

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22

INTRODUCTION

As Paul has made it clear in verses 1-13, idolatry immorality and complaining against God are not questionable activities that Christians may or may not engage in but they are clear sins. In these verses that we are looking at tonight Paul takes up the sin of idolatry and explains why this sin is so offensive to God.

Some of the Christians at Corinth were taking their Christian freedom too far, which actually resulted in them becoming involved in the sin of idolatry. As Christians they were free to attend pagan functions but they were not free to participate in the false worship that went on in these pagan functions.

However because they knew that other gods did not exist they were involving themselves in activities that aligned them with some pagan god or other and this of course was not as harmless as some thought.

1. PAUL'S WORDS OF ADVICE (vs. 14-15)

Paul first of all assures the Christians at Corinth that he is speaking to them as one who is their friend one who loves them deeply and genuinely cares for them. The term "dear friends" should be translated "beloved." Paul deeply loved these believers at Corinth Paul was after all the spiritual Father of many of these Christians in spite of their many problems and confusion Paul loved them deeply and as a result he could speak to them to warn and advise them about this matter of idolatry.

Of course many of the Christians were still spiritually immature (3:1-3) but because of their salvation all of them had God's Holy Spirit to guide them and to grant to them understanding. This is why Paul calls them sensible people (v 15). He knows that if they listen carefully to what he is saying to them they will be able to judge for themselves the wisdom of his advice because the Spirit will clearly guide them to see that what Paul is saying is right, biblical and indeed logical.

Before Paul goes into detail he urges the Corinthian Christians to flee from idolatry. Even before Paul explains its dangers they must flee from it. It is possible that some had adopted the pagan practices and had added them to their Christian practices and it is possible that for others the temptation of the pagan worship system was still very appealing.

For others they were probably fighting the idolatry battle everyday and were winning but needed to hear this word of warning to flee from it. Before they can appreciate Paul's teaching on idolatry that he is going to give they need to flee from it. They need to distance themselves from it otherwise they will probably not pay any attention to what Paul has to say.

Now before we examine Paul's reasons for his advice it is good for us to heed this advice and flee from any idolatry that we are engaging in. Now obviously our idolatry will be different from the idolatry that went on in the pagan temple at Corinth but nevertheless anything or anyone who is receiving our devotion and attention more that the Lord God is idolatry.

In all likelihood unless we can see the idolatry in our lives we will probably not listen or be willing to receive Paul's reasoning.

For some of us we will be battling everyday with the temptation of idolatry because remember idolatry is idol worship. Who or what do we idolise today? It could be our children, grandchildren or even our husband or wife. It could be our work, our hobby or our interests. Some of these things

can consume our thinking and most of our time and money and if that is the case then it is more than likely that they have become an idol to us or we are fighting hard not to let such things become an idol.

Now because idolatry is worshipping something or someone other than the true God in the true way then it is a very serious sin indeed. For it strikes at the very character of God for those who worship idols declare that God is not the only God and that other so called gods are worthy to share his glory and honour. Idolatry declares that God is deficient and that he is not all wise, all-powerful and all sufficient.

It is not by accident that the first two of the Ten Commandments deal with the issue of idolatry. If we do not have the right view of God then nothing else can be in the right perspective. There is no other God except the God of the Bible and he is a jealous God who will not tolerate the worship of another (Isaiah 48:11). Therefore flee from every object, idea, philosophy, habit, occupation, sport or whatever that has taken or decreased our loyalty to the One true God.

Our world sadly worships false gods all the time, they refuse to worship the true God turning instead to false gods and that are unacceptable to God (Romans 1:21-28). We all worship something even an atheist worships for he worships himself and his own ideas.

Now let me spell it out clearly the many forms that idolatry can take. For example slandering the character of God is a form of idolatry. This form includes believing God to be something less than he actually is. If we fail to think of God as triune then we are guilty of worshipping a god who is not the true God and therefore we are worshipping idols.

We are guilty of idolatry when we fail to trust God for our actions say that God cannot be trusted or that he is not willing to act on our behalf. That is idolatry we are worshipping a god that does not exist, a god that is less than the true biblical God. Worshipping the true God in the wrong way is idolatry. We must come to God his way when we set up rituals and religious routines that neglect the true worship from the heart then we are guilty of idolatry.

We are worshipping the way we worship rather than the one we worship. The worship of a building is idolatry and this can be a sin that evangelicals fall into. The building is all that matters and the building is really worshipped rather than God. I have known churches where the building seems to be more important than the God they worship. Great time and effort is put into building instead of time being given to the worship of God. This is all idolatry and Paul urges the Christians at Corinth and all Christians to flee from all forms of idolatry. I could go on and mention the idolatry of worshipping images, or angels, which is becoming popular today, or worshipping famous people who are dead.

These are all forms of idolatry that simply all Christian people must flee from.

2. REASONS FOR FLEEING FROM IDOLATRY

Paul gives three reasons why the Christians at Corinth should flee from idolatry.

a) Idolatry is inconsistent (vs. 16-18) - Paul turns the attention of the Corinthian believers to the practise of the Lord's Supper within the church in order to show the inconsistency of idolatry. The Lord's Supper of course was a regular practise for the Corinthians in Corinth and therefore every time they partook of the wine referred to here as the "cup of thanksgiving" they are participating in the blood of Christ.

The word "participation" is the word fellowship and it means "to have in common" "to be in partnership with." Paul's point is that when we properly share in the Lord's Supper we are

spiritually participating in fellowship with the Lord Jesus and indeed with other believers. The Lord's Supper is much more than symbols but it is a profound celebration of a common spiritual experience.

The cup of thanksgiving is like a picture of someone we love. It represents the person and it helps us to think about that person and to remember our experiences with that person. Well that is what is happening at the Lord's Supper as we partake of the bread and wine we are remembering the one we love and are thinking about the experiences that we have had with Christ.

Although Christ is not with us in physical form he is present by His Spirit and so we have meaningful and real fellowship with Him as we partake of the Lord's Supper. During the Lord's Supper our minds are flooded with the reality of Christ.

Now our Lord knows when we are contemplating Him during the Lord's Supper and He is intensely aware when we think about his death for us and all that is represented by his shed blood, which is symbolised here by the cup of thanksgiving. Therefore when we partake of the Lord's Supper we experience real fellowship with the Lord and with our fellow believers.

Likewise when we partake of the bread we are participating in the body of Christ. As we know the bread symbolises Christ's body just as the cup symbolises His blood. As blood symbolises Christ's death so bread symbolises his life. So when we break the bread at the Lord's Supper we are thinking about Jesus humanity, his willingness to become man and his willingness to give his life for the salvation of sinful people.

The breaking of the bread does not represent the breaking of Jesus body as some people seem to think for we know that not a bone of his body was broken (John 19:36). When Jesus broke the bread in the Lord's Supper He did so in order to distribute it among the disciples representing the sharing of his life with them.

When we partake of the bread in the Lord's Supper we are thinking about Christ becoming a man for our sake we are thinking about his suffering as a man for our sake, we are thinking about his perfect life for our sake. Therefore the Lord's Supper is a spiritual experience that every Christian should use for their strengthening. When as Christians we partake in the Lord's Supper the Holy Spirit uses the symbols of the bread and wine to kindle our spirits in awareness and appreciation of our Lord's great ministry and sacrifice for us.

But the Lord's Supper symbolises our unity in Christ Jesus. Because we are one with Christ we are one with each other and the one loaf symbolises this fact (v 17). As we fellowship with Christ through the Lord's Supper we are also fellowshiping with each other. The Lord's Supper reminds us that all believers stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. We are all forgiven sinners who have eternal life through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

But Paul's real point is not to give us an exposition of the Lord's Supper although we learn much about the Lord Supper in this passage, some things we learn here that we do not learn elsewhere. But Paul's point in reminding the Corinthian believers of their participation in the Lord's Supper is to compare it with what happens at the pagan altars in Corinth. Paul uses Israel to illustrate this point (v 18).

When the Israelites sacrificed to the Lord some of the offering was burnt as a sacrifice and the priests ate some of it and those who offered it ate some. Everyone was involved with the offering, the people, God and the relationship between one another. Therefore by implication Paul is saying that to sacrifice to an idol is to identify with the god that the sacrifice is made too and with the pagan worshippers. Just like Israel identified with their God through the sacrifice and just as Christians identify with their Lord through their participation of the Lord's Supper.

Therefore we can say that religious ceremonies, whether Christian or pagan, involves the participation of the worshippers with the object of their worship and with each other. It is completely inconsistent for believers to participate in any expression of worship that is not directed to their Lord. Therefore flee all idolatry because idolatry involves participation with what we worship and with the worshippers and is therefore inconsistent for Christian people.

b) Idolatry is demonic (vs. 19-21) – Much worse than the fact that idolatry is inconsistent for believers is the fact that it is actually demonic. The things sacrificed have no spiritual power nor does the physical idol that is sacrificed too. Those things are nothing in themselves; the idol does not even exist apart from in the heads of its worshippers. However behind idol worship there are powers at work and that is the power of demons. Therefore those who think that they are sacrificing to some idol are unknowingly but willingly sacrificing to demons. This is one of Satan's ways to keep people in his power. Although an idol has no power Satan does and he sends one of his demons to trick people into believing that the idol has power.

So we should not be surprised when we hear claims of an idol being able to cry and it suddenly makes the newspapers. There is no god behind an idol but there is power behind it and that power is demonic. Make no mistake about it demons can display considerable power. Many pagan religious claims are fake but many are also true for at work behind a dumb idol are demonic powers.

Demons have enough power and demonstrate their power enough to keep people hooked on idol worship. If demons are the power behind the worship of idols then to carry Paul's argument forward from his first point when Christians participate in pagan idol worship they are actually participating with demons.

Christians might take part in pagan festivals because they know that idols do not exist but they have forgotten that behind idol worship there is a power at work the power of demons. Therefore to participate in such festivals is to in reality offer sacrifices to demons and participate or fellowship with demons and no Christian wants to do that.

The application Paul makes is obvious (v 21). You cannot have fellowship with the Lord Jesus and His people in the Lord's Supper and then have fellowship with demons and with pagan people at their festivals. You cannot serve two masters therefore no Christians can share in the Lord's Supper and share in pagan festivals in the temple at Corinth.

It is simply impossible to do both; it must be one of the other. Some attempted to do both at Corinth but in truth they were not fellowshiping with the Lord for their worship was hypocrisy.

Christian people are not exempt from the influence of demons. When we willingly ignore the Lord's way and set up idols in our heart then we are opening ourselves up to demonic influence. Do you remember the incident with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? Peter said, "Why has Satan so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit" (5:3).

Through the idol of greed this couple left themselves open to be tempted by Satan. So remember that idols of all types have demonic powers behind them and no Christian can have fellowship with Christ and have fellowship with demons therefore we need to ask God's help us examine our hearts so that we will flee from all forms of idolatry.

c) Idolatry is Offensive to the Lord (v 22) – Idolatry arouses the Lord's jealousy. Now when the bible talks about God being jealous it does not mean that he is jealous in the way that we get jealous for that is sinful. But the Bible teaches that God is rightfully jealous for his name, he will not

allow competition when it comes to receiving glory and honour. We can be rightfully jealous for our husbands and wives.

They belong to us and we will not allow competition when it comes to them. No one else has any right to take our partner for he or she belongs to us. Well in a much greater way God is jealous for his own glory and honour. No one has any right to try to take his glory or to try to steal his honour for he alone is God. This is why the Lord deals strongly with idolatry because nothing robs God of his glory and honour more than another god.

God is offended when we have idols in our heart because idolatry is the most detestable sign of unbelief. We are saying that other gods are better and are trustworthier than you Lord. It is no wonder that idolatry arouses the Lord's righteous jealousy. The Lord will not sit back and allow someone to rob him of his glory so He must take action. When he does take action are we able to contend with him?

Are we stronger than He is? Of course not and therefore Paul is giving us a very good reason to flee from idolatry. We would not want to arouse the Lord's jealousy for how can we stand up against Him should he act against us. God will not allow idolatry to go unpunished even his own people will know His disciplinary hand when we allow idols into our hearts.

So my dear Christian friend the great lesson that we need to learn is to flee from idolatry. Perhaps tonight the Lord has exposed to you some idols in your heart. Then you must act tonight by fleeing from them and returning to wholehearted devotion to the Lord. The reason for doing so is that idol worship is inconsistent for Christians. We cannot worship God and idols.

Idol worship is demonic and finally we might arouse the Lord's jealousy by continuing in idol worship and are we stronger than the Lord?

Therefore examine our hearts and flee from idolatry.

Amen