

1 Corinthians 8:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) 1

Analysis

For though there be that are called gods (εἴπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοί, eiper eisin legomenoi theoi, "if indeed there are so-called gods")—Paul acknowledges polytheism's ubiquity while denying its reality. The participle legomenoi ("called, so-called") is dismissive—these entities are titled gods but lack divine essence. The parenthetical **as there be gods many, and lords many** recognizes the Greco-Roman pantheon's vastness without conceding legitimacy.

Paul's distinction between theoi (gods) and kyrioi (lords) reflects pagan religious taxonomy—"gods" were supernatural beings, while "lords" could include deified emperors and patron deities. The phrase "whether in heaven or in earth" encompasses celestial and chthonic deities. Paul's rhetorical strategy grants the cultural phenomenon (gods exist as cultural constructs and demonic deceptions, cf. 10:20) while asserting theological reality: only one true God exists.

Historical Context

The Roman Empire's religious pluralism accommodated countless deities—Olympian gods, Eastern mystery religions (Isis, Mithras), imperial cult worship, and local patron gods. Each city had patron deities; Corinth honored Poseidon, Aphrodite, and Apollo prominently. Participation in civic religious festivals was expected, creating pressure on Christians to compromise. The phrase "lords many" likely includes emperor worship, increasingly mandatory in the first century.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What modern "gods many and lords many" compete for ultimate allegiance in your life (money, success, politics, ideology)?
2. How do you live distinctively Christian in a pluralistic culture that treats all religious claims as equally valid?
3. Where are you tempted to compromise Christian exclusivity to avoid social ostracism?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	γὰρ	εἴπερ	εἰσὶν	λεγόμενοι	θεοὶ	εἴτε	ἐν	οὐρανῷ
and	For	though	there be	that are called	gods	or	in	heaven
G2532	G1063	G1512	G1526	G3004	G2316	G1535	G1722	G3772

εἴτε	ἐπὶ	τῆς	γῆς	ώσπερ	εἰσὶν	θεοὶ	πολλοί	καὶ	κύριοι
or	in	G3588	earth	(as	there be	gods	many	and	lords
G1535	G1909		G1093	G5618	G1526	G2316	G4183	G2532	G2962

πολλοί

many
G4183

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 2:28 (References God): But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah.

Galatians 4:8 (References God): Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 (References God): Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Jeremiah 11:13 (References God): For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal.

Jeremiah 2:11 (References God): Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.

Deuteronomy 10:17 (References God): For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:

Daniel 5:4 (References God): They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

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