif with regard to Jesus Christ is preserved. Below I give the pagination of the article as it appears in the *Keys*.

creation as such; τὰ πάντα also indicates that other “gods and lords”¹⁴ (mentioned in v. 5) have been likewise created by the Father and through Jesus Christ. As Hodge maintains, here Paul rejects the real divinity of beings “who are called gods”: “They are mere creatures” (1860, 144). Giblin (1975, 533 n. 29) makes an important reference to Ps 148:13 in which “God’s praise (majesty) is said to be above earth and heaven (above all creation),” that is, above the sphere of the (alleged) activity of “gods” in 1 Cor 8:5.¹⁵

Thus, “many gods” in v. 5 are not “other” gods, nor even “their” gods; they are in fact not “gods by nature” (cf. Gal 4:8). But this is also true with regard to the opposition between “many lords” and “one Lord.”¹⁶ In v. 6 Jesus Christ plays the role of mediator between God the Father and τὰ πάντα; this expresses his unique relations with both. According to the text of the verse, nothing is created without his mediation. And by virtue of this unparalleled role in creation Jesus Christ surpasses other “lords” in the same manner as God the Father surpasses other “gods” by virtue of his unparalleled role.¹⁷ Like “many gods,” “many lords” mentioned in v. 5 are not “lords by nature.” Whatever titles and attributes might be ascribed to them by different religious groups, their lordship is negligible in comparison with that of Jesus Christ.¹⁸ In regard to “all things” Jesus Christ is “one Lord,” that is, the true Lord.

¹⁴ The question whether Paul believes in the real existence of other heavenly beings which are called by some people “gods and lords” is an issue of secondary importance for our study.

¹⁵ Giblin also refers to Ps 134 (135):6 where YHWH is said to do everything he pleases in heaven and on earth; but for our discussion v. 5 from the same Psalm seems to be even more illustrative: there the Jewish God is presented as both YHWH and *Adon* (that is, the Lord) and as the Lord he is proclaimed to be above all gods.

¹⁶ Cf. Robertson and Plummer (1911, 167): “There are two parallel triplets: θεοὶ πολλοί, εἷς θεός, τὰ πάντα; κύριοι πολλοί, εἷς κύριος, τὰ πάντα. The one God is compared on the one side with many gods, on the other with the sum total of the universe; so also the one Lord. The comparison results in opposition in the one case, in harmony in the other.”

¹⁷ Cf. Smit (1996, 586): “Just like the Father is God in an exclusive manner, so Jesus Christ is Lord in the same exclusive manner.”

¹⁸ Cf. Cullmann (1963, 197) who points out, that “the heathen *kyrioi* are no longer absolute lords, for their authority has been absorbed into that of one *Kyrios* . . .; all these *kyrioi*, these ‘powers and authorities’, have been conquered by Christ, are subject to him, and thus for this reason can for us no longer be *kyrioi* in absolute sense.”

In other words, the God and the Lord of v. 6 are opposed to the gods and the lords of v. 5 not because they are God and the Lord “for *us*” but because ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα.

The cosmological dimension of the functions of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is also confirmed by the usage of εἷς. Through contradistinction of εἷς in v. 6 to πολλοί in v. 5 Paul makes clear that no one else can execute the functions of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This oneness indicates the uniqueness. De Lacey points to the very character of the expression in 8:6: “Jesus was not simply ‘the Lord’ to the early Church. He was the one, and so implicitly the only, Lord” (1982, 199; see also 191).

Thus Jesus Christ is not merely the Lord of a certain religious group, that is, merely “the Lord for *us*”; nor is he the Lord because of “our” decision. His lordship expressed in v. 6 is spread over the whole creation. He is the Lord as such; in fact, he is the only Lord. This has an important implication for understanding who Paul’s “we” are: “we” are those who recognise Jesus Christ as the universal Lord, along with the recognition of God the Father as the universal God.

1.4 *One God and one Lord in the act of salvation*

Although Paul explicitly points to the universal scale of the functions of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ, he nevertheless writes in the beginning of the verse not “for all” (πᾶσιν) but “for us” (ἡμῖν). By doing so Paul introduces the salvific dimension of God’s and the Lord’s work which is as significant as their work in creation.

In recent scholarship the salvific dimension of 1 Cor 8:6 is generally recognised and seems to be a matter of scholarly consensus. There are, however, nuances, which are sometimes discernible in positions of scholars, but nevertheless not sufficiently stressed as important for the understanding of the verse as a whole. Three of such nuances, firmly intertwined, are of importance for the analysis of the meaning of “we” here.

1.4.1 ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν as an eschatological perspective

Because of the absence of verbs in 1 Cor 8:6, different translations of the phrase ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν have been presented. In some of them the stress is on the current state of “our” existence (that is, for instance, “for whom we

exist”¹⁹). This kind of translation is convincingly challenged by Sagnard (1950) who emphasises the dynamic character of the relations between the elements of the verse and the necessity to use the verbs of movement in the translation.²⁰ Giblin speaks in this connection about “personal direction” and “communitarian perspective” (1975, 535). Also according to Murphy-O’Connor, “the prepositions *ek*, *eis*, and *dia* demanded verbs of motion”; thus he uses the verb “to go” in his translation of ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν (2009, 72, also see 58).²¹

The use of the verbs of motion raises the question concerning the direction of “our” move. As Rainbow (1987, 152) maintains, “the ἐκ-phrase . . . and the εἰς-phrase mutually define one another in such a way as to comprehend the course of history from origin to goal.”²² Having started the verse with the indication of the initial act of history, that is, creation, Paul logically accomplishes it with the indication of the final act, that is, eschatological salvation. And therefore, ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν points to God the Father as to “our” *goal*²³ or the “end-goal”—*Endziel*, as H. Langkammer calls him (1971, 197). In other words, not the description of the current state defines “us”; “we” are defined through moving towards the eschatological goal, that is, towards God the Father.

¹⁹ As an example of the translations with the usage of the verb “to be,” Sagnard (1950, 54) quotes A. Lemonnyer’s translation (“pour qui nous sommes”). This sort of translation was also presented in RSV (“For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and *for whom we exist . . .*” [my italics]) and later reproduced in NRSV without any modifications.

²⁰ Correspondingly Sagnard translates the phrase ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν as “vers qui nous <allons>” (1950, 58). To be sure, some commentators prior to Sagnard’s article already translated the phrase using the verbs of motion. But he seems to be the first who discussed the opposition between static and dynamic meaning of v. 6 in detail.

²¹ In terms of grammar, to be sure, the meaning of prepositions depends sometimes on the context. See, for instance, Wallace (1996, 358–360) who maintains that the prepositions of motion can be used with verbs of state. See, however, also the note of Robertson (1934, 569) that “the usage [of prepositions] varies greatly in the course of the centuries and in different regions, not to say in the vernacular and in the literary style. Besides, each preposition has its own history and every writer his own idiosyncrasies.”

²² Cf. Murphy-O’Connor (2009, 58): “The finality of creation is redemption.”

²³ God in 1 Cor 8:6 is defined as the “goal” for “us” in many studies; see, for instance, Robertson and Plummer (1911, 168); Richardson (1994, 301); Thiselton (2000, 638); Collins (2000, 315); Fee (2007, 91); Fitzmyer (2008, 330, 342).

1.4.2 Salvation is not an automatic process

The second salvific element of the verse which has to be stressed here is that the salvation is not an automatic process. The very character of the salvific motif in the verse is expressed through the explicit distinction between “all things” and “we.” This distinction has not always received the necessary attention.²⁴ However, the fact that Paul underlines this distinction two times²⁵ indicates that the final salvation will not be like a *Stoic apokatastasis*.²⁶ “We” indeed are the part of all things and have been created along with them. But, according to the text, it is “we,” not “all things” who move towards the *Endziel*.

One can also regard this from a different angle. In the verse “all things” originate “from,” that is, they are created; although grammatically τὰ πάντα is a subject, it is in fact the object (even the result) of God’s work which is seen in ἐξ οὗ. In contrast “we” are burdened with a definite purpose and have a clearly expressed task, namely to attain God the Father. This implies an activity from “our” side; “we” are expected to “go.” In other words, in 1 Cor 8:6 “we” are those who intentionally move towards God as the eschatological goal and through this may hope for salvation.

1.4.3 Salvation comes through the Lord only

The last (but not the least!) salvific element of the verse is the meaning of the second διὰ which stresses the significance of the Lord for the salvation of “us.” Some interpretations of the verse (consciously or unconsciously) question this significance. For instance, Lietzmann (1969, 37) translates the verse as “Gott ist letzter Urgrund und Zweck, Christus Vermittler des Weltgeschehens wie des Christenlebens.” According to Barrett (1968, 192) the part with the Lord should be translated as “one Lord Jesus Christ, through . . . whom all things, including ourselves, come into being,” and therefore without any indication of Christ’s role in coming events. If one continues these assumptions logically, the act of the final salvation appears

²⁴ See, for instance, the characteristic remark of Denaux (1996, 601–602) that “after ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα one would expect to read καὶ τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν rather than καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν.”

²⁵ Murphy-O’Connor (2009, 64–65) emphasises “a twice-repeated shift from *ta panta* to *hēmeis*”; see also Fitzmyer (2008, 337).

²⁶ Cox’s (2007, 147) expression; see also Eriksson’s (1998, 125–126 n. 253) remark that the twice-repeated shift from τὰ πάντα to ἡμεῖς and the use of four prepositional phrases points to an explicit distinction of 1 Cor 8:6 from Stoic pantheism.

to be a matter of relations between “us” and God only. Through Christ, indeed, “we” have been created (even if one understands this as a “new creation” also, that is, “we” have been through him already created anew as Christians²⁷) but in “our” final attainment of God, Christ plays no specific role.²⁸

There are, however, some objections to this reducing of the Lord’s role. First of all, the theme of Christ’s mediation in final (eschatological) salvation is a commonplace for Paul. It is also elaborated in chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians itself (see the second part of this study). Thus, there is no reason to suggest that in 1 Cor 8:6 Paul excludes Jesus Christ from his description of the final act of salvation.

Secondly, the highly parallel structure of the verse presupposes that the correlation between ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα and δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα is the same as the correlation between ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν and ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ. The full “course of history” (Rainbow’s expression, see above) with regard to God’s work should be similarly referred to the Lord’s work. The “dynamic sense of movement ‘from . . . through . . . to,’” as Thiselton sees it (2000, 637) creates a single and complete process of co-working of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As Hurtado points out, the repetition of the preposition διὰ “makes emphatic his [Jesus Christ’s] role as agent in creation as well as redemption” (2003, 123). In other words, the eschatological motif expressed in εἰς αὐτόν should also be discerned in the meaning of δι’ αὐτοῦ and the salvific role of the Lord should be understood in the closest connection with the salvific role of God the Father. It means that δι’ αὐτοῦ points not to something that has already happened but to the future reality, to something that will take place as the final point of the process started in the act of creation. It denotes the *eschatological* act.

Therefore, the second διὰ indicates *how* “we” can get the final salvation. By analogy with the usage of the first διὰ²⁹ where Jesus Christ is presented as the only and indispensable mediator between God the Father

²⁷ This position is expressed, for instance, in Hamerton-Kelly (1973, 130).

²⁸ It seems that the similar position was maintained by the Corinthians and that precisely this position caused Paul’s argumentation in 1 Corinthians in general and in chapter 8 in particular (see the second part of this study).

²⁹ As it has been noted in n. 3, B reads δι’ ὧν τὰ πάντα, not δι’ οὗ; on the other hand, it retains δι’ αὐτοῦ with regard to ἡμεῖς. In my view, the use of two different διὰ-constructions in the verse contradicts its deliberate parallel structure. The reading δι’ ὧν has no support in other manuscripts.

and “all things” in the act of creation, in the act of salvation expressed through the second διὰ Jesus Christ exercises the function of the only and indispensable mediator between “we” and God as the eschatological goal. The wording of the verse does not leave a chance to come to God bypassing the Lord’s mediation. Not just “through him” but “only through him.”

One may ask what the exact meaning of this διὰ is, that is, how in fact the eschatological act of salvation will be executed through Jesus Christ. Although in 1 Cor 8:6 Paul does not provide us with the explicit answer on this question, in my opinion δι’ αὐτοῦ as an eschatological act implies here the theme of the final judgement and presents Jesus Christ as the universal eschatological Judge who will ensure the group of “us” an access to God the Father. Indeed, the theme of the judgement plays an important role in 1 Corinthians in general. Jesus Christ as the Lord is mentioned as a key figure of the judgement in different places of the letter, either explicitly or implicitly.³⁰ Moreover, the theme of the judgement may also be discerned in other verses of chapter 8 (see below).

1.4.4 General points of the salvific motif in 1 Cor 8:6

If we now summarise the conclusions of the previous sub-sections, we can determine three important soteriological motifs in 1 Cor 8:6: a) salvation implies a process, that is, it is not about “our” current state but rather about “our” move towards the eschatological goal which is God the Father; b) salvation presupposes striving for the final goal; c) there is no salvation but through the Lord Jesus Christ: As the only mediator of creation, he plays an equally unique role in salvation, most likely as the Judge of the last judgement through which “we” can attain God the Father.

These motifs have a direct application for the understanding of the meaning of “we” in 1 Cor 8:6: a) “We” are those who know where “we” must go; b) “We” are also those who know that “our” salvation is not an automatic process and partly depends on “ourselves”; c) “We” are those who know who will judge “us” favourably. Each of these components is

³⁰ Starting from “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” in 1:8, Paul consistently comes back to the theme throughout the letter; see 3:13–15; 4:4–5; 11:32; 15:24–28 and some other places where the idea of the final judgement is somehow implied (including ch. 8 itself). The theme of the Lord’s judgement can be also recognised in *maranatha* in 16:22. Cf. Denaux’ (1996, 606) interesting remark concerning a parallel between 1 Cor 8:6 and 1 Thess 1:9–10; according to him Jesus’ soteriological function here is about “deliverance from the eschatological judgement and so bringing the faithful to God.”

essential for the definition of “we.” None of these components may be neglected. And all of them serve as boundary markers which separate “us” from “not-us.”

1.5 Conclusion of part 1: Inseparability of creation and salvation in 1 Corinthians 8:6

Thus the formula ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ . . . καὶ [ἡμῖν] εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός in 1 Cor 8:6 points to the double character of the relations of God and the Lord with “us.” On the one hand, their cosmological functions are articulated which makes “our” God and “our” Lord the *only* true God and the *only* true Lord of the whole creation (in which “we” are included); on the other hand, God’s and the Lord’s specific relations with “us” are revealed through their soteriological functions. Paul’s use of ἡμῖν in the beginning of the verse serves to demonstrate the unity of these two dimensions. What sometimes seems to be overlooked, however, is the direct dependence of the matter of salvation on the matter of cosmology. Paul’s ultimate concern about the issue of salvation does not downplay the significance of the cosmological issue but, on the contrary, strengthens it. Cosmology does not oppose soteriology; cosmology is the foundation for soteriology.

For Paul the question *who* can eventually save is a matter of great importance. The trust in idols that cannot speak (1 Cor 12:2) or in “gods” and “lords” (1 Cor 8:5) who are actually not real gods and lords (even if they are regarded as “gods” and “lords” by some communities) is a sort of self-delusion: these entities can do nothing. According to 1 Cor 8:6, the knowledge of who can save depends on the knowledge as to who is the universal Lord: the act of salvation should be understood as part of a cosmological act,³¹ that is, salvation comes through the one who, due to his cosmological status as the Lord and due to his participation in creation, *is actually able* to finalise the whole cosmological process in general and determine the destiny of “us” in particular. Thus, to question Jesus Christ’s cosmological significance means to question his significance as the Saviour³² and therefore to turn the only Lord into one of κύριοι πολλοί.

But at the same time the significance of the salvific dimension should not be underestimated. The cosmological Lord Jesus Christ is

³¹ See Collins (2000, 320): “Paul’s protology implies an eschatology.”

³² Cf. Hurtado (2003, 124): “Attributing preexistence to Jesus proceeds from the conviction that he is the eschatological agent of redemption.”

presented not as a remote deity from philosophical speculations. On the contrary: the very movement “*through him*” points to the dynamic relations between “us” and the Lord and to the absence of any indifference from his side.

We may now formulate the distinctiveness of the group of ἡμῶν according to 1 Cor 8:6: “for us” means “for those [only]” who accept the universal God and Lord as “our” God and Lord; through this acceptance “we” obtain the access to the understanding of “our” way to the ultimate salvation. Thus, the content of 1 Cor 8:6 presupposes both the possession of the true knowledge and the appropriate retroaction on it from human side. However, the content of chapter 8 shows that the Corinthians and Paul define the characteristics of the “we”-group differently. In the second part of the study I discuss this difference in order to clarify who, according to Paul, can be included in the group of “us” mentioned in 1 Cor 8:6, and on which conditions.

2 Contextual Reading: Who Are ἡμεῖς in 1 Corinthians 8:6?

As has been mentioned in the introductory section, scholars generally interpret ἡμεῖς in 1 Cor 8:6 as all the members of Christian communities indiscriminately. If this is true, then every member of the Corinthian (and any other Christian) community has already been included into Paul’s ἡμεῖς-group by virtue of his/her entry into the church. There are, however, some problems with this position: the context of verse 6 reveals that Paul’s definition of (Christian) ἡμεῖς is not the same as the Corinthians’ definition. In this part of the study I discuss Paul’s critical reaction to some Corinthians’ acclamations; this helps to clarify his understanding of ἡμεῖς used in v. 6, namely, *who* can be included into the group of “us” and *on which conditions*. It is noteworthy that the figure of the Lord Jesus Christ plays a key role in Paul’s argumentation.

2.1 *Who are “we” according to the Corinthians*

Apart from v. 6 “we” occurs (implicitly) in chapter 8 in vv. 1, 4, and 8. These three texts, however, are often interpreted in recent scholarship as quotations from the letter of the Corinthians to Paul.³³ This interpretation

³³ A significant number of scholars support the Corinthians’ authorship of vv. 1 and 4. See, for instance, Robertson and Plummer (1911, 163, 166); Barrett (1968, 189, 191); Dunn (1980, 180); Hurd (1983, 120–123); Fitzmyer (2008, 338, 340). There are more doubts and disputes concerning v. 8 and especially concerning the second part of the

finds its strong support in the context of the chapter: as I will attempt to demonstrate, all these texts are followed by Paul's critique or correction.

In v. 1 the Corinthians maintain that they already possess knowledge which they apparently consider as sufficient for their proper relations with God. In v. 4 they proclaim the oneness of God as the basic content of their knowledge. Finally, in v. 8 they assert that their earthly behaviour (regarding eating, in particular) cannot affect their ultimate relations with God. One can reconstruct their position as follows: "we are those who know that there is no God but one; this knowledge separates us from pagans and grants us freedom in our earthly behaviour; this behaviour does not affect our ultimate relations with God, that is, our final salvation."³⁴ These are the characteristic elements of the Corinthians' self-definition, that is, who *they* are. The Corinthians are confident that these elements fit Paul's gospel and allow them to be included into the group of those who will ultimately attain God the Father (that is, into *Paul's* ἡμεῖς).

Throughout chapter 8 Paul, however, makes it clear that his qualification of "we-group" expressed in v. 6 does not coincide with the Corinthians' qualification of themselves. In other words, Paul's "we" in v. 6 differs from the Corinthians' "we" in vv. 1, 4, and 8. The pivotal element of the difference is the figure of Jesus Christ. The Corinthians, according to Paul, either misunderstand the significance of his status as the Lord or neglect the necessity to subdue their daily life to him. In the subsequent sections I discuss Paul's reaction to the Corinthians' self-definition in more detail.

verse. However, Grosheide (1955, 194), Jeremias (1966, 273), Cox (2007, 151) and Murphy-O'Connor in his "Food and Spiritual Gifts in 1 Cor 8:8" (see 2009, 76–86) maintain that Paul here quotes the Corinthians' letter to him; see also Fitzmyer (2008, 345). In my opinion, Murphy-O'Connor is persuasive in his defence of the Corinthians' authorship of the entire v. 8. The basic argument here is Paul's reaction to the statement which is found in the verses which follow. Note also the list of scholars who have been convinced by Murphy-O'Connor's argument (2009, 81–82). See my discussion on Murphy-O'Connor's hypothesis and the arguments of some other scholars below.

³⁴ In his analysis of the position of Horsley, Wright (1992, 124) reconstructs the position of the strong Corinthians as follows: "They were teaching three things which Paul is concerned about: we all have γνῶσις, idols have no real existence, and we are therefore free to eat what we like." Cf. Cox's (2007, 151) reconstruction of the Corinthians' position: "They believe they possess certain knowledge . . . which affords them the liberty . . . to eat temple meat. The content of that knowledge is summed up in the following slogans: 'there is no God but one,' 'idols are nothing in the world' (v. 4) and 'Food will not bring us close to God' (v. 8)."

2.2 1 Corinthians 8:1–3: Paul’s understanding of true knowledge

In his critique of the statement that “we know that all of us possess knowledge” (8:1) Paul points to the lack of the Corinthians’ proper understanding of what kind of relations they need to have with God. The Corinthians’ “knowledge” is not a true (or “necessary”) knowledge at all for it is not based on their love for God; it is love for God which is a precondition for getting true knowledge, not vice versa.³⁵ This love for God is the distinctive feature of Paul’s understanding of ἡμεῖς, for precisely this love makes “us” “known by him” (v. 3).

The love for God in 1 Corinthians seems to be paralleled with the love for God expressed in the Old Testament as the fundamental characteristic of belonging to the true Israel. It is marked, for instance, in Deut 6; in the *Shema*³⁶ (Deut 6:4–5) love for God is posed as a part of the proclamation of the oneness of God: “You shall love the Lord your God.” In the following verses it is presented as a precondition of right understanding of the commandments of God (i.e., of true knowledge) and, consequently, of right behaviour. The misunderstanding and disobedience leads to God’s anger and destruction (6:15) while doing “what is right and good” will provide with God’s reward (6:18–19).

The love for God articulated in 1 Cor 8:3 brings Paul’s readers back to the same theme in chapter 2. There Paul makes a radical distinction between two groups (“us” and “not-us”) and places the figure of Jesus Christ as a watershed. Those who reject God’s message crucified the Lord of glory (that is, they did not accept Jesus Christ as the Lord; 2:8); they are “doomed to perish” (2:6). On the other hand, those who love God (2:9), like Paul, recognise Jesus Christ as the core of true knowledge (2:2). For this group God has prepared an outstanding reward (2:9).

The issue of love finds its elaboration in the final words of the letter (16:22); those who have no love for the Lord (Jesus Christ) are accursed.

³⁵ Some scholars contradistinguish love and knowledge *as such* (see, for instance, Kjær 1996, 35–36). This position, however, seems to be unjustified: in 8:1–3 Paul opposes love to the *knowledge acclaimed by the Corinthians*, not to the *true knowledge*; the latter (not the former) should be considered as the gift from God (cf. 1:5 and also 8:2b). In fact true knowledge and true love are interconnected: “Love for God opens channels of knowledge rather than closing them because that person [who loves God] is in a special sense ‘known by God’” (Bailey, 2011, 234).

³⁶ Wright (1992, 127 n. 19) indicates the link between the *Shema* and 1 Cor 8:1–3 and asserts that “it is the remarkable that so few have noticed the reference to the *Shema* in v. 3.”

Maranatha, which immediately follows, anticipates the coming Lord's judgement. According to Fee (2007, 85–86), it “probably serves as both encouragement and warning” and therefore strengthens the significance of the love for the Lord for one's eschatological future.

Thus both in Deuteronomy 6 and in 1 Corinthians love for God has a clear link with the eschatological distinction between “us” and “not-us.” But in 1 Corinthians Paul makes a remarkable addition. According to him, love for God is inseparable from the recognition of Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory; this is in fact the content of *true* knowledge. The eschatological distinction between “us” and “not-us” depends on the acceptance of the true knowledge and will be accomplished by the coming Lord. In other words, Paul makes the figure of Jesus Christ the criterion for belonging to the true Israel (that is, to “us”).³⁷

According to Paul, not everybody understands God's gifts (2:14). Paul warns the Corinthians that they are still on their way to the full understanding; they are now merely “infants in Christ” (3:1). What he says in 2:9–16³⁸ about “us” does not fully refer to them for they are still not “spiritual” (3:1). In order to join “us” they have to replace *their* “knowledge” based on human speculation with “*our*” knowledge based on the love for God and centred on the figure of Jesus Christ (2:2).

In his counter-argument against the Corinthians' knowledge Paul puts the emphasis on the relational aspect: the Corinthians have to have not so much knowledge about God but knowledge about the proper relations with God. This leads us to the correlation between the content of verses 4 and 6.

2.3 *1 Corinthians 8:4, 6: Paul's inclusion of Jesus Christ in the monotheistic formula*

As it has been mentioned above, it seems very plausible that in v. 4 Paul also cites the position of the Corinthians. There are some grammatical

³⁷ Cf. Waaler (2008, 442): “Recognition of the Lordship of Jesus was necessary for inclusion in the Christian in-group and absence of love directed at Christ was sufficient for exclusion from this in-group.”

³⁸ Some scholars regard 1 Cor 2:2–16 as a later interpolation in Paul's text. This view was defended by Widmann (1979, 44–53) and elaborated by Walker Jr. (2001, 127–146). The counter-arguments, however, seem to be rather sound (see, for instance, Murphy-O'Connor 1986, 81–94 and Fitzmyer 2007, 169–170). There is no room in this paper to discuss the issue with proper attention but I am not convinced that these verses contradict Paul's line of thought both in chs. 1–3 and in the letter as a whole.

reasons to think so.³⁹ But besides this, Paul's wording in v. 6 allows to assume the Corinthians' origin of v. 4.

Paul's use καὶ γὰρ εἶπερ in v. 5 indicates that in vv. 5–6 Paul elaborates what is written in v. 4. Verse 5 presents his elaboration of οὐδὲν εἰδῶλον ἐν κόσμῳ, while in v. 6 he reacts to οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς. It is significant for the present study that the theological contents of vv. 4 and 6 do not coincide: while in v. 4 one reads “we know” that [there is] εἷς θεός, in v. 6 Paul states that “for us” [there are] εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ καὶ (!) εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. What is the reason and meaning of Paul's reformulation of the Corinthians' statement which (the statement) at first glance appears as self-evident?

In vv. 4 and 6 the *Shema* (Deut 6:4: κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν) as the expression of Jewish monotheism is alluded to again; this is generally recognised in modern scholarship. The Corinthians in v. 4 merely repeat the main message of the *Shema*, namely the oneness of God. They presumably consider it as the core of the gospel (especially in the context of their polytheistic environment) and as the foundation of their knowledge. Paul, however, replaces their formula with the statement in which he modifies the *Shema* in three significant ways: he articulates the functions of God (and the Lord); he adds the description of the relations between God (and the Lord) with “us”; and he includes Jesus Christ in the formula as εἷς κύριος.

The latter point is the most important and the most controversial one. Some scholars endeavour to protect in 1 Cor 8:6 the purity of the Jewish monotheistic formula. They suggest to divide v. 6 into two separated parts: the *Shema* itself is preserved only in the part devoted to God the Father, while the part devoted to Jesus Christ is a certain “addition” to the *Shema*.⁴⁰ In other words, according to this hypothesis Jesus Christ is completely separated from the monotheistic formula and this makes Paul's statement in v. 6 similar to what the Corinthians maintain in v. 4. But this hypothesis fails to answer the main question concerning the idea of lordship in v. 6: how has εἷς κύριος of the *Shema* turned into εἷς κύριος of 1 Cor 8:6? Or, to put it differently, why does Paul

³⁹ In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Fee (1987, 365 n. 30) argues, “The repeated οἶδαμεν ὅτι in vv. 1 and 4, and especially the repeated ὅτι (οἶδαμεν ὅτι . . . καὶ ὅτι) in v. 4, makes this [Paul's citing of the letter of the Corinthians] certain. When Paul is expressing his own ideas he never repeats with a ὅτι; the simple καὶ joins such correlative sentences.” See the similar argument by Giblin (1975, 530).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, McGrath (2009, 40).

call Jesus Christ here “one Lord” if “one Lord” for him is the Jewish God from the *Shema* only?⁴¹

As has already been shown in this article, Paul does not consider Lord in 1 Cor 8:6 as merely an object for worship. Jesus Christ is κύριος because of the functions he exercises. These functions point to the unique work of Jesus Christ *within* the work of God the Father; he is presented as God’s co-worker in the universal process from the very beginning till the very end. In other words, Paul does not mechanically add Jesus Christ to the formula but ascribes to him the functions and therefore the status of the Lord from the original *Shema*: “There can be no mistake: just as in Philippians 2 and Colossians 1, Paul [in 1 Cor 8:6] has placed Jesus *within* an explicit statement, drawn from the Old Testament’s quarry of emphatically monotheistic texts, of the doctrine that Israel’s God is the one and only God, the creator of the world.”⁴²

Therefore, the absence of any mention of Jesus Christ in the Corinthians’ statement in v. 4 looks striking. Does “one God” there imply both God the Father and Jesus Christ? I doubt; for if it was so, Paul would have no reason to reformulate the claim in v. 6. It seems he finds the Corinthians’ statement in v. 4 at least not complete and appeal not to forget or to ignore Jesus Christ in the basic expression of their theology. For Paul the confession of “one God” is now inappropriate unless it includes the confession of “one Lord Jesus Christ” also. As Fee points out (2007, 88–89), Paul in v. 6 “offers a . . . ‘correction’ to their [the Corinthians’] ‘theology’” expressed in v. 4 and “insists that their understanding of the ‘one God’ must now include Christ as well.” The recognition of this sort of unity between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ becomes fundamental for belonging to “us” expressed in v. 6. In other words, “we” for Paul are those who recognise “one God *and* one Lord” in a single monotheistic confession.

Finally, in the statement of v. 4 once again the issue of the Corinthians’ relations with God and the Lord is lacking. The Corinthians’ statement looks like an expression of general knowledge. But this sort of knowledge just “puffs up.” In his reaction in v. 6 Paul points to the dependence of “our” salvation on God and the Lord (see the first part of

⁴¹ This hypothesis also fails to explain why Paul uses this “double” formula at all: why does he mention this “addition” if his intention is to confirm the Corinthians’ statement concerning the oneness of God?; what is the reason for mentioning Jesus Christ here? See below.

⁴² So Wright (1992, 129; authors italics).

this study). For Paul not the conviction that “God is one” as such is the distinctive feature of “us” but “our” proper response to God’s/the Lord’s demands. “We” are those who *go* towards the *Endziel*, and *not merely know* something about him. The absence of the figure of the Lord in v. 4 also questions the Corinthians’ right understanding of *how* “we” go. Precisely the accent on the meaning of the second διὰ of v. 6 is the matter of Paul’s argument in the second half of chapter 8.

2.4 1 Corinthians 8:8–13: Paul’s exhortation to subject daily behaviour to Christ’s lordship

What Paul makes clear immediately after his “Christian redefinition of the Jewish confession of the faith”⁴³ in v. 6, is that the insertion of Jesus Christ in the understanding of God should not be abstract knowledge. The recognition of Jesus Christ as the true Lord presupposes the Corinthians’ permanent subjection to his demands. Doing their daily business, the members of the Corinthian community should not forget that they now live in the conditions of ongoing relations with the Lord who is the only mediator of the process of their final salvation. This is Paul’s concern in vv. 9–13. According to some scholars these verses are Paul’s reaction to the Corinthians’ statement which he quotes in v. 8 and where the first person plural is used five times (one time as the pronoun itself, twice through the respective form of the verb ἐσθίω, and once each through ὑστερούμεθα and περισσεύομεν).⁴⁴

As mentioned above, scholars debate whether v. 8 is the Corinthians’ slogan or Paul’s. Some scholars regard the verse as part of Paul’s own argument.⁴⁵ According to the others, v. 8a is Paul’s quotation from the Corinthians’ letter but v. 8b is Paul’s correction of it.⁴⁶ In turn, Hurd (1983, 68) lists the scholars who attribute the whole verse to the Corinthians’ letter to Paul. The translators of NRSV take into account both possibilities of Paul’s quoting: they explicitly mark v. 8a as the quotation from the Corinthians’ letter to Paul but also note that “the quotation may extend to the end of the verse.”

⁴³ See Wright (1992, 121, 125).

⁴⁴ In NA²⁸: βρῶμα δὲ ἡμᾶς οὐ παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ· οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν (in the NRSV: “Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do”).

⁴⁵ So R. Collins (2000, 325).

⁴⁶ For instance, Barrett (1968, 195).

The contextual reading of the verse demonstrates, in my view, that the whole verse should be regarded as the Corinthians' statement. Some sound arguments have already been suggested. Murphy-O'Connor (2009, 76–77) points out that the content of v. 8a explicitly opposes Paul's statement in v. 13 and therefore cannot be Pauline. He maintains (following F. W. Grosheide and J. Jeremias) that δέ in v. 9 serves as an indication that Paul's argument starts in v. 9 (not in v. 8b⁴⁷). He also supports the position of G. Heinrici concerning the importance of a shift from the first person plural in v. 8 to the second person plural in v. 9. In other words, in terms of both grammar and content verses 9–13 stand in certain opposition to v. 8 and therefore appear to be Paul's reaction to the v. 8 as a whole.

It seems that v. 8, indeed, should be regarded as a single unit. The meaning of the first part of v. 8 may be clarified through the analysis of the meaning of παρίστημι. The literal translation of the verb, *to place beside, to present, to stand by*⁴⁸ does not make much sense in the context of the verse. The suggestion was made that the verb is used in a forensic sense. The future tense of the verb in 1 Cor 8:8 points rather to eschatological perspective than to the present state. Therefore, some commentators translate v. 8a as "Food will not bring us before God's judgement."⁴⁹ Correspondingly the second part of v. 8 seems to play the role of the specification of the Corinthians' views expressed in the first part: according to the Corinthians, neither the eating of (the idol) food, nor the restraint from it make them worse or better⁵⁰ (apparently in their

⁴⁷ Note Murphy-O'Connors' remark that if v. 8b constitute Paul's reaction to v. 8a, "we should expect an adversative particle v. 8b" (2009, 77 n. 10).

⁴⁸ According to LSJ and BDAG.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Barrett (1968, 197); Fee (1987, 382 n. 34); Thiselton (2000, 645). Fitzmyer (2008, 345) hesitates but admits this understanding as possible. In BDAG (2000, 778) it is argued that in 1 Cor 8:8 and in 2 Cor 14:14 "the forensic meaning [of παρίστημι] is not certain . . . and the sense is prob. *bring before God—bring close to God*." One can ask, however, what is the meaning of this bringing "before God" or "close to God"?; is it not a form of the ultimate judgement? Is not this bringing "before God" a result of the decision of the deity that this particular person is worth to be "close to God"?

⁵⁰ Murphy-O'Connor (2009, 77–79) discusses the alternative wording of v. 8b: οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα. Although this variant has very limited support from manuscripts, Murphy-O'Connor offers some arguments to substantiate it. The detailed discussion on the textual problems of this passage goes beyond the scope of the present study. It seems that Paul reacts negatively not on the

religious status). In other words, the general meaning of the Corinthians' statement in v. 8 demonstrates their understanding of the connection between their earthly (daily) behaviour and their ultimate relations with God. One can reformulate the Corinthians' words as follows: "*Our* eating of the food offered to idols⁵¹ will not be the matter of God's final judgement" or, to put it differently, "*our* particular action does not affect *our* salvation."⁵²

Paul reacts immediately. In v. 9 he calls what has been just maintained in v. 8 "*your* ἐξουσία", not "*our*." In his subsequent argument in vv. 10–13 he persuades the Corinthians to recognise the direct dependence of their final destiny on their behaviour. But Paul does it in a striking manner: instead of the appeal to the Corinthians to reconsider their relations with God (who is mentioned in their statement in v. 8) Paul suggests that they build proper relations with Christ.

According to Paul, the Corinthians fail to recognise that an inappropriate use of *their* ἐξουσία first of all threatens their allegiance to Christ.⁵³ Their wrong behaviour results in sinning against Christ (v. 12) and ultimately may lead to the destruction of the members of their community (v. 11). The context plainly indicates that Paul understands this destruction as an eschatological act, that is, the result of the final judgement. Thus, the Corinthians' confidence concerning God's judgement (v. 8) overlooks Christ's judgement (vv. 11–12). Without proper relations with Christ, Paul maintains, there could be no proper relations with God. As Murphy-O'Connor asserts, "Paul's main problem with the Corinthians was their tendency to drift away from the clarity of the demand to follow Christ into speculation about the will of God" (2009, 86).

In other words, in vv. 9–13 Paul's argument flows as follows: the Corinthians' behaviour affects their relations with Jesus Christ; as the true Lord he considers their behaviour as the matter of *his* judgement and *he*

Corinthians' wording as such but on their misunderstanding of the grounds of their behaviour.

⁵¹ Fitzmyer (2008, 346) points out that the saying in v. 8a is only about food, not about food offered to idols; see also Fee (1987, 382 n. 33). This is unconvincing: Paul's usage of βρῶμα in v. 13 seems to undermine this argument.

⁵² The balance of the present tense of the verbs in 8b and future tense of παρίστημι seems to confirm the assumption that the Corinthians have here in mind the link between their present acts and the final judgement.

⁵³ So Cheung (1999, 296).

determines the Corinthians' final destiny which may be destruction (that is, the failure of their attainment of the *Endziel*); it means that their behaviour in fact *does* affect their ultimate relations with God, but this occurs *through* Jesus Christ. And therefore, their daily behaviour should not be the matter of *their* decision but should be determined by the Lord's demands.

It is also worth noting that Paul rejects the Corinthians' understanding of ἐξουσία manifested in 8:8 not only in 8:9–13; his negative reaction is confirmed throughout chapter 9 also. In 9:4 Paul asks the rhetorical question concerning himself and (apparently) Barnabas, whether “[we] have no ἐξουσία to eat and to drink.” The general answer on this, as well as on the other questions from the beginning of the chapter is given in 9:12: “[we] have not made use of this ἐξουσία.” Paul's concern, therefore, is not the question whether he or the Corinthians have ἐξουσία or not, but what to do with it. Both the Corinthians and Paul have ἐξουσία “to eat and to drink”; the former, however, misuse it while Paul is ready not to use it at all. For him the true ἐξουσία implies the *subjection* to the gospel of Christ (cf. 9:12), or to “Christ's law” (9:21), and not ἐξουσία understood in terms of human knowledge. This forms a significant distinction between the Corinthians and Paul's understanding of who “we” must be.⁵⁴

2.5 Conclusion of part 2

The present analysis demonstrates that the Corinthians' self-qualification and Paul's qualification of “we” expressed in 1 Cor 8:6 significantly differ. In the centre of his critique of the Corinthians' views Paul places two issues.

Firstly, Paul stresses the importance of right understanding of the figure of Jesus Christ. It seems that Fee is right when he defines the situation in the Corinthian community as “an early crisis in Christology” characterised by “a diminished view of who Christ is.”⁵⁵ The universal status of the Lord was probably downplayed by the Corinthians in their formulas and apparently in their beliefs. Paul, however, insists that they should understand Jesus Christ as the true Lord of both creation and salvation.

⁵⁴ Therefore, in my opinion the content of chapter 9 strongly supports the Corinthians' authorship of 8:8 in its wholeness.

⁵⁵ See Fee (2007, 84, 86).

Secondly, the Corinthians, according to Paul, overlook the determinative significance of *their relations* with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ for their daily business and their ultimate destiny. For Paul, however, this relational aspect is the core of the whole gospel. Not an abstract knowledge about God and his oneness, but the love for God and the subjection to the Lord open an access to God's gifts and eschatological salvation.

It seems to be a commonplace to consider chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians as devoted to one practical issue, namely the issue of eating of meat sacrificed to idols. It is striking, however, that both times when Paul mentions the issue (in vv. 1 and 4) he immediately switches the topic: he starts to discuss not practical matters themselves ("*what* to do") but their theo- and Christo-logical justification ("*why* to do or not to do," as in vv. 3, 6 and further in vv. 11–12).⁵⁶ And only after the affirmation of the foundation of the Christian truth, Paul proceeds in discussing the issue of idol food. Thus Paul considers practical issues as completely dependent on the theo- and Christo-logical issues. To put it differently, to answer the question concerning idol food (as well as other daily questions) one needs first to answer the questions concerning one's relations with God and the Christ. The latter predetermines the former.

Throughout chapter 8 Paul points to the Lord Jesus Christ as to the foundation of true knowledge and proper behaviour. He is the criterion of belonging to the new Israel. Along with God the Father, he is included in the formula of christological monotheism. Through him only the believers are called to be known by God and through him only they may attain their eschatological goal. As Wright asserts (1992, 133), "God and the people of God are both redefined through Jesus the Messiah."

3 General Conclusion

To sum up, "we" in 1 Cor 8:6 points to the group of those who understand the meaning of the lordship of Jesus Christ: He is not another cultic figure (like lords from Hellenistic cults) but the true Lord of both creation and final destiny. This understanding, however, is not abstract knowledge; it

⁵⁶ As Furnish (1999, 70) rightly points out, "Paul introduces the question about meat from pagan temples with two affirmations that are of critical theological importance, one about knowing God (8.1–3) and another about belonging to one God and one Lord (vv. 4–6)."

has to be applied in daily life. The recognition of Jesus Christ as the universal Lord inevitably entails proper behaviour.

Throughout chapter 8 Paul stresses that the members of the Corinthian community (or at least some of them) are still on their way to be included into the group of “us” mentioned in 1 Cor 8:6. Their error, however, is not about their misunderstanding of the rules of eating idol food. It is about their inadequate relations with Jesus Christ. They neither understand the significance of his status nor behave according to his demands. Therefore “we” in v. 6 does not include all the members of the Christian communities indiscriminately. The entry into the community does not guarantee by itself the final salvation. The Corinthians should liberate themselves from the lordship of false κύριοι; but they have to do it in order to subject themselves to εἰς κύριος, not to their own ἐξουσία.

But Paul does not close the door before the Corinthians; on the contrary, he points to the possibility for them to be included into the group of “us.” He appeals to them to change their erroneous theology and daily behaviour (which are inseparable for him) and through the Lord Jesus Christ strive for the attainment of God the Father as the *Endziel*.

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