

People of God, The city of Corinth was filled with idols. Statues mostly. But the Christians of the first century Corinth didn't think much of those idols. They knew that the pagan gods were not real. And that knowledge gave them the freedom to engage in eating food offered to idols, because after all the idol wasn't actually real. This knowledge even led some of them to go further, and engage in the culturally accepted act of engaging in the sexual immorality that accompanies such feasts. Thus Paul warns the Corinthians about the double dangers of idolatry and sexual immorality. And that is what this 1 Cor. 10 is all about.

Our day and age is filled with idols as well. But our idols are manifested more so as common cultural customs and habits, then as statues. But because they are so common, we tend not to think anything about them. In fact, we don't even think they are idols. And this is what makes them so dangerous.

Let us look at 1 Cor. 10 to understand Paul's warning to the Church in Corinth about the dangers of idolatry.

In vss. 1-5 Paul begins by connecting the Corinthians experience of Salvation in Christ to Israel's experience of salvation under Moses.

In vss. 6-13 Paul rehearses the Israelites destruction in the wilderness because they engaged in idolatrous feasting and sexual immorality.

And in vss. 14-22 Paul warns the Corinthians that by participating in idolatrous feast they are communing with demons.

Lets begin.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

Paul identifies Israel as our fathers, speaking to Gentile Christians. And our Fathers' experience of salvation was they all came out of Egypt, they all crossed through Sea, they all were under the glory cloud of God's presence

that was with them, in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. They were all baptized into Moses, he says. They all had the same experience.

Why is Israel's salvation referred to as being baptized into Moses? Because Israel's deliverance is directly connected to Moses' deliverance. What happens first to Moses, is what happens later to His people. In crossing through the Red Sea, the people are brought into Moses' experience. Remember, Moses was first brought out of the Reeds at his birth, he is named after it. He then delivered the Israelite by striking down the Egyptian task master. He then went out of Egypt into the wilderness for 40 years, and came to see God on Mt. Sinai. And then he is going to return to Egypt to deliver God's people through the same way – by striking down the Egyptians with plagues, by bringing them through the Red Sea and taking them to Mt. Sinai where they can see God.

In the same way when we are baptized into Christ, his story becomes our story. Christ's baptism in the Jordan River is our baptism. God's announcement that he is his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased, is God's announcement over us as well. We were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, that we might die to the old man and walk in newness of life. Christ's victory over the Devil's temptations in the wilderness is our victory over temptation. Christ's covenant faithfulness is ours. The Spirit who comes upon Jesus at His baptism comes upon the Church on Pentecost, that we can share in the blessings of his ascension and in the mission of disciplining the nations. Just as Israel was baptized into Moses, the Church is baptized into Christ. We share the same story. We are in the same history.

³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

The reference to the spiritual food is course a reference to the manna. Ps. 78:23 says, *"Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of Heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them food in abundance."*

They also drank the same spiritual drink, which is a reference to the water that came from the rock Moses struck in Ex. 17 and Num. 20.

In the original account of the Rock in Ex. 17, the Lord is associated with the rock in very powerful way. *"Behold, I will stand before you on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out, and the people will drink."* The striking of the Rock, is a type of Christ when he was struck with the spear on the cross, and from out of his side flowed water and blood.

There is also the account of Moses striking the rock in Num. 20, in a different location than in Ex. 17. Now, Paul says the rock followed them. But instead of thinking that the rock itself was literally following them in the wilderness, from place to place, we would do better to see that God himself was symbolically associated with the rock, communicating himself to his people at very specific rocks along the way, that all represented him as the One Rock.

This is why Moses calls God the Rock in his song in Deut. 32.

⁴ *"The Rock, his work is perfect,
for all his ways are justice.*

¹⁵ *"But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked;
you grew fat, stout, and sleek;
then he forsook God who made him
and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.*

¹⁸ *You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you,
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.*

³⁰ *How could one have chased a thousand,
and two have put ten thousand to flight,
unless their Rock had sold them,
and the LORD had given them up?*

³¹ *For their rock is not as our Rock;
our enemies are by themselves.*

Now what is the point of rehearsing Israel's salvation experience? Paul is making a direct connection between Israel's salvation in Moses from Egypt and the experience of the Church's salvation in Christ from sin.

Israel was baptized, just as the church was. Israel had the spirit presence of God among them, just as the Church does. Israel ate the spiritual bread of Heaven and drank spiritual drink from the rock of Christ, just as the Church does in communion. Israel of Old had Christ with them then, just as the Church does now.

The Church in Corinth is supposed to learn a lesson or two from OT Israel. They had all these spiritual blessings then, just as the church does now, and yet Israel made nothing of it. The salvation which Israel experienced wasn't fleshly, it was spiritual. Paul says so. The problem was that the people were fleshly, and they did not respond to God's grace accordingly. And the Corinthians need to understand what happened to them as a result of not responding to the grace of God accordingly. And so do we.

⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.⁶ Now these things took place as types for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written,

Paul then begins to list some the disasters that fell upon the people for their idolatry and sexual sin.

He references the golden calf in Ex. 32 - *"The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."* This is a reference to the connection of eating a sacrificial meal to the golden calf and then the people rising up from the meal to engage in sexual debauchery.

He references the Baal of Peor in Num. 25, saying - *⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.* This was another incident in which the people offered sacrificial meals to the Baal of Peor and then engaged in sexual immorality. A plague broke out among the people because of this. But in his zeal for the Lord,

Phineas put an end to the plague by running a spear through an Israelite man and the Midianite woman who were having relations. 23,000 fell in a single day, Paul said. 24,000 in total.

There were also fiery serpents in Num. 21. ⁹ *We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents.* Now notice, Paul says it was not just God they tested, but it was Christ they tested. This is important because sometimes people think that the God of the OT was harsh and filled with wrath, but Christ of the NT is filled with love and mercy. But Paul says it was Christ they tested, and it was Christ who sent the fiery serpents to bite the people, causing many of them to die. And why did Christ send serpents? Because the people despised the manna, they despised the Bread of Heaven, which was a type of Christ, who is the True Bread of Life from Heaven. Eating the Lord's Supper wasn't enough for them, they like the pleasures of Egypt better. And so Christ killed them.

Paul then references the many grumbings that occurred throughout the whole wilderness wandering.

¹⁰ *nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.*

The Destroyer is referred to in Exo. 12:23 as the one who slew the firstborn sons during the Passover. He is the one who followed them throughout the wilderness slaying the Israelites every time they grumbled and wished they had gone back to Egypt. The Destroyer served the people as a reminder of what waits for them there in Egypt. Destruction. And whenever Israel desired to go back to Egypt in their heart and mind, and satisfy the lusts of the flesh, the destroyer was sent to destroy them.

¹¹ *Now these things happened to them typologically, Paul says, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages has come.*

There is a parallel between Israel of old and the Church in Corinth and the Church in every age and every place, and especially here among you today as this word is being preached to you. You participate in the same story. Israel's destruction in the wilderness is a typological and cautionary tale

about a people who took the grace of God for granted, and who gave into every temptation as it came to them. It is a story of a people who had all the privileges and blessings of God with them, but it profited them nothing, because they loved their sin more than God. It is the story of a salvation in which God had brought his people out of Egypt, but the people held on to Egypt inside of them. And same is true of the Corinthians. Christ has performed a greater Exodus on the Cross, but the Corinthians don't want to crucify their idolatrous fleshly lusts. And we too follow in that same story.

Paul says these things were written down for us, upon whom the ends of the ages has come. The eschatological collision point between the old age and the new age is happening upon us. The Church stands in the crucial moment of history, in which everything past is illuminated by the bright light of Christ, and reasonable and wise people will do their best to interpret themselves in the story of God's people in the Bible, and flee to Christ and away from idolatry.

Therefore, we all need to guard ourselves from thinking that God will overlook our sin and wink at our disobedience and turn a blind eye to our idolatry and sexual immorality. We must not be like Israel of old who tested the Lord by giving themselves over to all manners of sin. They were compromising with sexual immorality, they were desiring evil, they were testing Christ by their disobedience and unbelief, they were grumbling and murmuring and dissatisfied with the gifts of God, they were engaging in dissension and rebellion, and they were compromising with idolatry. And so God destroyed them. And he will destroy us too.

¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

God often tests his people. He tests us to see if our souls are true to him. *He tests us to see whether we will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as our father's did, or not.* But God never brings a test to you to have it overpower

you and destroy you. Your own desires do that. *Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires.* God though, always provides a way of escape. His desire is to bring you into a fuller maturity, and into greater use and experience of his good gifts. Being tested by God does not pose the same kinds of dangers that testing God does. And so when the test comes, take heed, lest you fall, and you are destroyed by your unbelief, and then destroyed by the Destroyer.

Paul then comes back to the original point which he actually began in chp. 8, about eating meat sacrificed to idols, and perhaps even further back to chp 6 about the impropriety of Christ's people engaging in idolatry and sexual immorality. All of which seem to be connected in Paul's mind, as they are all things Israel did in the wilderness.

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

And here Paul is going to finally come back to his point about the dangers of eating in the temple of idols. And he going to make his argument based upon some shared knowledge that the Corinthians already knew about the Lord's Supper, and the meals at the Jewish sacrificial feasts. And then he applies that truth to the idols table.

The point he makes is this: Each meal creates a bond, or a relation of fellowship, communion, a joining together among the worshipers at the altar, and between the worshipers and the god worshiped at the altar.

¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation, communion in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation, communion in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

The participation, communion is the word *koinonia*, and again it refers to the covenantal binding together of the worshipers between each other and between them and Christ. The same binding was true in the Jewish sacrificial meals of the OT.

¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants, or communicants in the altar? The answer of course, is Yes.

Then he moves to the third table, the table of idols, and he asks: *¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?* We already know from chp. 8 that an idol is nothing. The idol has no real existence. Aphrodite does not exist. Apollo does not exist. Poseidon does not exist. They are not real gods. So the Corinthians supposed that there is no real danger there. But they are wrong. Paul says,

²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

The reality behind eating at the altar of the idols is that the worshiper is creating a communal bond between themselves and demons. It is not true that there is nothing there. There are demons.

I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

The Corinthians didn't think that there were any gods behind the idol's table, and they thought engaging in idolatrous sexual practice was culturally acceptable. The Greeks actually invented a verb, Korinthiazomai, which mean, to engage in sexual immorality like a Corinthian. It is just what Corinthians do.

Our secular world has de-divinized the world, and our actions have become just actions of the flesh. Sexual immorality? Its just what we do. No. Its just who I am. It is my identity. But just as the Corinthians needed to wake up to the demonic reality of sexual immorality and idolatry of their day, so too do we need to wake up to the demonic reality of sexual immorality and idolatry of our day.

You see, the tables of idols do not necessarily have to be real tables with real food. And the idols do not have to be statues for there to be a demon present. They can be symbolic feasts, or spiritual feasts, where you go to

receive something from someone or something else that you are only supposed to receive from God and only in his appointed way.

One such demonic table we must not eat at is the demonic table of sexual immorality. Prov. 9 pictures this seductress *"calling to those who pass by, who are going on their way, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell."*

Here the image of the seductress is connected with eating and drinking. Seeking the satisfaction of the lusts of the flesh through secretive sexual immorality is the most wicked perversion and destructive idol of our day. Flee from it. Do not even entertain it for a moment. There is nothing there for you except a feast in hell with the rest of the dead who have gone before you. The demonic goddess of death is worshipped in unlawful sexually immoral practices, and she lies to you and makes you think there is secret pleasure there. She says what you do in the body doesn't matter. The body was made for pleasure. She say, it is who you are, and you can't deny yourself. Be true to yourself that is all that matters. But these are demonic lies, and the end of that road is only death.

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (says Paul). ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord (in his body) and will also raise us up by his power (in our bodies). ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

You cannot commune with demons while engaging in sexual immorality and eating from their demonic table, and then think you can waltz into the Church and commune with Christ at the table of the Lord and that Christ is going to be OK with that. Our God is a jealous God. Shall we provoke the Lord to Jealousy? Are we stronger than God?

Sexual immorality refers to anything that is sex outside of marriage – pornography being the most deceptive, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, lesbianism, transgenderism, pedophilia, incest, bestiality, and the like. These things are becoming more and more common place in our culture, as you know, and you need to understand why the Church opposes these things. These things are demonically inspired.

Sexual immorality is not the only idolatrous practice we must flee from. We must flee from all our culturally acceptable idols. We must flee from the god of self, which is known as narcissism, which is the worship of our own self image, particularly as we create them on Social media, or fabricate them in our own minds based upon our feelings. We must stop worshipping our phones and technology and video games. We must not worship money, wealth, and success. We must not worship our spouses or our children. We must not worship TV and entertainment. We must not worship that other person who we give way too much emotional power and influence in our lives and who we know is leading us astray. We must not worship our addictions.

Because addictions, people of God, is just the modern way of talking about idolatry. Are you doing drugs? Are you an alcoholic? Are you obsessed with taking selfies? Do you eat too much? Are you hooked on pornography? These are idols you must flee from.

People of God, I warn you of such sins because you are members of Christ. And you cannot commune with Christ and share a bond between him and His body and then go out and share another communal bond with false gods and demons. You must take heed to the reality of your situation. Our heart is an idol making factory. And so we must examine our hearts daily. Ask yourself

- *Who or What do I love or treasure more than God?*
- *Who or What do I prioritize before God?*
- *Who or What brings me more pleasure than the things of God?*

- *Do I place my identity in anything over my status as a child of God?*
- *To Whom or What do I look to meet my spiritual and mental and emotional needs instead of God?*
- *Do I secretly seek fulfillment or satisfaction or pleasure in things that God forbids?*
- *And if you can't answer any of those ask this: What is the one thing that if I do not have it, I am miserable? That is your idol. That is where your demon resides. And you need to flee from it.*

I ask you to consider your soul. Consider your heart and mind, and your actions. And consider how your idols make you act. Are you genuinely a more Christ-like person when you are engaging in these things? Or what about when you don't have them? Do you become more loving, and forgiving and selfless? Or are you more angry and hold grudges and self-centered? Are you more giving and sacrificial? Or are stealing from loved ones? Are you willing to listen to others? Or are you more demanding and controlling and domineering? Are you more humble or more proud? Have you been more focused and have more peace of mind, or are you more distracted and constantly thinking about that thing? What is that thing? Sex, porn, drugs, that other person, money? Games? Alcohol?

Those of you who are in the midst of these idolatries and these sexual sins, You know what I am saying is true. These things completely change who God created you to be, and who you know you are supposed to be. You know deep down inside you don't like the person you have become when you act like this. And do you know why you act like this? Because you have been communing with demons, and you don't even know it. You see the fruits of demonic activity in your own lives even now. And so I call upon you to repent of your sins and come to Jesus Christ and be saved, and delivered.

We are going to eat of the Lord's Table in a few minutes, and you are going to commune with Christ there. So repent and confess your sins to him. No longer make the members of Christ's body one with a demon. Receive the

grace of Christ anew, ask Christ to forgive you, receive his broken body and poured out blood for you, and receive the forgiveness for your sins.

He gives himself to you today, in this spiritual food and spiritual drink, so that you would know he loves you and wants to free you from the Egypt of your Sin and from the slavery of your idols. Receive him with all your heart and call upon him to save you and forgive you and redeem you, and He will. And reject all other idolatrous and demonic meals, and come to the Table of the Lord and be saved. This is the good news.

But if you continue to reject this message, you shall continue to provoke the Lord to jealousy, and you need to learn your lesson from what happened to Israel of Old in the wilderness. For God might just bring something equally horrible upon you, as he did to them.

And learn also from our Gospel lesson, where Jesus told the people that unless they repent, they would all likewise perish.

Perhaps in a tragic accident, like when the Tower in Siloam fell, or some other equally horrible freak accident. God is in control of all things. Your life consists of the breath in your nostrils. And he can snuff it out when he pleases. Do not provoke the Lord to jealousy. You are not stronger than He. Instead, Repent, people of God, or you all will likewise perish. Flee from sexual immorality and flee your idolatry, and come to Jesus Christ and live. For it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Amen.