

Introduction: How aware of you of the concept of idolatry today? If we're honest, we might not feel it is that present of an issue, or that there is any real danger. It's not like we live in a culture like ancient Rome or Greece, or modern Hinduism, where there are images all around us. However, the threat and pervasiveness of idolatry is just as present in the world today as it was in the first century. We still take good things and make them ultimate things. We still put our trust in things to save us, satisfy us, bring us happiness, etc. See, the problem with idolatry is that it is the fundamental orientation of the heart. We tend that way all the time because our hearts are made to worship God, and if he is not being worshiped, then inevitably something fills that void.

This text then is especially important to help us flee from idolatry. Notice that's his conclusion from the section we discussed last time, and is the foundation of what he describes here. Paul is writing these things to help the church understand the dangers of idolatry, and to give them the framework in order for them to overcome it. We need those things as well.

I. The danger of Idolatry

A. Now, as we have seen so far in chapter 10, an idol is anything that we crave more than God. By definition then, we are craving evil things (v 6).

1. However, the craving in of itself might seem innocuous - why does my desire for something matter? It's just some food and drink. It's just sex.
2. In fact, we might look at the image of gold or silver and think, there isn't really any power there. That's just silver, gold, etc. Like back in 8:4 "we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and there is no God but one."
3. And Paul does affirm this in verse 19. If you look at it purely from a dualistic worldview - one that separates the spiritual and physical, the idol is nothing.
4. However, Paul does not share the dualistic worldview that was present in Corinth, and is present today in western cultures.

B. The biblical worldview explains the danger in idolatry.

1. Look at verse 20. After affirming the idol is nothing, Paul says that the things which they sacrifice to (Israel and the Gentiles), they sacrifice to demons, and that by doing this, the Corinthians would be sharing with demons.
2. Now, I can imagine some in Corinth might have been shocked by this. It can be a shock to us as well if we are not familiar with what Paul is describing here.
3. See, the biblical worldview is not dualistic. Yes, there is a division between heaven and earth presently - because of sin, but that is not how it has always been and they are still deeply connected and related.
4. Paul is referring to a deep and important storyline that is easy to read over. When Paul looks at these idols, he says that what was really happening is that the people were sacrificing to demons - that is, fallen angels.
5. Now, where did he get this? Well, the primary text under discussion through this entire chapter has been Deuteronomy 32, or the song of Moses.

- a) Paul has already introduced this chapter when he referred to the Rock as Christ (that's from v 4). This chapter explains how Israel had been rebellious children against God because of their idolatry.
 - b) Moses begins by telling the story of humanity - like he did in Genesis. In verse 8 he describes when God gave the nations their inheritance and separated the sons of man - that is Genesis 11 and Babylon.
 - c) However, notice the rest of v 8, the ESV says it was divided according to the sons of God. The older, more reliable manuscripts attest to this reading. Moses is saying, that's when one of the spiritual rebellions that took place - the nations did not want God, so God gave them over to demons.
 - d) To make it more clear, Moses explains it was only Yahweh that guided them, there was no foreign god (v 12). Then when they forsook him and scorned the Rock of Israel's salvation, they made him jealous by strange gods and through abominations made him angry (v 16).
 - e) Now, especially notice verse 17 - this is the quotation Paul made in 1 Corinthians 10. They neglected the rock that bore them (v 18)! That's the point Paul is making. When they went after food and drink, idol worship, and sexual immorality, they served DEMONS. As a result they provoked God to jealousy and anger (v 21) and were destroyed as a result.
6. The biblical worldview sees the spiritual and physical as inseparably connected. When a human being rebels, it's not just their own rebellion, they are following these fallen sons of God, or demons instead of God!
 7. This becomes the foundation of many important texts, especially in the book of Daniel and Revelation where you have heaven and earth interacting regularly and the contrast is between demons with rebellious humanity, and God, Jesus, His angels, and the saints.
- C. This is critical to our thinking and lives
1. The dualist worldview is the foundation of two great evils in our society - on one side we have the irreligious - evolution. Which says basically the only thing that exists is physical things - it's the same concept. There is no spiritual side of things.
 2. The other side we have the religious - a gnostic/deist idea - Spiritual things do not interact with physical things. What you do in the flesh is not important. God is not connected to or interacting in our world.
 3. However, the biblical one is the true one. It means the physical and spiritual are connected. The physical actions ARE spiritual. They have spiritual ramifications.
 4. The spiritual beings may not be seen, like demons at the temple, or Jesus in the Lord's supper. But they are alive and well. They interact with our world. **Eph. 6:12**
 5. See the ignorance of this idea lead them to think sleeping with a prostitute didn't affect anything. That going to the idols temple was completely harmless. But don't

be mistaken, when a person pursues idol worship, sexual immorality, and all evil cravings, they are worshipping demons.

6. However, in contrast, when we pursue true worship, keep ourselves pure physically, and cultivate spiritual cravings, we are worshipping and serving God!

D. The danger then is that we serve a God who will not take second place to his own created spiritual beings. He is jealous over his people. He will destroy those who participate in this level of rebellion against Him. He will hold us all accountable.

E. But on the positive, we serve a God who is faithful to us and will reward us greatly for our loyalty to him. He will not let our good deeds and acts of faith go unappreciated.

II. The answer to Idolatry

A. See the answer to fleeing idolatry, is not just to run away generally. It is to run away TO something. Or better, to run away to SOMEONE. The way that we flee idolatry is by running to Jesus!

B. Paul connects this concept to the idea of the Lord's supper. In contrast to sharing with demons, the Lord's supper is where we sharing in the blood, body, and table of the Christ the Lord.

C. Now, this is another concept that might seem a bit unusual to us so it deserves some explanation to understand what this is, and what it accomplishes.

1. The concept of covenantal meals is a bit strange or unusual to us. Yet it is all over the old testament. It was with Isaac and Abimelech, Jacob and Laban, Israel and Moab (which was the events at Baal-Peor) and Joshua and the Gibeonites.

2. In these meals, there is an agreement that is struck. A relationship. A covenant. The meal then is symbolical of a relationship that is shared and cultivated as a result.

D. However, this is not limited to what human beings do with each other. It is something that God does with humans as well. Let's consider an example.

1. Remember in the book of Exodus. In chapter 20 and following we have the terms of the covenant God and Israel are about to agree on.

2. In chapter 24 God tells Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 of the elders to come up and worship at a distance. Moses then gives them the words of the covenant and the people say "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" They are agreeing to the covenant with God.

3. Moses then offers sacrifices and takes some of the blood and sprinkles it on the altar, and the people, and says "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." God is agreeing as well!

4. Now in 9-11, the leaders go up and amazingly THEY SEE GOD! Yet, God did not stretch out his hand against them - WOW! Why? Because of the blood! Then, there is this little phrase "they ate and drank." They had a covenant meal with God

5. Covenant meals then are about creating peace. They form relationships. They form community. They build relationships. They remind and celebrate the agreement!

- E. Now, this is especially true in regard to one other important covenantal feast - Passover
1. The meal of the 70 was amazing and fantastic. But only a small group participated in it representatively for the people. However, with the passover everyone participated in it and it has a huge goal of community creation, unity, relationships, and much more. It was intended as transformational, yearly reminder for Israel
 2. Remember, the passover was when God allowed the angel of justice to come and strike Egypt. But God's justice is not prejudiced - it would strike Egypt and Israel. The answer then for Israel to take a lamb, kill it and put it's blood on the doorposts
 3. Then, they were supposed to have a covenantal meal, along with unleavened bread. It was so important that this became the first day of their entire calendar - it was like an act of new creation for Israel.
 4. As well, in that moment they were to remember some things - particularly verses 12-13. That is when the gods (idols) of Egypt would be judged, and they are saved.
 5. The event was to be done every person, every year, with no work. It was so serious that if a person did not partake of it rightly they would be cut off from Israel.
 6. Now, do you see what is happening? It is an act of community creation. A unifying, transforming action. They are communion with each other and with God. They are remembering the story. They are practicing the rituals. They are spending focused and dedicated time together. That's how you build a relationship and community!
 7. Further, it is also the moment that shows the absolute weakness and futility of idol worship. The passover was a memorial of the judgment God brings on these rebellious spiritual beings and their human partners. It is a divine reminder.
- F. Now, what does this have to do with idolatry and Corinth?
1. Paul is bringing Corinth into the story of Israel. They are the true Israel. The ones that have experienced a new and greater exodus. But not just that, they have experienced the new and greater passover, that covenantal meal with Yahweh.
 2. Think about what Jesus represents in contrast to the passover. He is the ultimate temple, he is the ultimate priest, he is the ultimate lamb, he is God who prepares the meal, he is the one who gives the blood, he is the one who brings a greater covenant. All of those passover images are adapted and transformed in Him!
 3. That's what the "wise" people in Corinth should have been able to judge. That's why these questions are put in rhetorical form. This should have been obvious to them. It wasn't the blood and body of a lamb anymore. It was the body and blood of the son of God! The true lamb of God given for their sins!
 4. That's what was needed to break the back of idolatry in Corinth. They had failed to realize just what they were participating in. They had fallen into treating God trivially, just like the Israelites of Exodus 32.

5. They were repeating the same mistake. They had forgotten the mountain top meal with God, just like Israel. And as a result, they are sitting at the table of demons at the bottom of the mountain, just like Israel in Exodus 32.
6. They had forgotten what that covenant meal meant, both positively in regards to the great benefits of being in fellowship with God. But also negatively in regards to the cross being the moment when Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them"
7. Those idols are nothing compared to Jesus. They have done nothing but enslave you and cause you to be destroyed. But Jesus has brought life and immortality to light. He has allowed you to be partakers of the divine nature!

G. See, that's what causes Corinth to flee from idolatry and to run straight into the arms of Jesus. The message of the cross shows the exceeding wonder and grace God has for everyone, how he defeated all our enemies and liberated us from their power, and it is the call God uses to bring his people out of the world and separate them as a holy people for his name

III. How to apply this text to ourselves

A. What does this text say to us about our idols?

1. It says that the threat of idolatry is the all and encompassing threat to our spirituality. Whether it is sensuality through the pursuing of the pleasures of this world - whether that be food, drink, or wealth, comfort, status, etc. Or through sexual immorality in the form of pornography, lust, fornication and so on. Whatever we set our hearts on more than God. Whatever we trust in and find joy in more than Him.
2. Inevitably there is one or more forms of idolatry that tempts us - that can be family, power, wealth, pleasure, any of those kinds of things. But the real danger that is present here is not the full abandonment of God to pursue those things. The real threat is when we deceive ourselves and think that we can share in the table of the Lord and the table of demons at the same time.
3. For Christians, myself included, we want to work God's commands in our favor. We say "all things are lawful", "The idol is nothing" all in effort to save our consciences as we brazenly walk contrary to God's commands and the message of the cross.
4. The danger presented here in Corinth is of religious people who dabble in idolatry, sexual immorality, tempting the Lord, and grumbling. Or through accepting the doctrines of demons that are present by false teachers in the world regarding the nature of Christ, the organization of the church, or how a person is saved. We want to have the table of the demons and the table of the Lord.
5. We do all of this by recreating God into our own image. We rewrite or reinterpret God's word to be what we want it so say instead of what He wants and thus whole forms of idolatry are seen in both religious teaching and practice.

6. We should take serious the warning Paul presents in verse 22 "Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?" In essence, Paul is saying you are angering God and pushing him to jealous fury against your sin. And that situation will not go well, you are not stronger than Him.
 7. The reason this arrangement will not work is because the Lord will not allow it. We may want it. We may tolerate in our churches and personal lives. But the Lord will not tolerate it himself, or in his body. It is because, as James 4:4 says, we are adulteresses who want friendship with the world and we become his enemies.
 8. The point of this context is that God destroyed those who fell back into idolatry, even though they had experienced his power and wonderful grace in their exodus. We need to remember that warning for ourselves today and flee from our idols.
- B. What does this text say to us about our covenantal meals?
1. However, this text has much to say about the true deep remedy all of us need for our idolatry and wandering hearts. It is to properly appreciate the covenant meal that we partake of each week.
 2. The reason there is jealousy in this relationship on God's part when we sin is because he is absolutely passionate about us - like a husband for his wife. That's the consistent relationship that God compares himself to with his people.
 3. Therefore, this meal is a reminder of our vows and promises to each other. It is the covenantal meal by which we remember our true identity as the temple of God, body of Christ, saints, and sharers in the blood and body of Christ in a new exodus.
 4. Much like the passover before, the communion should remind us of our new life that began when we applied the blood of Jesus in baptism and received the forgiveness of our sins. It should remind us of the awful price God paid for our sins in the death of Jesus because he loved us and how it allows us to eat with him
 5. But there is more here as well. Notice what he says in verse 17. It is through the mutual participation in this action together that we become not only stronger in our relationship to God, but that we become the ONE BODY.
 6. Here then lies the travesty of what has happened over the years regarding the Lord's supper, and especially during covid. People think of the Lord's supper as a very personal, individual thing - and it definitely is (11:28). However, the change individually is to be done in order to form the community!
 7. For those that believe that the Lord's supper is simply an individual responsibility, I beg the question, if that is true, how then are the many expected to become the one body? We know this happens in baptism. But Paul's point here is that it happens as well in the regularly covenantal ritual and meal we share together
 8. Remember, it is the Lord's supper and their abuses of it that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:30 was THE REASON many among them were weak, sick, and a number had died.

9. The comparison meal for the Lord's supper over and over again is the passover. The passover is all about community formation through shared rituals and identity in those rituals. To abuse them, or change them to individual acts, is to undo them
10. To me, it is no surprise that the evil spiritual forces and demons have tried to strike at the regular rituals we do TOGETHER. They are attacking the things that form our community - and the most important is the Lord's supper. **11:17 "...when you come together as a church..."**
11. Is it any surprise then that churches are dividing the last couple of years when the event made for uniting them, reminding them of their identity and covenant, and forming their community has been neglected, changed, or deemphasized?
12. Think about what this meal would have meant for a church like Corinth, that was so divided, selfish, and proud. See the meal itself shows the importance of death to self for the benefit of others - it directly attacks a primary idol causing problems in Corinth - the one of individualism and person freedom. The idolizing of their personal "rights" was contributing to the destruction of the community.
13. The covenant meal done right showed how Jesus has already triumphed over and put to shame that idol through his death on the cross. Therefore it not only showed the error of the Corinthians in this section (8:10) where they used their knowledge to destroy the brother for whom Christ died. But also radically united them back together as they reflect on the awful cost Jesus paid and the amazing status they have receive because of his grace.
14. But here is the point that we need. If it has that kind of power to transform Corinth like they needed. What would happen to our churches if we truly took of this meal in the way Paul is describing? Would it not be the same kind of transformation, where people who bow down to the idol of self and personal freedom are now bound in a loving community that serves each other.
15. If it worked for Corinth, then it will work for us. This meal can show us the absolutely futility of idolatry, while at that same moment draw us closer to the Lord of the covenant and those who participate in the meal as well. Because the closer we grow to God and one another, the further we separate ourselves from the idols and passions of the world. Like a marriage, the more you are in love with your spouse, the more you are repulsed by the advances of anyone else.