

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Idolatry, Demons And False Religion I Corinthians 10:14-22

The portion of Scripture we are studying today is all about pagan idolatry. Pagan temples, pagan sacrifices, pagan feasts and pagan worship seems to be quite distant from the thinking of the average American Christian. Many would feel this section has no relevance to them, but it does. What Paul has to say about paganism can be directly applied to what relationship a true believer in Christ today sustains to liberal churches, apostate churches, cultic churches and quasi-evangelical churches in the twentieth century. These verses have something to say to the sincere Christian who chooses to remain in a liberal or apostate, cultic or quasi-evangelical church in order to be a witness to it, or teach Sunday school or serve in some capacity, hoping to act as salt and light in a corrupt situation. These verses have something to say to the naive Christian who does not understand the implications of his or her association with a liberal, apostate, cultic or quasi-evangelical church. These verses have something to say to the carnal Christian who remains in a liberal, apostate, cultic or quasi-evangelical church for social, economic or sentimental reasons such as there is such a beautiful building or it has such a wonderful choir or it is doing so much for the community.

In I Corinthians 8-10, Paul is dealing with the subject of meat offered to idols. He has already taught that meat sacrificed to idols was a questionable practice and it could be eaten providing it did not cause a weaker brother to stumble. However, if it did cause a brother to stumble, it was to be forsaken for the unity of the body of Christ and the keeping of a weaker brother from falling into sin. Now Paul gives another reason for abstaining from the questionable practice of meat offered to idols. Those partaking might be led into sin. By going to the verge of the allowable, they might be drawn into the sinful. Before their conversion to Christ, all the Corinthian Christians had been deeply associated with the pagan temple. They worshiped idols and participated in heathen feasts. After they were converted, some of them still participated to some degree in the ceremonies and feasts of the temple worship. They enjoyed the festivities. Perhaps some were sincere and were trying to reach their lost relatives who were steeped in paganism for Christ. Others may have been naive to the evils of paganism because they were babes in Christ. Still others were just carnal and chose to stay in contact with paganism for social, economic or sentimental reasons. Others may have been just pragmatic and refused to leave the idolatrous worship system of paganism because they did not want to rock the boat, offend friends or incur the displeasure of families. All the Corinthians basically knew that paganism was wrong. They understood that there was nothing to idolatry; that is, that there were no real gods behind the idols. They realized that it all was a sham. Yet they continued to associate with this pagan idol worship to some degree.

He (Paul) warns them to abstain from idolatrous feasts because they might be lead into idolatry. By going to the edge of that which is permissible, they might be drawn into sin. There was great danger that the Corinthians, convinced that an idol was nothing, might be induced to join the sacrificial feasts that took place within the temples. It was one thing to buy meat at the market and then eat it in their homes, but it was quite another to actually go to the feasts themselves. Paul tries to convince them that going to sacrificial feasts was the same as engaging in idolatry (Table Talk).

ATTITUDE ABOUT PARTICIPATION IN IDOLATRY 10:14

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. These Corinthians were flirting with idolatry. They are told to keep on fleeing from idolatry, for God hates it. Idolatry is the worshiping of a false god which results in a false religion, taking people away from Christ and the true religion. The Corinthians were not to dally with idolatry, flirt with it or tolerate it. They should not see how near they could come to idolatry without actually participating in it, but how far they could keep from it. There was always the danger that the Corinthian Christians, convinced that an idol was nothing, might fall back under the spell of paganism. Therefore, the only wise course was to have nothing to do with it.

The libertine Christian in our American culture who revels in his God-given freedom in Christ can so easily compromise math. Our culture is pluralistic, showing tolerance and acceptance of everything. Pluralism in America is bringing us many false gods to worship Allah, the New Age god, liberal god and the freewill god and the gods of various religions.

ACTUAL PARTICIPATION IN IDOLATRY IS FELLOWSHIP WITH IDOLATRY 10:15-17

I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Paul may have been speaking sarcastically because they thought themselves so wise but were actually foolish because of the association with idolatry, or Paul may be appealing to them as sensible, intelligent people who ought to see the dangers of flirting with temple worship.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Paul wants to make one basic point in this verse and the following verses: To participate in something is to have fellowship with it. He uses the analogy of the Lord's Table. When Christians partake of the bread and the wine, they are actually fellowshiping with Jesus Christ.

This verse helps us understand that the Lord's Table is more than just a memorial or remembrance of the death of Christ. Christians actually share in the blood and body of Christ.

The word can mean "participation" or "fellowship" or "share." Somehow when partaking of the Lord's Table, Christ is spiritually present in a way He is not present at other times. Christ is not in the elements of bread and wine as the Roman Catholics believe, but He is more real to the

Christian's faith. By faith, we sense His presence with us at the Table more than we do on other occasions. The Lord's Table is referred to by some Christians as a "sacrament." A sacrament is an oath. The word "sacrament" was used for the oath of allegiance which the soldiers of the Roman legion took to show their loyalty to the emperor. Therefore, each time Christians gather at the Lord's Table, they renew their allegiance to their Lord, confessing their devotion to Him who saved them by His sovereign grace.

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. Participation in the Lord's Table, as a means of grace, not only brings the Christian into fellowship with Christ but it also brings him into fellowship with the whole body of Christ. The one loaf is a symbol of unity and the Lord's Table as a whole is to be a symbol of unity. This is why we must confess our sins and get our lives straight with our brothers and sisters in Christ before we partake of the Table lest we make a mockery of this unity. Historically, the Lord's Table, which was designed for unity, has brought the church great disunity because Christians cannot agree as to the extent of the presence of Christ in the elements or at the Table.

This verse also tells us something about how the Lord's Table was originally observed.

Apparently there was one loaf and each Christian broke off a piece of the loaf as it was passed.

Paul's point is clear: To participate in the Lord's Table is to have fellowship with Christ and

Christ's people but to participate in idolatry in any way is to have fellowship with idolatry and ultimately demons.

ANY PARTICIPATION IN IDOLATRY IS THE WORSHIP OF DEMONS 10:18-20

Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? When any Israelite took his offering to the altar, some of the sacrifice was given to the priests and some was given back to the offerer. When sacrificing an animal, an Israelite was participating in fellowship with the God of Israel, with the priesthood of Israel, with the temple worship and with all the nation of Israel. To participate was to have fellowship with God and the whole system associated with the altar.

Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? Paul acknowledges that in essence an idol is nothing and the things offered to idols are mere superstition; that is, there are no real gods behind idols of stone or wood. Zeus, Minerva or Aphrodite were just shams, but there is something deeper and more potent than false gods behind pagan idolatry.

No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. Behind all idolatry are no man-made gods, but there is the god of this world, Satan, and his demons. These Corinthians were not involved in Satan worship per se. They did not realize that demons were behind this idolatrous worship. Yet, their ignorance did not make it any less true. What Paul is saying is that behind the idolatry at Corinth was Satan and his demons who had instituted a false religious system in order to lead men and women away from God into a false, counterfeit religion. The Devil and his demons are the masterminds behind pagan idolatry and all other false religions and systems. So to participate in the heathen temple worship, to get involved in pagan feasts, to have anything to do with idolatry is to have fellowship with all that is associated with paganism. Satan is behind the pagan temple, in the sacrifices and among the priesthood. Therefore, all who participate in any form of idolatry have been deceived by Satan. A Christian cannot flirt with idolatry and not be affected by it. If a Christian becomes involved in idolatrous feasts, he is exposing himself and the Christian community to demons.

There is a missionary thought in this verse. When we take the gospel to heathen lands where idolatry is rampant, we do not leave the people who trust in Christ to continue in their paganism. They must separate from it. Why? It is demonic. To allow people to flirt with paganism is to invite them to participate in it and with the demonism connected with it. We are not to Americanize other cultures, but we are to have them separate from the paganism, keeping within the confines of their own culture as much as possible.

ALTERNATIVES IF ONE PARTICIPATES IN IDOLATRY 10:21-22

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. — The "cup of demons" was a cup of wine drunk by pagan worshipers at their feasts where certain gods were honored. The drinking of this wine, often leading to intoxication, was accompanied by a prayer to the gods. It was a ritual that pagans went through to honor their gods. When this was done, the pagans were actually honoring demons, even though they were not aware of it. Our modern-day custom of drinking toasts at feasts and celebrations arose from this practice of pouring out wine or drinking wine in honor of the heathen gods.

What is Paul's point? A person who professes to be a Christian cannot consistently and habitually associate with demons and idolatry and still call himself a Christian. A true Christian may flirt with idolatry and demonism as a naive baby Christian, but he cannot consistently do it, for this would prove he is not a Christian at all. It is impossible for a person to eat of the table of demons without being brought under their power and influence.

A Christian must separate completely from idolatry and be wholeheartedly committed to Christ. If a Christian is partaking of the Lord's Table on Sunday night and the table of demons on Wednesday night, then he must flee idolatry and separate from it, whatever his motives, in order to prove and demonstrate that he or she is a true believer in Christ.

Are we trying to amuse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? God is a jealous God for the love of His people. When a Christian associates in any way with idolatry, he is provoking God to jealousy because God is not receiving the wholehearted devotion from the Christian which He desires and deserves. The true Christian opens himself up to the discipline of God. Christians are not stronger than God, and He will discipline whenever we flirt in any way with idolatry of any kind.

The Lord is a jealous God, who brooks no rivals, no comparisons, no alternatives. There are dangers in presumptuousness and complacency, especially the danger of finding ourselves victims of the humiliating fall which inevitably follows all pride. But there is, if anything, even greater danger in compromise, because we smudge the issues and let all kinds of spiritual counterfeits which confuse the truth as it is in Jesus, as well as being in obvious conflict with it (David Prior, I Corinthians).

APPLICATION TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY CHRISTIAN

Surely the message of Paul to the Corinthians must have hit them like a ton of bricks, but the message is just as loud and clear to modern day Christians. We are not to have any part in false religions or counterfeit religions because these religions are controlled by demons who seek to destroy true Christianity.

Satan Is Behind All False Religion. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (II Cor. 4:3-4).

As biblical Christians, we understand that Satan is behind the false religions such as Shintoism, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, ancestor worship, Ba'hai and many others, and most are persuaded that we should not be involved in the various Christian cults such as Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Unitarianism, Unity, Christian Science and others because Satan is in control of these organizations as well. However, we are often duped by liberalism, the apostate church and quasi-evangelicalism. Satan's strategy is to counterfeit the real thing. His frontal attack is a religious system that is designed to promote unbelief. Satan's ace in the hole is churches which call themselves Christian but are not Christian because they have gone liberal and/or apostate. Satan's latest strategy is evangelical churches which deny a real eternal hell, saying that people do not have to believe in eternal judgment to be true "born again" Christians. Satan has blinded people to the truth that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ, is purely by the grace of God apart from works, and is appropriated only by faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

Satan has His Own Theology. The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and allow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:1-2). Satan and his demons have their own doctrines and their own systematic theology of error. They get people in apostate churches to believe that one can be a true Christian and yet deny the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary death of Christ for sin and sinners, the inspiration of the bible, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the fact of miracles, a real hell and other fundamental truths of Christianity. Satan is the author of syncretism which is the mixing of Christianity with other false religions and false ideologies. Christianity is mixed with eastern mystical religions which results in New Age heresy. Christianity is mixed with feminism which creates rebellious women and goddess worship. Christianity is mixed with voodoo so as to give some kind of white witchcraft religion. Christianity is mixed with American Indian paganism so as to get a worship of the earth. Christianity is mixed with all the religions of the world so as to get Ba'hai. Satan and demons are behind all syncretism.

Satan Has His Own Clergy. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:13-14). Satan's masterpiece is not the drunkard, dope addict, gangster or prostitute but the self-righteous man who is in unbelief against Jesus Christ. There are many intelligent, attractive, educated, suave and witty men and women who preach behind pulpits or on television or radio who are emissaries of Satan, directing people away from the free and gracious salvation which is in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Satan Has His Own Churches. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9) This may refer to Jews who called themselves Christian but in reality they were false believers, making up a synagogue of Satan. If Satan has synagogues, he also has churches under his control. These churches may have many cultured and educated people in them. They probably meet in gorgeous buildings and have fantastic music and church programs, but underneath it all, they deny that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and the only way to heaven.

Satan And False Religion Must Be Shunned. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry (I Cor. 10:14). True Christians are to shun and flee from all apostate religion. Why? Because it is demonic and out to destroy the true message of Christ and salvation.

Satan And False Religion Must Be Separated From By The True Christian. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.

Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:14-18). To be truly unequally yoked means to associate with false religion. Christians are to come out from liberalism and apostasy and cultism and be separate. No Christian can flirt with apostasy and not be influenced by it. This is why Christians should not go to liberal seminaries. They will be tainted by their unbelief and rebellious spirit.

APPEAL TO CHRISTIANS

For a Christian to flirt with liberalism and/or apostasy, cultism or quasi-evangelicalism is a very serious matter. Why? Because it endangers your very spiritual existence.

Endangers Spiritual Health. No matter how pure and doctrinally strong you may think you are, you will be influenced by apostasy. It is impossible to walk through a coal mine and not get dirty, so it is impossible to snuggle up to liberalism and not be tainted. Therefore, flee!

Endangers The Souls Of Your Children. To stay in a liberal church or a quasi-evangelical church in order to witness to it or to stay for social, economic or sentimental reasons, may not affect you as much as it will your children. They do not have the ability to discern truth from error. You must not play Russian roulette with the souls of your kids. Therefore, flee!

Endangers You To God's Discipline. When you flirt with false religion, you are associating with demonic powers. God is jealous for the devotion and dedication of His people. If He does not get it, He will bring loving discipline into your life. He does this because He loves you. Therefore, flee!

CONCLUSION

A great deal has been said about false religion, but what is the true religion? It is found in Jesus Christ alone, who is true deity and perfect humanity, who was born of a virgin, who died a substitutionary death for sin and sinners, who was resurrected from the dead, who went to the Father's right hand in heaven, and who is coming again in His second advent.

This Christ, the promised Messiah, as King of the universe, offers salvation to all men who will recognize they are sinners and under God's wrath, and who will turn to Him alone to forgive them for their sins and grant them eternal life. Salvation is not by works, but by grace, and all one can do is receive Jesus Christ by faith. Where a person will spend eternity heaven or hell depends upon what he or she does with Christ in this life.

Where are you? Are you on the road to eternal heaven or eternal judgment? Where will you spend eternity? Jesus said that He alone is the way to heaven. He said, "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life" (Jn. 6:47).