

Flee From Idolatry 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Hence we must hold, that whosoever adulterates pure religion (and this must be the case with all who cling to their own views), make a departure from the one God. No doubt, they will allege that they have a different intention; but it is of little consequence what they intend or persuade themselves to believe, since the Holy Spirit pronounces all to be apostates, who, in the blindness of their minds, substitute demons in the place of God.¹

I. Don't Flirt, Flee!

10:14 – “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”

Paul brings the argument that he started in 8:1 full circle in 1 Cor. 10:14-22. He is concerned about two things:

- First, their going to the temple feasts was causing weaker Christians to stumble by tempting them to participate in things that could cause them to sin.
- Secondly, Paul was concerned that they were participating in idolatry.

His argument against causing one to stumble is summarized in 8:4-6. A solution to that same problem is given in 8:9-13. In 10:14-22, Paul builds off of his teaching from 8:1-10:13 to address their idolatry. This climaxes with v. 14's, “. . . flee idolatry.”

II. You Can't Fellowship with Christ and Demons

10:15-17 – “I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. ¹⁶ Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing² in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing² in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Since there is one bread [lit. “loaf”], we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread [lit. “loaf”].”

- Paul appeals to their better judgment (v. 15) by reminding them that when Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper, the one loaf that they pull a piece of bread off of and the same bottle of wine (or grape juice) that they partake of is supposed to symbolize their unity and intimate fellowship with each other and with Jesus.
- This is proved by verse 17. It could also be translated, “*Because* there is one loaf, we who are many are one body; because we all partake of the one loaf.”

Paul's point is that since Christians participate in intimate fellowship with one another and with Jesus in a deeply spiritual way in the Lord's Supper; this means that they *cannot* also become sharers in demons by participating in pagan feasts that honor them. It's either Christ or demons!

10:18 – “Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers [Gk. *koinonoi*] in the altar?”

- 10:18 points out that since the ancient Jewish sacrifices were literal sacrifices (unlike the Lord's Supper) where the animal was sacrificed and later eaten with fellowship taking

¹ John Calvin, Institutes, Book I., Ch. 5. Section 13a.

² Greek word translated as “sharing” is “koinonia”. It also means “fellowship”. Cf. Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 13:14; 6:14-18.

place in honor of God, so it was with the pagan sacrifices. Both groups sacrificed, both groups ate, both groups fellowshiped, and both honored their respective deity.

Paul's point is that to participate in the pagan sacrifice and then eat it is to participate in fellowship with pagans and their false god.

10:19-20 – “What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ *No*, but *I say* that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.”

- Both Paul and the Corinthians are agreed that the idol isn't a real god. Where they disagree is that Paul knows that while the false god represented by the idol itself does not really exist (cf. 8:4-6), there *is* however, a real demonic power behind that false god that energizes that false worship. To participate in that activity makes you one who fellowships with demons, which is idolatry (1 John 5:21).
- The fact of idols being supernaturally energized by demons is supported by OT teaching: Deut. 32:17; Psa. 96:5; 106:34-39.

10:21-22 – “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. ²² Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?”

- Christians *cannot* participate in the worship of Christ and the worship of demons because fellowship with Jesus and His people excludes fellowship with demons. Paul absolutely forbids any kind of relationship with the demonic realm.
- Paul says that to participate in idolatry is to make God “jealous with what is not God” (Deut. 32:21).
- To convince ourselves that we are stronger than He by attempting to put Christ to the test through idolatry is to reveal who we really are: those who are lost and headed to Hell. As Isaiah says, “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker”! (Isa. 45:9a)

III. Conclusion

Being members of the one body of Christ makes it impossible to be involved in idolatrous practices. Our fundamental spiritual allegiance is at stake. We must choose our master and choose wisely. One cannot serve God and demons – whatever form that may take in our day. Participating in the table of the Lord does not give us a license to engage in all manner of wickedness; whether moral or religious. Instead, the grace of God binds us to one another in common fellowship around Christ and His New Covenant in such a way that our behavior in the New Covenant era is controlled by the Spirit working through the “law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

Questions:

1. What is Paul's main point in 1st Corinthians 10:14-22?
2. What modern application could we make of this passage?
3. What things today cause believers to be tempted to participate in idolatry?
4. What repercussions are there for Christians who fail to avoid idolatry?