

1 Cor. 10:1-14 • Getting Rid of the Last Vestiges of Idolatry

Introduction

Paul is going to use a startling example to teach the meaning of “idolatry”: The nation of Israel and its calling by God through Moses. The point harkens back to Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 that a relationship with the One True God subsists in love, not knowledge or ritual.

“Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.” – 1 Corinthians 8:1-3

Like the false religions of their day, the Israelites took the holy things entrusted to them by God and treated them merely as rituals and rules just like the worship of any other idol. The question for us is whether we’re doing the very same thing with the Gospel and gifts provided to us. It’s about the quality of our relationship with Christ, not the service in and of itself.

¹For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” ⁸Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

[Read v.1-6]

Q: Four things are listed here that are common between both the nation Israel under Moses and the church under Christ. What are they?

- **Both** had a baptism
- **Both** had spiritual food (Manna, then Christ’s body)
- **Both** had spiritual drink (Water, then Christ’s blood)
- **Both** were led by God (the cloud, then the Spirit)

Q: Did having these things guarantee Israel’s relationship with God?

A: Not according to v.5, “...with most of them God was not well-pleased...”

Q: What did those laid low in the wilderness fail to achieve? How might this apply to us?

A: Their poor spirituality prevented them from taking possession of the Promised Land. For us it’s the application of not allowing God’s salvation to actually change us into His likeness.

Q: According to v.6, what is the overall application for each of us today?

A: That we learn from their example; that we recognize the measure of our relationship with Christ is the depth of our craving for Him vs. the world.

[Read v. 7-11]

Q: According to v.7, what exactly is a person who, as described in v.1-6, craves evil things over God’s things?

A: Idolater.

Q: What does it mean in the latter half of v.7 that, “...the people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play”?

A: Their priority was to pleasure themselves, whether through food or drink or sexual immorality.

Q: In v.8-10 we have a specific list that identifies the characteristics of an idolater. What are they?

- v.8 – An idolater acts immorally. God’s commandments concerning relationships are disregarded in favor of personal pleasure.
- v.9 – An idolater tries the Lord. Not fully trusting the Lord’s goals, an

idolater seeks his/her own direction/destination.

- v10 – An idolater grumbles. God’s ways and path are followed half-heartedly, always perceiving something else as being “better”.

Q: What part of us do each of these 3 things represent?

A: 1 Timothy 1:5, “*The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart [does not act immorally], a good conscience [does not grumble], and a sincere faith [does not try the Lord].*” They’re all behavioral changes that either mold us into the image of God or the world.

Q: So what identifies someone as being an idolater?

- Lack of obedience
- Lack of trust
- Lack of faith

¹²Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

[Read v.12]

Q: Of what is Paul trying to warn?

A: As in the example of Israel, having the “things” of baptism, spiritual food, spiritual drink, and spiritual leading are not enough to achieve a right relationship with Christ. We need to examine whether they are supported by our heart, conscience and faith.

¹³No temptation has overtaken you but 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 the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. ¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

[Read v.13-14]

Q: How does idolatry start? Where does it begin?

A: Temptation. (v.13)

Q: What kind of temptation? Extraordinary, never-before-seen, immeasurable-in-strength temptation that no one could possibly ever resist?

A: “...such as is common to man...” (v.13) All the things mentioned above in Israel’s example to us are all common occurrences that boil down to a choice of pleasing our self instead of pleasing God.

Q: But aren’t these things actually “tests” sent by God to measure our spirituality?

A: No. Tests generally have to do with faith. Temptation – which is something God never engages in – has to do with our human flesh. God realizes that we do not have unlimited resistance to temptation and therefore provides an avenue of escape.

Q: So how do we endure temptation?

A: Run away from it. Don’t allow constant contact.

Summary

Q: Is knowledge enough to overcome sin?

A: Since I **KNOW** that pornography, for example, is a sin, I should be able to walk into any adult bookstore or surf any web site and not have a problem, right? That's Paul's point of application for us; we need to **AVOID** – even **FLEE** – those people, places and things that are obviously associated with temptation.

- About which of God's commandments do we grumble?
- Are we completely in submission to His path rather than our own?
- Which areas of sexual sin do we struggle with?
- Does your Christianity have any "exceptions"?

To each of these questions ask,

- Where does the influence come from?
- What person, place or thing is the source?
- How will I 'flee' from it?