

1 Corinthians Series #25 "Idols" - 1 Cor. 10:14-22

I. INTRODUCTION

A. RR

B. The Danger of Idolatry

1. John wrote this to believers
 - a. though they lived in a time when people believed in many gods and worshipped idols
 - b. as Christians, they knew there was only 1 God
 - c. they knew that idols were fakes and powerless
2. So why this warning to avoid idols?
3. Because idolatry is a very real threat for Christians!
4. That is what Paul writes about in our passage today in 1 Cor.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 14-15

14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1. As always, we have a two-fold task set before us today
 - a. to understand what these things originally meant
 - b. to see how it applies to our lives today
2. First of all; Notice who this is written to . . .
 - a. "My beloved . . . "
 - b. written to believers
 - c. people dear to Paul
 - he had led them to the faith
 - deeply concerned about their growth in Christ
3. To them he says - Flee from idolatry
 - a. that word "flee" is a good translation
 - b. gives the idea of making quick and definite movement away from something because it presents real danger
 - c. if standing on a railroad track, and you see a train coming at you — you don't slowly meander out of the way: you jump — NOW!
 - d. why? Because you know that in a contest between a train and a human body, the train is going to win every time!
 - e. I had a friend who saw a guy hit by a train; he described it to me

- trust me — it wasn't pretty
- 4. Paul says, "Flee from idolatry"
 - a. get out of it's way
 - b. don't let it impact you
 - c. don't meander slowly out of its way
 - d. don't play chicken with it
 - e. FLEE from it.
 - f. because just as a train will ruin your day if it hits you
 - g. so idolatry will mangle your spiritual life in untold ways
 - h. in a moment we'll see just what idolatry is and why it is so dangerous
- 5. Paul knows that many of his readers in Corinth will read these words and think,
 - a. "Hey, we're Christians now and don't believe in idols. So we don't have to pay this command any attention."
 - b. that's why in v. 15 he writes . . .

15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.

- 6. Paul subtly calls them to be wise and discerning
- 7. No one wants to think they are a fool, so Paul gains their attention by saying he is speaking to sensible people
 - a. "Oh, that's me," they would say.
 - b. he tells them to judge what he is saying about idolatry
 - c. he doesn't mean to judge what he is saying to see if it is true or not
 - he means that they must exercise some discernment
 - they must not just cast off this command as being to others but not them
 - THEY must be careful to see if they have fallen into idolatry.
- 8. If we were to stop here, it might be difficult for us to know why Paul wrote this warning against idolatry.
 - a. but the next few verses gives us a clue as to why he wrote it
 - b. it turns out that there were many in Corinth who were practicing the worship of idols under the guise of being free in Christ.

B. Vs. 16-21

16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

17 For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

18 Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?

19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?

20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.

1. Corinth filled with idols
 - a. each idol rep. a deity, a god
 - god of rain
 - of sun
 - of harvest
 - of love & sex
 - of health & healing
 - you name it, they had a god for it and an idol to it
 - b. most of these idols were housed in temples
 - c. people gained the favor of these gods by worshipping them
 - offer sacrifices
 - feast days; pagan parties
 - sit at tables & eat and play
2. When a Corinthian became a Christian, it meant forsaking these idols with their temples and feasts
3. This meant the believers were removed from a large part of Corinthian social life & entertainment.
 - a. just as today, becoming a Christian means forsaking the world and being somewhat alienated from the empty pursuits of modern social life
 - like drunkenness
 - and sexual immorality
 - b. the problem was that there were some Christians in Corinth who had gone back to the temples and the pagan feasts.
 - they justified what they did
 - by saying that there really is only 1 God so the idols and their temples were nothing
 - and if they were nothing, then it meant nothing to go there and enjoy the festivities.

- c. they were using their freedom in Christ as an excuse for compromising with the world
- 4. Paul warns them strongly
 - a. in v. 19 he agrees with them that an idol is nothing more than a hunk of stone or wood.
 - b. but in v. 20 he says that evil spirits take advantage of idols and lead people into horrible deception.
- 5. Demons are real
 - a. their whole goal is to lead people astray and away from God
 - b. idolatry is one of the ways they do this
 - c. while an idol is nothing in and of itself; demons take advantage of idols to turn people away from God and in to error
- 6. There are places in the world today where people worship idols
 - a. India, Hindus
 - b. Burma & Thailand - Buddha
 - c. there are supernatural things that occur surrounding the worship of these idols
 - not because some god is giving evidence of his presence
 - but because demonic spirits are seeking to deceive people and lead them into false religion
- 7. History tells us that Patrick encountered the power of the demonic realm in great force when he came to Ireland
 - a. at that time, the Druids controlled Ireland
 - b. when Patrick came with the gospel, they opposed him with their occultic practices and many strange and bizarre things happened.
 - c. Patrick, rather than running away in fear, realized the source of their power was demonic and knew that Christ had defeated the powers of darkness at Calvary
 - d. so he challenged the Druid high priests to a duel
 - e. they tried their incantations and chants but they all back-fired.
 - f. then Patrick prayed and asked God to reveal Himself and his power to the Irish people.
 - many people were healed
 - and numerous miracles were performed
 - g. the result: many of the Druids became believers as well as hundreds of the Irish

8. The point is this: Yes an idol is nothing, but demons use idols and idolatry as a way to lead people away from the truth
 - a. this is why any contact with idols is to be shunned by the child of God
 - b. and by contact I am not just speaking of the touch of the hand to a statue
 - it includes the touch of the mind upon an idea
 - or the touch of the imagination upon a mental image
 - or even the touch of our affections upon an object
9. In Corinth, the Christians had been set free from spiritual bondage to demonic spirits
 - a. rather than sitting at the table of some idol and feasting with pagan friends
 - b. they had been given the honor of sitting with their brothers and sisters in Christ at the Lord's table.
 - c. and as Paul says in vs. 16 & 17, they drank of the cup of blessing symbolizing Christ's blood shed for their sins
 - d. they ate of the bread which pictured His body broken that they might be made whole
 - e. and as they sat at that table and ate and drank, the Lord communed with them in Spirit
 - f. they became one with Him and with one another through the sharing of that meal
10. But some of the Corinthians were rising from that table and going to the temple of an idol and sitting down there to feast as well
11. Paul says, "This cannot be!"

21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

12. Jesus said, "You cannot serve two masters; for you will love one but hate the other."
13. Paul says the same thing here
14. There can only be ONE God in our lives
 - a. no matter how much people might protest,
 - b. it is impossible for anyone to divide his or her loyalties between two gods
 - c. the reason why is because the true God demands complete and total loyalty from us
 - He abides no competition for our affection and

devotion

- He will not take what He can get from us and be content with that
 - He doesn't have to because quite frankly, He doesn't need to
 - God is complete in Himself
 - there is nothing He needs that we can give Him
 - why then is He so demanding of our total loyalty and devotion?
 - because HE IS GOD and because THAT is what we were created for
 - God demands our undivided love and affection because in His infinite love for us He knows that that is the only way life works for us.
 - if we give our loyalty and love to someone or something else, life breaks down and starts to die.
15. That is why Paul says in v. 22 . . .

22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

16. He draws from a well known passage of the OT where God says to Israel, "I am the LORD and my name is JEALOUS!"^[1]
17. In Exo. 20, the 2nd Commandment, God says, "**You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . .**"
18. The jealousy of God is not the petty selfishness of man
- a. God's jealousy is utterly holy and right
 - b. it is the desire of God that we might have the best of all things
 - c. He is not jealous of us but for us.
 - d. He knows that anything that competes with Him for our affection is not good and ultimately harmful
19. And God is every bit as jealous today as He was the day His voice echoed forth from the top of Mt. Sinai when Israel first heard the 10 Commandments.
20. That's right: God is jealous FOR YOU!!!
21. Therefore, let us not provoke Him TO jealousy by

allowing our affections to be captured by anyone or anything else.

D. The Danger of Idolatry

1. We might think that we are safe from this problem
 - a. because we don't bow down to a statue
 - b. or because we don't have an image of Mary and Joseph on the dashboard of our pick up
2. In reality, the danger of idolatry is even more serious for us because the idols of today are more subtle - less obvious
3. Anything that competes with God for the place of first affection and loyalty is an idol
 - a. an object, an idea, a philosophy, an occupation, hobby, entertainment, sport, person, possession
 - b. if it becomes the focal point of our lives and decisions, it is an idol
4. Now again, most people will hear that and say, "Phew, I'm still safe."
 - a. but wait
 - b. as Paul said in v. 15
 - be sensible and wise
 - exercise some concentrated discernment
 - c. the threat of idolatry is serious and requires close inspection of our affections
5. Ask yourself these questions:
 - 1) In the last month, what has been the foremost thought on my mind?
 -) What is most imp. to us will dominate our thinking.
 - 2) When I have time to myself that is not consumed with the tasks of daily living, what do I spend it doing?
 -) How we spend our free time does give a clue as to what we consider imp. and give most value to.
 - 3) What do you find yourself most often sacrificing for? In other words, what is it that seems to keep surfacing as the thing you really care about and so re-order all other priorities to accomplish?
 -) For teenage boys, this is often a car.
 -) For teenage girls, it is often a teenage boy.
 -) For adult men it is often their career or getting ahead in the world.
 -) For adult women, it is often their house or

their family.

6. These things can all be idols from which we must flee
7. And though they may not be today — we must ever stay on guard that our chief affection and loyalty is given to none but God

III. CONCLUSION

A. Hugh Chisholm

1. And earlier Prince Charles of England once had to flee for his life
2. He found refuge with 8 outlaws who harbored him
3. There was a reward of about \$60,000 for his capture and though the men didn't have a penny to their names, they refused to turn him in
4. Charles spent several weeks with them but finally when it was safe to return to court, he shook their hands and gave them his deepest thanks
5. One of the robbers was named Hugh Chisholm
6. Ever after, when he shook a man's hand, he always shook with his right hand.
7. His reason was this: He said, "I will never again give to man the hand I have given to my Prince."

B. Today

1. As it was true in Corinth, so it is true today
2. We who have handled the sacred things of Christ cannot soil our hands with vain and unworthy things
3. We who are privileged to commune with Christ must not fellowship with idols
4. Christian — Guard your affections!

^[1]Exo. 34:14