

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Title: Flee Idolatry

Truth: God demands and deserves a whole-hearted loyalty from His people.

Date/Location: Sunday October 18, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Here are the key ideas:

- Flee idolatry.
- Think carefully about what the Bible says here about fellowship, which is the reason you must flee from idols.
- Do you understand the connection a Christian has with Christ and how that is displayed at the Lord's Table?
- Look again at the Bible's example of Israel's priestly arrangement and the fellowship there.
- Do not have fellowship with demons while trying to have fellowship with God as well.

I. Command: Flee from Idolatry, v. 14

A. Maybe you have had this experience in reading 1 Corinthians 8-10. You imagine yourself in the shoes of a person who lives in Corinth. You agree with Paul that knowledge puffs up (8:1-3), an idol is nothing because there is only one true and living God (8:4-6), and yes, there are people who don't get that (8:7). Still, if we eat food offered to idols or we do not, it does not matter (8:8). And yes, we should be careful not to offend others. If they see us eating in the idol temple, that could cause those weaker brothers to stumble. We would not want to sin against them or against Christ.

B. Consequently, you plan to quietly participate at such events when they come up, not while other believers are watching. You feel it is unimportant if you participate with non-Christians because their conscience is not bothered. But you want to keep your foot in the door with your former friends in terms of social interaction. You want to eat good meat occasionally too, because it would not be nice to give that up. You gladly acknowledge that a believer has certain liberties and, like Paul, certain rights. You are not so sure

about giving up those liberties and rights because it seems you can hang onto them *and* not compromise. Besides, you are not sure what it would buy you to give up eating idol-meat or eating in the temple. It does not seem like a huge foul or harm to participate at least occasionally. You have a measure of self-control, so there is nothing to worry about.

- C. What I am suggesting is that you have soft-pedaled what the Bible is *really* saying here. You are saved from that wrong view when you start reading 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Now, it would be easy to compartmentalize that into the “Israel” box because it is all about them. But then you get the uneasy feeling that verses 6 and 11 are saying there is more to this than Israel, and this might actually have some application in some area of your life since Paul is so strong about telling us that we should not desire evil things. Some of the sins hit close to home—like complaining and the pull to sexual immorality that is everywhere around us. And sometimes we have had a bad attitude toward God. Even worse, the punishments that Israel received were very strict. Temptation is all around you, and you wonder...
- D. But then you read verse 14, and you are brought back to reality. “Flee from idolatry.” You ask, “Do you mean to say that it was *not* a harmless thing to get close to the idols, even to eat in the idol temple like all the rest of the society did?” That is right. Paul is saying that it is not OK to lightly esteem God’s admonitions about this. It is not OK to have close connection with idols, *even though there is only one God*. Eating at the temple was an act of fellowship with idol-worshippers and the idol itself, which as it turns out is a bit more than a *nothing*. We are commanded to run away from these practices.

E. We must flee from all idolatry. There is a very good reason to do so.

II. Reason to Flee Idolatry: The Matter of Fellowship: Three Examples, v. 15-20

In each of the three cases below, there is a kind of “fellowship” that is going on. *Fellowship* is the meaning of the word *communion*. It means sharing or partnership. If you say, “I do not want any part of

that,” then you are saying you do not want to fellowship with that thing. The question, “Did you take part?” means “did you share in or fellowship with” whatever is in question.

Paul asks us to pay attention and think this through. Form a sound judgment about what is being said...

A. The Lord’s Table. The cup of blessing and the bread refer to the elements of the Lord’s Table. In the Jewish tradition, the third cup of the Passover Seder is called either the cup of redemption or the cup of blessing. Jesus took the cup after supper, which would have been the third cup, and gave thanks, and called it the cup of the new covenant in his blood, which was poured out for the remission of our sins. When we partake of the cup—and the bread—we show that we are participants in the blood and body of Christ. That is, *by taking part in the ordinance, we show we confess to share a part of salvation* provided in Christ’s work. Note that by taking part in the ritual, we do not *obtain* a share in salvation. Rather, by participating, we *symbolize* our participation in Christ already.

The big idea is in verse 17. We are many members, but we participate or fellowship in One—Christ. In that manner, we share together. We plant a flag in the ground and say that we are a Christian. We are with Christ. Many are in one. All in Christ share a solidarity, a union, together.

B. Observe that the Israelite sacrificial system had the same kind of fellowship in it. Those who ate of the sacrifices were partners with all that the altar represented (at least if they were pure). They were co-worshippers of God with the priests and with one another. Notice that in both this case and the prior case of the Lord’s Supper, food is involved. A connection is displayed in the ritual that is associated with eating and drinking.

We are beginning to see a pattern here. The third example of the pattern seals the truth: sharing in the ritual is “making a statement” about communion together. Such behavior tells on your soul!

C. Gentile idol worship is the same kind of partnership idea discussed above. Verse 19 introduces how this relates to idolatry. In one sense, an idol is nothing, and the meat offered to them is nothing.

But in another and real sense, there is a serious problem. Paul tells us that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons. They certainly are not offering those things to God, for God does not today accept any animal sacrifices as appeasement, whether temporary or eternal, whether for civil infractions or sins that offend the holiness of God. Any religious significance that an idol has, or any power that its system of worship displays, must be coming from beneath, not from above. Therefore, when you eat idol meat or eat and drink at the idol's temple, you are having a share of fellowship with that idol and all his worshippers. You are planting a stake in the ground and saying, "I am one of these people." Is *that* even remotely appropriate for a Christian person?

III. Concluding Exhortation: Christians Must Not Have a Divided Loyalty, v. 21-22

A. Verses 21-22 teach us that we must make up our mind about God one way or the other. We cannot have one foot in the boat and one foot on land, or one foot in one boat, and the other foot in another boat! The two worlds—God and idols—are incompatible. It is obvious from the text:

1. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord *and* the cup of demons. That is, you cannot have a double-loyalty. You simply cannot serve two masters (Matt 6:24). You cannot have God as master, and your flesh at the same time. You cannot have Christ as master, and the world or property or wealth at the same time. You must make a choice. Either you take Christ and disavow friendship with the world; or you work hard to gain the world and lose your soul:
2. Mark 8:34-37 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

36 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

You cannot partake (fellowship) in the Lord's table and worship at the table of demons. This shows that you are not fully loyal to Christ. Now, someone may object by suggesting as long as you participate in the Lord's Table, you are safe even if you participate in the others. But this treats the Lord's Table like a good luck charm or a talisman. What participating in both rituals *actually* means is that you are not genuine before God. You are a fake, disloyal to the One who paid His life for your eternal well-being.

B. The idol demon may not require the worshipper's full loyalty. If he has a part of you, he is happy, because he knows that you are not seriously walking with the Lord. But God is a jealous God. He deserves and demands all our love and loyalty.

Matthew 22:36-38 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with **all your heart**, with **all your soul**, and with **all your mind**.' 38 This is the first and great commandment."

Psalms 86:11 Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth. **Unite my heart** to fear Your name.

Psalms 119:2 Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the **whole heart**.

Psalms 141:4 **Do not incline my heart to any evil thing**. To practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies.

James 1:8 exhorts us not to be **double-minded**.

1 Kings 18:21 "How long will you hesitate **between two opinions**? If the LORD is God, follow Him" (NAS). But if the world is where it is at, or your own personal pleasure, or entertainment, or comfort, or money, or whatever, follow that. But do not play or pretend that you are following God if you are not doing so with a united heart.

- C. Verse 22 quotes Deut. 32:21 about God’s jealousy. When Israel chose idols over the true God who had provided for them through the Exodus and Red Sea crossing, that was a severe offense against God. Far worse it was than when your boyfriend or girlfriend dumps you, and worse than when your spouse leaves you. In the case of marriage, we can see a good and godly sense of the term “jealous.” We should be jealous for our spouse—for their purity, for the protection of our relationship, for their godliness, for the maintenance of our vows. This is a jealousy over what is rightly yours, not a jealousy over what belongs to someone else. The Corinthians were doing exactly what Israel did in the Old testament, putting Christ to the test. This is dangerous territory!
- D. Paul adds Ezek. 22:14 to speak about the courage that we would need to stand before the Lord if we plan to argue about this loyalty and fellowship business. The short answer is this: are you going to mess around with God? Do not even think about it!

Conclusion

Idolatry today might look like it did in ancient Israel. But it may also be more secret, in one’s heart. Ezekiel 14:3-7 alerts us to this possibility. You cannot have things in your heart that rank higher than God, and then expect God to answer your inquiries as if your relationship with Him is just fine.

Any failure in this area of divided loyalty or failure to flee from idolatry, etc. is reversible. God is gracious and will receive you if you turn away from your idols, from your self-centeredness, from your sin. God is merciful toward us sinners because His Son has freely offered Himself in our place as a substitute sacrifice for sinners. He who did no sin took on Himself our sins so that He could pay our penalty instead of us having to do it ourselves. If you believe in Him for salvation, and Him alone, He will rescue you from sin and cleanse you and put you into His family!

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