

1 Corinthians 10:1-14 Our Spiritual Rock Falls Ch. AM 4/28/2024

Is your heart prone to wander?

The controversy in Corinth - about which Paul wrote 3 chapters in order to address, chapters 8, 9, and 10, was the question about whether or not it was proper for Christians to eat food that had been previously offered to idols.

Nowadays the food in our church crockpots was not previously offered to idols – so the ancient controversy seems irrelevant and petty, until we realized that the controversy really has to do with idolatry. Is idolatry relevant to us? Again I ask - is your heart prone to wander?

In these chapters, Paul showed persuasively that it was not just the Christians in the ancient city of Corinth who were influenced by idolatry. Every human being deals with idolatry. To show this, we remember that Paul wrote another letter addressed to believers over in another city, about the problem of idolatry. Specifically, Paul wrote in Romans chapter 1, verse 25 that not just the Romans, and not just the Corinthians, but we all have “...*exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator...*”

Paul knew that our Creator has given us 10 commands, and Paul knew that God’s command concerning idolatry topped the top 10 list. It was presented first because it was of first importance, namely, “...*You shall have no other gods besides Me.*” (Exodus 20:3, The First Commandment)

Avoiding idolatry has always been a main concern for believers, whether ancient Israelites, ancient Romans, ancient Corinthians, or modern Americans.

Idolatry was an essential matter in the teachings of Jesus, who put it compellingly in Matthew 6:33, “*Seek first the kingdom of God...*” That word kingdom is not a geographic place, but rather the rule or reign of God, so that Jesus said, “Seek first the reigning of God.”

The apostles of Jesus naturally gave preeminent attention to the vital issue of idolatry in their teachings. For example, the apostle John, in order to leave a lasting impression on his readers, ended his letter of 1 John by writing these words, “*keep yourselves from idols.*” Earlier, in the heart of his letter, the apostle John had fully explained idolatry with a memorable statement found in 1 John 2:15-17, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*” John wrote there about the danger of idolatry!

Pastor John Calvin was one of the main influencers of the 16th-century religious, political, intellectual and cultural change that we call The Reformation. Calvin encapsulated into a short phrase, the ongoing danger of idolatry when Calvin wrote, “the human heart is a perpetual idol factory.” (Inst. 1.11.18)

We are here today ostensibly because we worship Christ, and we each would like to think that we worship Christ with unwavering commitment. It seems that we keep on needing to be surprised again, and even painfully reminded again of the darker truth that within each one of us is a heart that is always looking around for other gods to worship, like having a spiritual wandering eye.

Is your heart prone to wander? Yes. Christ came to help us with our idolatry problem. Paul's point is this: **Only Christ gives us spiritual life, and all idols lead to death.**

1. Our forefathers show the history of Christ vs. idolatry. (v.1-6)

In the first six verses, Paul presented the story of humanity as the story of idolatry.

Paul skillfully wrote simultaneously about two groups of people: Israel and Corinth. Why? Because they both had a similar history, a history of idolatry!

Verses 1-2 – Paul reminded the Corinthians how the Israelites were delivered by God. The Israelites were delivered from Egypt through the cloud, passing through the sea, as it were, being baptized into Moses. That bears similarity to how the Corinthians had been delivered from sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and how the Corinthians were baptized into Jesus as a symbol of their deliverance. Both Israel and Corinth had a story of baptism.

In verses 3-4, both Israel and Corinth had a story of symbolic meal - something to eat and drink, with the spiritual meaning that they were sustained by God. Israel was sustained by God when they ate the spiritual food of manna and drank the spiritual drink of water from the Rock, and the Rock was Christ. Corinth was sustained by God when they ate spiritual food and drank the spiritual drink of the Lord's Supper, by which they were feeding on Christ the Rock. Both Israel and Corinth were spiritually eating Christ the bread of life and spiritually drinking Christ who gave His life to give them life, and were sustained by God.

A glorious history, and a masterful comparison. Most encouraging!

Until Paul got to verse 5. "*Nevertheless...*" Both Israel and Corinth had a flaw in their story. The flaw was that - IN SPITE OF BEING DELIVERED BY GOD AND SUSTAINED BY GOD - they were still experiencing spiritual defeat, being overthrown, and feeling God's displeasure. How? They were still being drawn away from God to follow other gods. The story of Corinth was in spite of being given baptism and The Lord's Supper - both pointing them to the love of Christ on the cross, they were still being drawn away from Christ to follow other gods!

In verse 6, Paul drove this point home, by writing that the central reason that Israel's wilderness events took place. Note, not just the central reason Paul was bringing up the story. No, the central reason the events took place 1500 years earlier, the central reason that God made sure that Moses wrote them down, and

therefore the reason Paul was bringing it up, was as examples for the believers in Corinth! Examples so that they learn what? So that Corinth might learn to NOT “*desire evil, as [Israel] did.*” Desiring evil is another phrase for turning away from God and following a false god! Desiring evil is idolatry!

2. Our faithful Lord helps us to avoid idolatry’s traps. (v.7-12)

Corinth had a faithful life-leader in our Lord Jesus Christ. Because our faithful Lord knew that idolatry was deadly for them, He directed Paul’s writing of verse 7.

Verse 7 very clearly showed Israel as a people who claimed to be followers of God, while living in a manner contrary to their confessed belief. What did Paul call them? Tainted? Compromised? Backsliders? Two-minded? Confused? Half-hearted? Wavering? Lukewarm? Neutral? Undecided? No. Paul called them idolaters! Idolaters are people who have fully left God, and are fully serving another god instead. And drawing on the Israel story events as examples, what was it that Paul was so passionately asking Corinth NOT to be? Idolaters!

Idolatry is subtle. Let’s read afresh the verse that sounds so church-like sounds so Old-Testament like, sounds so Sunday-School like, that we miss it until it strikes us with a powerful relevancy to you and to me. Listen to verse 7, “*Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people say down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’*” Here Paul reminded Corinth about the famous Old Testament story of Israel, the classic Sunday School story about the golden calf incident. How was that relevant to Corinth? Here is how it was relevant. While Moses was meeting with God, the people were melting down all of their gold in order to build an idol. But Paul would not let Corinth adopt the idea that idolatry only happens when you are dumb enough to build ourselves an honest-to-goodness actual golden statue and go ahead and bow down to it together. No! We learn how much more subtle is the temptation of idolatry from verse 7, if we have ears to hear God in His Word here. Please notice that this is 1 Corinthians 10:7 quoting Exodus 32:6, and so it is stacked up as both the prophet Moses and the Apostle Paul, both carried along by the Spirit of God to give us a very important statement about the subtlety of the danger of idolatry. Ready? “*The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.*” What does that mean? It means that idolatry is to be found in everyday regular things that we all do. Idolatry is found in eating. Now I won’t ask for a show of hands, but of there is anyone in this room who has recently engaged in eating – be careful, because there could be idolatry found in your eating practices! Idolatry is to be found in everyday stuff that we do. Idolatry can be found in our eating, and in our drinking, and when we rise up to play. Idolatry can be found in our playing! What does that mean? It means that we as people redeemed by Christ, would do well to include Christ in our whole lives – in whatever we do. It means that the sneaky danger is that we can get so busy

playing out our lives, that we forget the giver of life Himself! What is important to the lives and playing of the American culture around us? Whatever that is, we get invited to enter into it through eating, drinking, playing, and culture-making. Listen, we were designed to worship Christ like a tennis racquet is designed for hitting tennis balls. The question is not whether or not you will worship anything at all. No. You will worship something, that is known. Rather, the question is who or what will you decide to worship when you get up to play or get up to work, or get up to live out your day, live out your life? How can you know who or what you are worshipping. Simple. When you want to celebrate, to whom are you giving thanks? When things get tough, who or what do you lean on? When you get tired, what refreshes you? When you are not sure what to do, where do you go for guidance? When you are in need, who comes to rescue you? The Israelites had a God who rescued them, but then they tried to build a different god. Why? Because they wanted a god on the side – a god that they could build, and a god that they could control. They wanted to eat, drink, play, and adopt the same culture and values as the city of Corinth, which was sin city!

In verse 8, and Paul gave another example of Israel's idolatry that was still relevant in Corinth. Sexual immorality is not new. Israel had connected herself to the sensuality of the idol called Baal of Peor. Paul drew a spiritual lesson for sin city, "*We must not indulge in sexual immorality, as some of them did...*" Paul was drawing from the Old Testament story found in Numbers 25:1-3, which reported God's people intermarrying with those from another religion. People around the world do this all the time, but the Lord God calls for His people to have undivided allegiance in our homes and in our daily living. Our deepest desires show up in everyday things on this topic – with whom we spend time, whom we date and marry, our own decisions about our eyes, mind, and body and behaviors. The Holy God who designed this area of our lives showed the seriousness of this issue for spiritual life and for the vibrancy of a spiritual community when God sent a plague that would only stop with repentance and communal action. By then, 23,000 people had died in a single day. God meant business about holy living in daily behaviors in Israel and in Corinth, and that was Paul's point about idolatry!

Verse 9, "*We must not put Christ to the test...*" In Numbers, chapter 21, the people put the Lord to the test by rejecting His special bread that came down from heaven called manna. Some in Corinth were making the same mistake – being not satisfied with what God gave them. The bold in Corinth were not satisfied with bypassing meat, and eating meals of only vegetables in order to preserve unity among their brothers and sisters. Instead, the bold in Corinth wanted the meat so badly that they were okay causing their brothers to stumble. Because God destroyed people with serpents in the Old Testament incident, this warning Paul offered Corinth was helpful to stop putting Christ to the test and instead being

satisfied with what He provides.

Verse 10 – the next example of idolatry’s trap was grumbling or complaining. Grumbling against Moses was a repeated problem for the people of God, and Paul was referring to Numbers 16, where thousands died, presumably by God sending an angel to destroy. While this was another severe example of the consequences of idolatry, Paul wrote it in order to prevent Corinth from the spiral downward of idolatry, grumbling, rebellion, and death.

Verse 11 – Paul summed it up – Israel’s lessons should teach Corinth the lessons of God. Even though Corinth lived much later, after Christ was born, lived, taught, suffered, died, arose, ascended, and sent His Spirit, the ancient Israel lessons were still lessons of top importance. Since God would send His Son for us, wouldn’t God also, in His providence, have Moses write down how God dealt with the Old Testament believers in such a way that NT believers could learn God will deal with us? We who live in the age of Christ have greater grace, and therefore greater responsibility to follow God, not being drawn away to idols.

Verse 12 – Those who are over-confident and think that they are standing firm without danger, should be careful not to fall. Don’t assume you are immune from idolatry. Don’t play with fire. Don’t assume that you are a super-Christian. Be aware that the allure of idols applies to your own heart. You could fall.

Then how can any of us escape idols? That brings us to verses 13-14.

3. We must flee idolatry, through the provided way of escape. (v.13-14)

Verse 13 is well-known, and is often taken out of its context. From verse 7 and verse 14, we see the context is idolatry.

So, in verse 13 – falling into temptation is entering idolatry at the heart level. You are trying to have both Christ, and the stuff of the world. When you are tempted to do BOTH, you end up trapped between two different versions of yourself. The temptation is not this: choosing between 2 gods, and choosing the wrong one. Instead, the temptation is to believe that you can simultaneously serve both Christ and be in the world’s culture at the same time. The alluring temptation reveals that idolatry is spiritual adultery!

A man still loves his wife, but there is something over here that he wants.

A believer still loves Christ, but there is something over here that he wants.

The man actually thinks he loves his wife, but his actions say otherwise.

A believer actually thinks that he loves Christ, but his actions say otherwise.

We are tempted to sin in what is called idolatry, because idolatry is ordinary, insidious, subtle, mundane, almost normal.

SI - Idolatry is having two screens at home: livestreaming church on one screen, and something else on another screen.

Consider why we are tempted with idolatry. Because it is fellowshipping, sharing in, participating and joining with something else, RIGHT ALONGSIDE

OF our relationship with Christ, and we don't see the inconsistency and unfaithfulness of that. THAT is the moment of temptation, in the context of trying to have Christ and an idol at the same time!

Temptation to idolatry is NOT developing a deep dislike of Christ.

Temptation is the belief that you can still faithfully serve Christ, while also adding into your life the full enjoyment of all of the world's fun stuff. Temptation is accepting the duplicity of a double-mind. Temptation is toying with the potential of a divided heart as acceptable.

Pastor Paul Washer said, "If you want to follow Jesus because He will give you a better life, that's IDOLATRY. Follow Christ for the sake of Christ. He is WORTHY!"

Presbyterian Pastor Tim Keller wrote, "What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give...An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure. There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best word is worship."

Temptation is when you consider letting anything compete with the special relationship that you have between your soul and your Savior. Christ asks to maintain a special, exclusive, faithful and monogamous spiritual relationship with you. Verse 13, Christ is faithful to you. Therefore verse 14, flee from idolatry.

Christ understands the pull of culture because Christ came from heaven to earth and experienced it himself. Christ faced every temptation that we face, and yet He never fell into idol worship. Christ never had one moment of undivided loyalty to God the Father. Christ then died and rose again to cleanse us of our idolatry, and to give us eyes to see clearly in our many moments of temptation every day.

Christ provided a way for us as perpetually idolatrous people, to stay true to Him. The way is Christ perpetually feeding us using ordinary things this letter to Corinth, and like the water of baptism and the bread and the cup symbolizing our deliverance from idols. Christ meets us at the level of desire. Christ won't let us be tempted beyond our ability.

Conclusion: Whenever we chase idols, our Spiritual Rock chases us.

We are idolaters. We keep chasing idols. We cannot save ourselves from that. Your heart is prone to wander. Remember that. But that is only part of what we are to remember from this study. Also remember that Jesus chases after you.

We place our hope and trust NOT in our better maintaining our own commitment to Christ, but rather in Christ's unwavering commitment to us.

Listen to verse 4 again, how the people of Israel, "...*drank from the spiritual*

Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

Notice. Who followed whom?

Christ is the Rock who first followed Israel, then Israel followed Christ.

Christ is the Rock who first came to Corinth, then Corinth came to Christ.

Jesus is the Rock who first accompanied us, and now we accompany Him.

Jesus is the Rock who gave us to drink of His refreshing grace, to quench our spiritual thirst, rather than letting us keep drinking the poison of idols.

Whenever we rebel, Christ follows up on us, confronts us, brings us back.

Whenever we are unfaithful to Christ, Christ remains faithful to us.

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:13, *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”*

Every day God extends His provisions for His people in the gospel.

In our routine of our daily lives, as we make our way through the menagerie of idols calling out to our desires, and we get drawn in to seek a split screen of both Christ and the world, Jesus graciously convicts us and once again satisfies us with the cup of His grace and the bread of His accepting love.

Flee idolatry, and run back to the familiar and faithful arms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you ever find yourself very embarrassed that you have been chasing idols and you even begin to wonder whether Jesus will take you back after you have become so disloyal to Him, be encouraged by His own words in John 6:37, Jesus said, *“...Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.”*