

Flee Idolatry [Slide 1] 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Tell tortilla story, p. 160 map book. An idol can be anything, including a tortilla. Written on a tombstone are the following words: “He was the greatest leader of all peoples, of all countries, of all times. He was Lord of Humanity, the Savior of the World.” Any guess as to whom that refers? Vladimir Lenin, founder of Russian communism and who was probably responsible for the death of 100,000 to 200,000 Russians during the days of the Red Terror. William Temple once wrote, “It is much worse to have a false idea of God than no idea at all.” Far better to be an agnostic than an idolater.

[Slide 2] Today we are going to learn about idolatry and the demonic world behind it. I invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. 1 Corinthians is the seventh book in the Bible after the four Gospels, Acts and Romans. We are going to begin with verses 14-18 where Paul explains that when you participate in a sacrifice, you fellowship with the god behind the sacrifice. Let’s read those verses. Read.

A little historical background will help us to understand the issue Paul is addressing. Corinth and other ancient Greek cities would host temple feasts which were community events and celebrations in honor of one of the Greek gods. They would include a procession, a feast and possibly some kind of athletic or other form of competition. They strictly weren’t a worship service per se, but they were in honor of a god. Paul is going to make the argument that even in such a quasi-religious event that may have been more of a party than a worship service, Christians were still participating in idolatry by attending.

[Slide 3] Paul starts out by commanding them to keep fleeing idolatry. The present tense command indicates that the believers had to repeatedly or habitually flee because these types of opportunities to commit idolatry were pretty frequent in their culture. I’m going to give you a functional definition of idolatry. Idolatry occurs whenever something else takes the place of God. That something else becomes foremost in our affections, in our commitments, in our thinking, and in our decision-making. We typically think of idolatry as including some kind of false god who has been represented by some figurine or statue and that is certainly one major example of idolatry, but I believe we should consider a more comprehensive concept of idolatry.

One encounter I had with traditional idolatry is when I went with a group of Christians to meet with a Hindu priest in a Hindu temple. The priest showed us the carved image of a person with an elephant head that represented the Hindu god, Gonesh. Each day this priest would pick up the carving out of its bed, clothe it, and place it in its spot in the temple before placing food and drink before the idol so that it could eat and drink. In the evening he would take off the idol’s clothes and put it back to bed. The priest believed that whatever he or worshippers did to the carving, they were doing to the god behind the carving. So if they put food before the idol they were feeding the god. If they sang or bowed to the idol, they were singing or bowing to the god.

After warning the Corinthians to flee idolatry, Paul then used the Lord’s Supper to make a point that when you eat food and drink that is used to celebrate a god, you are fellowshiping with that god. Paul refers to the prayer of thanksgiving that is made over the cup in the Lord’s Supper, the cup of blessing which we bless. When you give thanks for the cup in the Lord’s Supper, like we did, we don’t pray to the cup do we? We are actually praying to the Lord Jesus who is represented by the cup. When we have fellowship in the blood of Christ, we are not

actually fellowshiping with the blood. We are fellowshiping with Christ. We believe that Jesus is present with us in the Lord's Supper. He is listening to us. We are talking to him and honoring him. The Lord's Supper is a moment of fellowship between us and Jesus. The same is true when we partake of the bread. We are fellowshiping with Jesus.

So, if eating the bread and drinking the wine or grape juice at the Lord's Supper means that you are fellowshiping with the one represented by the Lord's Supper, then eating food offered to idols in a celebration dedicated to that god, means you are fellowshiping with that god.

Paul will clarify in the next passage that if you eat meat sold in the market but you are not celebrating in some festival or service dedicated to some god, but eating in your home or someone else's home, then it doesn't matter if that meat might have been part of a temple ceremony. That meat or food itself does not worship or acknowledge any god, so you can eat it. The problem is when you eat it in the context of a ceremony honoring a god, then your eating means something more than just eating.

[Slide 4] Someone who is theologically astute might say, "Well, there is only one God. All these other gods don't exist anyway. They are imaginary so therefore I should be able to eat food offered to them even in a temple festival, because how can I really commit idolatry if no god exists? There may be no gods in idolatry, but you still fellowship with demons because demons are behind all false religions. Let's read verses 19-22.

It is true that there are no gods. There is no Allah. There is no Krishna. There is no Gonesh. There is no Shiva. There is no Baal. There is no Zeus or Apollos. There are no gods, but there are demons masquerading as gods. There is a supernatural reality behind false gods and it is demons, deceiving people and leading them away from the true God.

[Slide 5] No one worships at a completely dry hole. None of these religions could continue to exist if their worshippers did not occasionally get some kind of evidence of their reality whether that is an answered prayer or a vision, or a mystical experience, or whatever. People would not stay entrapped in false religions for generations without some kind of miraculous confirmation going on now and then. False prophets, false healings, demonically produced miracles, false tongues and interpretations, and false teachers can keep these false religions going, along with the deceiving influence put forth by the Devil and his demons.

In verse 21 Paul says that you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot fellowship with both God and demons. The cup of demons is probably a reference to the custom in the religious feasts of that day to drink cups of wine in honor of the gods. The first cup was drunk to Jupiter or Zeus, the second cup to Jupiter and the Nymphs, and the third cup to Jupiter Soter or Jupiter Savior. God demands total loyalty. You can't mix worship of God with worship of other gods. As soon as you worship other gods you are no longer in fellowship with God.

If you associate with other gods, you will provoke the one true God to jealousy which is not a wise thing to do because we are not stronger than he is. As Christians we are the bride of Christ. The Lord becomes rightfully concerned and jealous when we begin to cast our eyes at some other god.

[Slide 6] The people among whom Paul ministered were all supernaturalists. They all believed in gods of some sort. Idolatry was pretty traditional with statues and temples erected to honor various gods. We live in a century dominated by materialism and naturalism with a much higher percentage of atheists, agnostics, and even religious people who functionally live more like atheists than supernaturalists. As a consequence, idolatry takes on more modern forms. If

we define an idol as that which most commands our attention, our affections, our time and our commitments instead of God, then we can find idolatry in many places.

I am going to read this extensive quote from Pastor and author Tim Keller who identifies some of the different idols we might have. He writes, "Read Keller quote."

An idol can be your spouse, your children, your career, your hobby, money, approval from others, fame, or prestige. Musicians, singers, athletes, politicians, actors or actresses can be your idol. Your cell phone could be your idol. The Los Angeles Times ran the following article: Read. If your cell phone is the most important thing in your life, then it probably is your god.

Social Media could be your idol. Read article on social media. Your spouse could be your idol. Read Christopher West's article. Pastor Justin Buzzard suggests that your greatest fear could point to your idol. He writes, Read article. Andy Crouch, in his book *Playing God* claims that idolatry cost Steve Jobs his life. Read article.

[Slide 7] What is or what are your idols? What crowds out God in your life? On what do you depend rather than on God? You can think of your life as a lifelong process of shedding idols until you get to the point that God truly is your God and not someone or something else. Ray Pritchard was our pastor while in Seminary. He wrote this in his book, *Man of Honor*. Read card.

[slide 8] Paul said to flee idolatry in verse 14 right after he said that no temptation has overtaken you such as is common to man and God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape. Therefore, my beloved flee idolatry. You get the impression that when Paul wrote about temptation being common to all of us, he was primarily thinking about idolatry. You can flee idolatry, because God always provides a way of escape. I want to close in prayer and I want to give you the opportunity to ask God to search your heart and reveal any idols lurking there. Let's have a minute or two of silence and then I will close us in prayer.