



1 CORINTHIANS

OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION: HOW TO HANDLE PERSONAL & CHURCH LIFE STRUGGLES

Beware of Idolatry

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 | Pastor Jeff Moorehead | May 16, 2021

- As Paul continues to elaborate on how believers must carefully exercise their freedoms in Christ, he turns to address a very dangerous sin called idolatry. This sin has permeated the world since the fall of mankind. For believers, it is just one step away when you think you can live on the edge of the allowable and not be contaminated.
 - ◆ The Greco-Roman world was full of idols and it was part of their everyday life. In a melting pot of tolerance and syncretism, everybody was careful not to insult anyone else's god. But Christianity was different.
 - ◆ Our enlightened world today may not sacrifice or bow down to carved up and decorated material images, but we have found many other ways to give our love, time, attention, and devotion to things, ideas, and people rather than to the only true and living God who says, *“You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only”* (Lk 4:8)
- Anything or anyone that becomes ultimate to you is an idol in your life. You can take a good or bad thing and turn it into a god thing and that becomes a godless thing!
- The Corinthians were asking: Is it OK to *“eat meat sacrificed to idols?”*. Paul answers, yes and no.
 - ◆ Yes, you can technically eat this sacrificed meat because idols don't really exist, *“there is no God but one”* (1 C. 8:4, 6) and idolatry can't contaminate the meat with false gods.
 - ◆ No, you can't eat IF your action fails to love your fellow believer, causes your brother or sister to stumble (8:9), would defile their conscience (8:7), embolden them to ignore their conscience (8:10), be *“ruined”* (8:11), or *“wound their conscience”* (8:12).
- Now, Paul warns them from participating in the questionable practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols because it might lead to idolatrous sin.

→ He shares four reasons why idolatry is dangerous and we must all keep our guard up against it.

1. It disregards a clear prohibition (10:14)

- Paul is crystal clear and shares a present tense verb to command us to keep running away from idolatry.
- What is idolatry? It is giving anyone or anything more love, devotion, trust, attention than you do to God.
- WHY is idolatry clearly prohibited?
 - It misrepresents God's uniqueness as the only true and living God in existence (Isa. 46:9)
 - It misrepresents God's worthiness: He's the only Creator (Ps. 95:7), the only Sovereign (1 Tim. 6:15; Eph. 1:11), the only Savior/Redeemer (Isa. 43:11), the only Judge and jury to whom all must give an account (Rm. 14:12), and only King (Rev. 19:6)
 - It misrepresents God's purpose in being glorified forever and ever (Rom. 11:36; Rev. 5:13)

2. It downplays is an incompatible partnership (10:15-18)

- Paul uses the Lord's Supper to point out that sacrificial meals are similar, but opposite realities when compared to idol sacrifices and meals. They build a bond, a "*sharing*" between the participants and the deity honored in a meal.
 - The "*cup of blessing*" was most likely the cup Jesus blessed at the Last Supper (Mt. 26:27; 1 Cor. 11:25) and it commemorated "*the new covenant in His blood*" (1 Cor. 11:25). This shed blood pointed to the violent death Jesus died.
 - The "*bread which we break*" referred to Christ' incarnational body (1 Cor. 11:23b-24) which Jesus called "*His body*" symbolizing a person's whole life and more specifically to His sinless life in which He suffered that led to His death.
- Our eating and drinking reflect a special "*sharing*" (gr: *koinonia*) that is expressed vertically (a "*sharing in the body of Christ*"- v. 16) and horizontally (a "*one body*" partnership as "*we all partake of the one bread*" together) that comes through the solidarity we share in our union with Christ.
- v. 18: Like Israel who sacrificed and ate before the golden calf, eating food that had been consecrated to idols would bind the diner to that idolatrous altar.

3. It dabbles in a demonic participation (10:19-21)

- Paul reiterates that the meat isn't contaminated with false gods nor is an idol even real (as affirmed in 8:4). There is however a reality behind the pagan "*sacrifices*" that is manipulated and used by spiritual forces of wickedness (Satan and his demons) to influence our lives.
 - Even though idols are senseless objects made from inanimate materials, they represent a reality (a value system) that directly competes with God who exists and is true.

- Idols are more than simply foolish human inventions, they represent demonic spiritual powers so that when a sacrifice is made to an idol it is a sacrifice to demons and can become a fellowship with demons (v. 20)
 - Remember that Satan is a liar (Jn 8:44) and his religion is one of deception that promotes the lie of human achievement, not divine accomplishment.
 - v. 21 summarizes what cannot take place. You can't eat at the table set for false religion or idolatry and not be influenced by Satan and his demons.
4. **It detonates a jealous passion (10:22)**
- God's jealousy is provoked by idolatry as He tolerates no rivals (because they don't exist)
 - Jealousy is connected to God's holiness and power and it is aroused by any form of idolatry (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:14-15; Josh. 24:19-20; 1 K 14:22-23; Ps. 78:58-64; Ezek 8:3; Nah. 1:2; Zeph 1:18)
 - There is a great contrast between our mighty jealous God and us as frail humans (Job 9:32; 37:23; Ecc. 6:10; Isa. 10:15; Ezek. 22:14) who owe Him our undivided life and devotion.

Some applications:

1. God is always and exclusively worthy of our worship in spirit and in truth.
2. The unique and spiritual fellowship we share with Christ and each other must be guarded lest you link find yourself committing idolatry and being influenced by Satan and his demons.
3. Don't let your freedoms run to the edge of what's allowable in Christ and find yourself serving a functional idol that gets your primary love, time, attention, and devotion.
4. Ask yourself the following questions to help identify ungodly masters (functional idols) that occupy positions of authority in your heart and life. These are X-Ray questions written by David Powlison (Seeing with New Eyes)
 - What do you love? Hate?
 - What do you want, desire, crave, lust, and wish for? What desires do you serve and obey?
 - What do you seek, aim for, and pursue? What are your goals and expectations?
 - Where do you bank your hopes?
 - What do you fear? What do you not want? What do you tend to worry about?
 - What do you feel like doing?
 - What do you think you need? What are your "felt needs"?
 - What are your plans, agendas, strategies, and intentions designed to accomplish?
 - What makes you tick? What sun does your planet revolve around? Where do you find our garden of delight? What lights up your world? What really matters to you? What do you organize your life around?
 - Where do you find refuge, safety, comfort, escape, pleasure, security?
 - What or whom do you trust?
 - Whose performance matters? On whose shoulders does the well-being of your world rest? Who can make it better, make it work, make it safe, make it successful?

- Whom must you please? Whose opinion of you counts? From whom do you desire approval and fear rejection? Whose value system do you measure yourself against? In whose eyes are you living? Whose love and approval do you need?