

1 Cor. 10:1-13 Christ vs. Idols Falls Church AM 2/7/21

The controversy here in chapters 8, 9, and 10, which Paul spent 3 chapters addressing was the dilemma about whether or not to eat food offered to idols. At first it seems petty to us until we realize that it has to do with idolatry.

Idolatry is relevant to us.

Paul showed that it was not just the Christians in the city of Corinth who battled idolatry. Idolatry was everywhere. Paul wrote to the believers in the city of Rome, in Romans 1:25, about all of mankind sharing this problem of idolatry, saying that we “...*exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator...*”

Paul knew that the Creator gave us 10 commandments, and Paul knew which is the very first commandment, the one that tops the list “...*You shall have no other gods besides Me.*” (Exodus 20:3)

Avoiding idolatry is always a main concern for Christians.

Idolatry is a main concern in the teaching of Jesus, who said in Matthew 6:33, “*Seek first the kingdom of God...*”

Idolatry gets top level attention from Christ’s apostles. The apostle John ended his letter of 1 John by writing, “*keep yourselves from idols.*”

John explained idolatry in 1 John 2:15-17, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*”

Pastor John Calvin was one of the main influencers of the 16th-century religious, political, intellectual and cultural change that we call The Reformation. Calvin encapsulated into a short phrase, the ongoing danger of idolatry when Calvin wrote, “the human heart is a perpetual idol factory.”

You are here today because you worship Christ. You may be shocked to consider that your heart is always looking around for idols to worship. You and I have an idolatry problem. And Paul has good news for us. Christ helps us with our idolatry problem. Paul’s point is this: **Only Christ gives us spiritual life, and all idols lead to death.**

1. Our forefathers show the history of Christ vs. idolatry. (v.1-6)

In the first six verses, Paul equated the history of humanity as the history of idolatry.

Paul skillfully writes about two points in history at the same time, the history of the people of Israel, and the history of the people of Corinth. Why? because it is the same history, the history of idolatry!

Verses 1-2 – are basically baptism. Paul showed how both the Israelites and

the Corinthians were delivered by God. Israelites delivered from Egypt through the cloud, passing through the sea, as it were being baptized by Moses. Meanwhile, the Corinthians delivered from sin and death by Jesus passing through the baptism of death and resurrection, and giving the believers in Corinth his baptism.

In verses 3-4, basically the Lord's Supper. Paul demonstrated how both the Israelites and the Corinthians were sustained by God – the Israelites by the spiritual food of manna and the spiritual drink of water from the Rock, and the Rock was Christ, and the Corinthians by spiritual food and spiritual drink of the Lord's Supper by which they were feeding on Christ. Both were spiritually eating and spiritually drinking Christ.

A glorious history, and a wonderful comparison. Most encouraging!

Until Paul gets to verse 5. "*Nevertheless,...*" Uh. Oh.

Both the Israelites and the Corinthians had a history of - IN SPITE OF GOD'S DELIVERANCE AND DESPITE GOD'S SUSTENANCE - being drawn away to other gods. The Corinthians had a history of in spite of baptism and the Lord's supper, which both point to the love of Christ on the cross, being drawn away to other gods.

In verse 6, Paul hammers this point home, saying one of the reasons that the wilderness events took place, and that Moses wrote them down for us, was so that we might learn to NOT "*desire evil, as they did.*" Idolatry is desiring evil!

Since Paul had been asked by the Corinthians about eating the food offered to idols, Paul had the foresight and wisdom to devote 3 chapters of this letter to address a leading problem for believers in Corinth and a leading problem for believers throughout human history – idolatry! It turns out that these 3 chapters are powerfully relevant to all of us today. How do I know? Because Paul next about traps of idolatry that we still face today, which brings us to our second point.

2. Our faithful Lord helps us to avoid idolatry's traps. (v.7-14)

We have a faithful leader in our Lord Jesus Christ. Because our faithful Lord knows that idolatry is literally a dead-end, He takes action to rescue us.

Verse 7 shows people who claim to be followers of God, while living in a manner contrary to their confessed belief. What does Paul call them? Half-hearted? lukewarm? Neutral? No. Paul calls them idolaters! Listen to verse 7, "*Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people say down to eat and drink and rose up to play.'*" Paul is telling about the famous story of the golden calf. While Moses was meeting with God, the people were melting down all of their gold to build an idol. But Paul won't let us keep the idea that idolatry is only when we build golden statues. No, learn from verse 7 with me. Idolatry is seen in regular things – eating, drinking, playing, and culture-making. What is important to the culture around us? Whatever that is, we get invited to worship it through eating, drinking, playing, and culture-making. Listen, we were designed to

worship. The question is not whether or not you will worship anything. No. Rather, the question is who or what will you decide worship? What do you lean on? What refreshes you? Who rescues you when you are in need? The Israelites had a God who rescued them, but then they tried to build a different god. Why? Because they wanted a god on the side – a god that they could build, and a god that they could control. They wanted to eat, drink, play, and adopt the same culture and values as the city of Corinth – you know – sin city!

Which brings us to verse 8, and Paul's next example of ancient idolatry that was still relevant in Corinth. Sexual immorality. Israel had connected herself to the sensuality of the idol called Baal of Peor. Paul draws a lesson from history, "*We must not indulge in sexual immorality...*" Again, Paul draws from an Old Testament story in Numbers 25:1-3, which showed God's people intermarrying with those from another religion. People around the world do this all the time, but the Lord God calls His people to have undivided allegiance in our homes and in our daily living. Our deepest desires show up in everyday things here – who you hang around with, who you date and marry, your own decisions about your sexuality, sexual ethic, and sexual behavior, and even eating food. God showed the seriousness of the issue by sending a plague that would only stop with repentance and communal action. By then, 23,000 people had died in a single day. God means business about our holy living in daily behaviors, and that was Paul's point.

Verse 9, "*We must not put Christ to the test...*" In Numbers, chapter 21, the people put the Lord to the test by rejecting His special bread that came down from heaven called manna. Some in Corinth were doing the same thing – being not satisfied with what God gave them. The proud in Corinth were not satisfied with eating meals of vegetables in order to preserve unity among their brothers and sisters. Instead, the proud in Corinth wanted the meat so badly that they caused their brothers to stumble. Because God destroyed with snakes in the Old Testament story, that warning Paul offered was a help to the Corinthians to stop putting Christ to the test and instead being satisfied with what He provides.

Verse 10 – grumbling against Paul was the next example of idolatry's trap. Grumbling against Moses was a repeated problem for the people of God, and Paul is likely referring to Numbers 16, where thousands died, presumably by God sending an angel to destroy. While this is another severe example of the results of idolatry, Paul wrote it in order to prevent the Corinthians from making a severe mistake of idolatry leading to grumbling, then rebellion, then death.

Verse 11 – Paul sums it up - these OT examples were written down by God for our instruction, even though we live much later, after Christ was born, lived, died, arose, ascended, and sent His Spirit. If God would send His Son for us, wouldn't God also, in His providence, have Moses write down how God dealt with the Old Testament believers in such a way that we can learn from it how God will

deal with us? We who live in the age of Christ have greater grace, and therefore greater responsibility to follow God, not idols.

Verse 12 – Those who are over-confident and think that they are standing firm, should be careful not to fall. Don't play with fire. Don't assume that you are a super-Christian. Be aware of the allure of idols to your own heart. You could fall.

Verse 13 – falling into temptation is entering idolatry at the heart level. You are trying to have both Christ, and the stuff of the world. When you are tempted to do BOTH, you end up trapped between two different versions of yourself. The temptation is not to choose between 2 gods, and choose the wrong one. Instead, the temptation is to believe that you can serve both Christ and be in the culture at the same time. The alluring temptation reveals that idolatry is adultery!

A man still loves his wife, but there is something over here that he wants.

A believer still loves Christ, but there is something over here that he wants.

The man actually thinks he loves his wife, but his actions say otherwise.

A believer actually thinks that he loves Christ, but his actions say otherwise.

We are tempted to sin in what is called idolatry, because idolatry is ordinary, insidious, subtle, mundane, almost normal.

Do you know why we are tempted with idolatry? Because it is fellowshiping, sharing in, participating and joining with something else, RIGHT ALONGSIDE OF our relationship with Christ, and we don't see the inconsistency and unfaithfulness of that. THAT is the moment of temptation.

Temptation to idolatry is NOT having a deep feeling of disliking Christ.

It is the belief that you can still faithfully serve Christ, while also adding on the enjoyment of the world's fun stuff. It is buying into the duplicity of a double-mind. Temptation is considering coming to the conclusion that a divided heart is acceptable.

Pastor Paul Washer has said, "If you want to follow Jesus because He will give you a better life, that's IDOLATRY. Follow Christ for the sake of Christ. He is WORTHY!"

Presbyterian Pastor Tim Keller has written, "What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give... An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure. There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best word is worship."

Temptation is when you consider letting anything join into the special relationship that you have between your soul and your Savior. Christ wants to have a special, exclusive, faithful and monogamous relationship with you.

Am I not describing you? You say, "I would never do that to Jesus."

Verse 12 – take heed lest you fall.

Then how can any of us escape idols?

Christ provides Himself as the way of escape.

How? Christ meets us in the ordinary things of life. what we eat, what we drink, how we play, and how we participate in the things of our culture.

Verse 13 – God is faithful.

Verse 14 – flee from idolatry.

Christ understands our desires because Christ came from heaven to earth and experienced them himself. Christ faced every temptation that we face, and yet He never fell into idol worship. Christ never had a moment of undivided loyalty to God the Father. Christ then died and rose again to cleans us of our idolatry, and to give us eyes to see clearly in our many moments of temptation every day.

Christ provided a way for us as perpetually idolatrous people, to stay true to Him. Christ feeds us using ordinary things the like bread and the cup and the letter and the message spoken. Christ meets us at the level of desire. Christ won't let us be tempted beyond our ability. That brings us to our third point.

3. Life is enjoying the blessing of Christ's cup, bread, and table; partaking in idolatry is death. (v.15-22)

Verse 15 – Paul speaks to sensible and reasonable people.

Verse 16 – the cup of blessing is participating in the blood of Christ and the bread is sharing in the body of Christ. Ordinary things that we drink and what we eat!

Verse 17 – there is one bread, so we are one body. The Corinthians were reminded by the ordinary means of a loaf of bread being one piece, they ought to care for each other. The action of one person to decide to eat meat have an impact on the others, because we are one body like a loaf of bread is connected to the rest of itself.

Verse 18 – back to OT Israel – the ones who eat, share in the altar. The altar pointed ahead to the Lamb of God, even Jesus Christ.

Verse 19 – so then, is eating the Corinthian food offered to idols the equivalent of them participating in worship of idols? No.

Verse 20 – Paul says it is not about the other gods, because they don't exist, but it is about demons, because they do exist. Demons can use the practices of false religions to draw people away from the one true God.

Verse 21 – Back to the main concern – you cannot have both Christ and idols. You cannot follow both Christ and demons. You cannot follow both Christ and the world. It is just like Jesus said - You cannot serve both God and money.

Since Paul has drawn their attention to the evil supernatural beings, Paul helps them to see that it leads to the loss of exclusive worship of God alone.

Anytime we partake of what demons offer, there is a spiritual union that takes place that is cheating on God.

You say – well I would not go near a demon. Right. But what if the demon dressed up like a wonderful cultural event? What if the demon looked like a supermodel?

We have to see that behind any threat on the holy sweet intimacy that your soul has with Christ, has a demonic element to it.

Verse 22 now makes sense – if we are cheating on the Lord by adding something else to the loves of our hearts, then we would provoke the Lord to jealousy just like a human spouse would be provoked to jealousy if we were flirting. Why the last question – are we stronger than [the Lord]? Because if we are acting adulterously, we are asking for a confrontation with the Lord about it. Do we think that we can win that conflict with The Lord, and be able to have both the Lord at church, and some other love of our heart on the side? We will tell the Lord, I still love, you I just also love other things, and you need to calm down, or You are going to lose me?

Wait, listen to yourself.

The Lord is the strong one. The Lord insists and requires of us exclusive communion with Him, since we are HIS people. The Lord commands us through the writing of Paul, to flee idolatry. The Lord says to us that He is a jealous God, and that He will not stand for any of our unfaithfulness. All of the idols have to go, and we have to stop flirting with them. We have to stop getting as close as we can.

We need to find our satisfaction in the Lord alone.

Pastor John Piper has repeatedly said, “We make a god out of whatever we find most joy in. So, find your joy in God and be done with all idolatry.”

Conclusion:

We are idolaters. We cannot save ourselves from that.

We place our faith NOT in our exclusive commitment to Christ, but rather in Christ’s exclusive commitment to us.

Listen to verse 4 again, “they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

Wait. Who followed whom?

Jesus is the Rock who accompanies us first, and then we accompany Him.

Jesus is the Rock who followed us first, and then we follow Him.

Jesus is the Rock who gives us to drink of His refreshing grace, to quench our spiritual thirst, rather than letting us drink the poison of idols.

Whenever we rebel, Christ follows us, confronts us, and brings us back.

Whenever we are unfaithful to Christ, Christ remains faithful to us.

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:13, “*If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*”

God feeds us.

It is not just in the cup and bread of the Lord's Supper.

Every day God extends His provisions for His people in the gospel.

Christ opens to us the table of His closeness to us in the Lord's Supper, rather than cutting us off, and that represents how Christ relates to us every minute of every day.

It our routine of our daily lives, as we make our way through the menagerie of idols calling out to our desires, Jesus satisfies us with the cup of His grace and the bread of His accepting love.

Flee idolatry, and run back to the familiar and faithful arms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

One last verse – if you find yourself unfaithful to Christ again, and you are trying to have both Christ and something else, let me read John 6:37, Jesus said, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”*