

1 Corinthians 10 (Part 3): 14-22 •

Removing Idols

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1 Corinthians chapter 10. I've taught through 1 Corinthians several times. This is our third time teaching through it on a Sunday morning, and I've probably taught through it, oh, I don't know, several times other than that with youth group, and college age groups, and various other small Bible studies and stuff.

It's really funny and crazy how the more you go through the Scripture, the more you get out of it. I'm getting more out of this than I ever have before. And I mean, I'm finding things in here. I'm finding meanings and nuances of the passage that, I never saw before, and so I hope the same is true for you.

We're in the 10th chapter. We're picking it up in verse 14, and I'm going to read through verse 22. All right. *“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?” (ESV)

Stop there, please. This is a challenging passage. Let's pray.

Father God, give us understanding, insight, direct our hearts, Lord God, according to Your Word. And may we be open to all that You want to say to us today through this passage. We ask it, Lord, in Jesus name, amen.

I remember one of the first times I ever read through this passage, I was confused because it seemed like a reversal of what Paul had said earlier, a couple chapters ago, when he said, it was okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

Because it's like, an idol is nothing at all, so don't worry about it. It's just, meat is meat, doesn't affect the meat, won't affect you, so just chill.

But you'll remember Paul said, there are people in the body who still think it's wrong. Those of you who know that it's okay, act out of love to those people who still think it's wrong. And if you have to abstain from eating meat, then abstain from eating meat. And of course, Paul brought out the principle there that, while knowledge is great, love is better. That's all great, that's all good.

But I remember reading through this passage and thinking, well now, is he reversing himself here? Apparently some of the believers there in Corinth, who knew that it was okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols, because meat is meat and an idol is really nothing at all, assumed that this freedom that they had also extended to attending pagan feasts, or pagan festivals, where there was worship going on of those pagan deities, and of course meat that would be served at those feasts.

And they probably figured, hey, it's no big deal to eat meat sacrificed to an idol so obviously going to one of those temples, while they're doing their little mumbo jumbo worship stuff, that's obviously nothing either, so, pfft, big deal. I can go to a pagan festival, which of course would be held in a temple, in a pagan worship place. And it doesn't really matter. It's no big deal.

Well, this is where Paul draws the line and he issues, a warning here because he sees danger. The question you and I ask as we look into this passage is, what's the danger? I mean, if eating meat sacrificed to idols was okay, then why would going to a pagan temple be a problem? I mean, it's like, big deal. You already established that this pagan idol is nothing. It's just, it's either metal or wood. What exactly is the danger?

Well, do you guys remember what I talked about last week? I said that whenever you're looking at a passage of Scripture and you want to figure out what's going on or the meaning of it, you need to find the key words in the passage. Remember that?

We called it, it's part of, just one of the tools of the inductive Bible study method. We did it last week. Let's do it again. Let me put up this, I'll put it in chunks. Here's the first 3 verses.

1 Corinthians 10:14-17

*Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a **participation** in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a **participation** in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

*Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; (he says,) judge for yourselves what I say. (now you'll notice that I have highlighted these two words, and of course it's the same word that occurs twice, but this is a key word) The cup of blessing (he says) that we bless, (and by the way, that means what we give thanks for. To bless is to give thanks, he says, the cup of blessing that we give thanks for) is it not a (and here's the key word) **participation** in the blood of Christ? (he's talking about communion, when you and I take communion. When we give thanks for the cup, which is a symbolic representation of the blood of Jesus. Is that not, he says, a **participation** in the blood of Christ? He goes on to say, and then when we get to) The bread that we break, is it not a **participation** in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

Now let me put up the other verses from the rest of the section. Notice the words that we've highlighted here, and they're just variants of the first one now we have participants, and participants where he says,

1 Corinthians 10:18-22

*Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices **participants** in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be **participants** with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

*Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices (offered at the altar, they're) **participants** in the altar? (and then skip down) What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. (he says,) I do not want you to be **participants** with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. (he says,) You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. (and have it not be a problem, okay) Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

Those are key words in the passage. All right. Those help us to understand what Paul saw as the danger that the Corinthian Christians were doing or engaging in. Participate, participation, participants. Those are the key words.

Let me remind you of what the word participate means. Let me show you this.

par•tic•i•pate

verb

Definition: to take part

Synonyms: take part in, engage in, join in, get involved in, share in, play a part/role in, be a participant in, partake in, have a hand in, be associated with;

The definition means, to take part. It might otherwise be used as, to take part in, to engage in. To join in, to get involved in, to share in, to play a part or a role in, to be a participant in, to partake in or of, to have a hand in, to be associated with.

Okay, it sounds good. That makes sense. That's the way I think of the word, participate. You can see that from these key words that Paul was concerned about the believers participating in pagan feasts and festivals. And the basis of his concern is the idea that when a believer attends a pagan feast, he is participating, or joining, in the worship that is going on at that feast. Okay.

It's one thing to eat meat sacrifice to a pagan God in your home, or even in the home of somebody else. You're not involved in worship. You're just eating meat. You're having dinner.

But it's another thing altogether to waltz into their temple, where there's worship going on. People bowing down, people offering up prayers, people participating, joining in the worship practice of this pagan deity, and you're there participating. Right? That's a whole, that's a different thing together. And that's why he reminds them, let me put up this reminder from verse 20,

1 Corinthians 10:20

*...what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be **participants** with demons.*

*...what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. (he says) I do not want you to be (there's that key word) **participants** with demons.*

Now, just because pagan idols aren't real, and they're not really gods, doesn't mean that the worship that is offered to those pagan idols is not real. The worship is very real. It's not going to God. It's going to this, yeah, this inanimate object that's made of wood or metal. But the worship is real and man was created to worship. Did you know that?

You know that God created us to worship, and we're going to worship something or someone. Now these people, these pagans in Corinth were offering their worship to these pagan idols, not to God.

And Paul says very clearly in this passage, listen, they don't know it, but they're offering worship to demons. They are unwittingly worshiping demons because you see demons long for worship. It's part of Satan's m.o. He wants to be worshiped. Satan wants to be like God. He even tried to overthrow God at some point and he was expelled from heaven. And that desire for the worship of man has not abated and his demonic minions desire the same.

And when we worship something other than God, they receive it. And we're unwitting in the sense that, we're not trying to necessarily worship demons, but this is what's going on.

And Paul says, I don't want you to be, remember the key word, participants. I don't want you to participate. I don't want you to join in. I don't want you to connect with this sort of a thing.

Now here's what's interesting. The word, participants, I looked it up in the Greek. You want to check this out? This is interesting. Here's the definition, or here's... Let me pronounce the Greek word for, participants, koinonos.

Does that sound familiar to another Greek word you've ever heard of? Like maybe, koinonia? That word means, fellowship. And it's meant to describe the intimate sharing of our lives with other people, other believers, and frankly with God. You can have koinonia with people, you can have koinonia with God. It's that intimate connectedness to the body of Christ.

It's interesting that this word, participants comes from that same idea of connecting on an intimate level and Paul says, I would not have you connect on an intimate level with demons by engaging in this sort of thing. Paul is saying in essence, I don't want you to fellowship with demons.

Somebody might say, well, I'm not trying to fellowship with demons. In fact, at this point, some of you might even be thinking, Paul, I think you're picking

knits a little bit. Don't you think? I mean, it seems that you're overreacting here by saying that just because they're attending, they're in attendance at a pagan feast, or festival, that somehow they're involved in the act of fellowshiping with demons. But Paul says, this is not an odd idea. Did you notice why he made the connection with other things?

Look with me again in your Bible, beginning in verse 15. He says, *"I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say."* This has been going on for a long time.

Verse 16, he says, isn't *"The cup of blessing that we... (give thanks for) is ... (don't you consider that a) participation...?"* Now this speaks about communion. When we take communion you guys, we're not just going through the motions, we're participating.

We're participating in something that is real, and dynamic, and life changing. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross and that cup that comes across your path that you take in your hand, and you drink from, that is a participation in the understanding that Jesus shed His blood for you. And the bread, again a participation. I'm participating in the communion remembrance of the fact that Jesus bore my sin in His body on the cross. I'm participating with that, right?

There's an expression. He even talked, look in verse 18, he talked about Israel. Israel did this for a long time too. He says, *"Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?"*

In Judaism, they had a sacrifice that was referred to as, the fellowship offering. And in the fellowship offering, you would sacrifice an animal. You'd bring an animal and that animal would be slaughtered. And some of the meat from that animal would be burned up on the fire on the altar, that was God's portion. And then some of the meat would be prepared, and you would sit down right there and eat it. And it was an act of fellowshiping with God.

It was like sitting down and having lunch with God. It was an expression of intimacy. And please understand that in the Middle East, sharing a common meal was an expression of intimacy. Sharing, coming into my home, my coming into your home, eating a common meal, many times dipping out of a common bowl, that was intimacy. That was sharing. That was a close connection for people. For the Jews even to do this under the Mosaic Covenant, this spoke of intimacy, joining, participation, fellowship, all those words that, that define, being one, being connected and so forth. I mean, when we take communion, as I said, we're joining in what's going on. Have you ever stopped

to think about what the word, communion means? We say it. Let's have communion. What does it mean? Let's put it up.

com•mun•ion

noun

the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level.

The sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level.

That's a secular dictionary giving you the definition of communion. But it's pretty appropriate, isn't it? That's what communion is, sharing intimately.

So what is Paul warning the believers in Corinth? When you go into that pagan temple and they're involved in all their stuff and you're there doing it, you're sharing intimately in that process, and you're participating. And listen people, listen, listen, listen, this is the key. And when you do so, it is an act of unfaithfulness to the Lord. Okay. This is the danger, this is the warning.

This is the word that Paul is giving them. When you do this, it is an act of unfaithfulness, because you're worshiping at another altar, even though you may not be aware of it.

Do you know what unfaithfulness to the Lord is also called? We have a word for it in the Bible. Idolatry.

For you and I, don't think of idolatry as bowing down to a little graven image. Think of it as just any act of unfaithfulness to the Lord where you bow down, or worship, or become intimately connected in worship to anything other than the Lord.

Idolatry is one of those interesting words that has become redefined, if you will, by our culture. I haven't been ever invited to a pagan feast, but I've been invited to participate with what pagans do today. Who are pagans? People who worship other gods, who have other gods. And again, I'm not talking about graven images. I'm talking about things they live for. Things they live for. That's your god. Whatever you live for, that's your god.

Let me show you, I want to show you 3 passages here in the scripture that might help bring a... put a little bit more of an emphasis on what exactly we're talking

about here. Okay. The first one is from Colossians chapter 3. Look at this. Paul writes and says,

Colossians 3:5 (ESV)

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: (such as) sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

These are the idols that we once worshipped as pagans. You say, well, I was never a pagan. Yes, you were. We all were. We were born pagans. We were born, like I said, you were created by God to worship and you will worship.

You can say, I'm not going to worship anything or anyone. I defy you to live your life without worshipping, without getting up and living for something, without devoting your life to something. You have to devote your life to something, even if it's you. Right.

We are created to worship and you will worship. Paul talks about some of the things we used to worship that now he calls us,

Colossians 3:5 (ESV)

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Put to death (right?) therefore what is (he says, those things which are) earthly in you: (and then he cites them there) sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

It's idolatry to worship those things because they're not the true worship, the worship of God. I love what Peter says. Look at Peter. And I'm going to quote this out of the older NIV, because I like it better.

1 Peter 4:3 (NIV1984)

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

For you have spent enough time (Peter says) in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, (which is living after pleasure, it's just

pleasure seekers, that's debauchery. Any pleasure sense sort of a thing. He says,) *lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.*

He says, you know what, you've lived, enough of your life doing that and you know and all of us are like yeah, amen. I did that way too long. I lived after my passions, my desires, my lusts, I've done that for far too long. And so Paul says, or Peter rather says, you've spent enough time doing that, right? Yeah, right. All right.

Now, we're going to live for the Lord now from here on out. We're going to live for Jesus. We're going to live to please Him, not us, not self. See, it's the difference between pleasing self and pleasing God. So what is idolatry? Living for, and serving, and running after anything other than God?

And then I want to show you a passage that we may not always quote in the way that I'm going to do it here, but Paul writes to the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians,

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (ESV)

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord (or agreement) has Christ with Belial? (a variant of Satan) Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

Great verse, great passage, leave it up just for a second. We usually quote this about marriage, don't we? When we're talking about people marrying, a believer marrying an unbeliever, we quote, "*don't be unequally yoked.*" Well, it applies to marriage. It applies to any sort of a thing that goes along those lines.

But the words, unequally yoked is one word in Greek. It's just one single word in Greek and it means, to have a partnership, or an association that is contradictory, or conflicting. Okay. A partnership that is conflicting or contradictory.

He's saying, don't have partnerships that are contradictory. Don't have partnerships that are conflicting. What partnerships is he talking about? Anything! Not just marriage, anything!

Notice some of the same key words that we saw in 1 Corinthians appear here. We'll highlight them.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (ESV)

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what **partnership** has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what **fellowship** has light with darkness? What **accord** has Christ with Belial? Or **what portion does a believer share** with an unbeliever? What **agreement** has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."*

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what **partnership** has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what **fellowship** (Koinonia) has light with darkness? What **accord** (and that word accord, again, means an agreement right? What agreement) has Christ with Belial? Or **what portion does a believer share** (right? That's that same idea) with an unbeliever? (and then) What **agreement** has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."*

Do you see what Paul is saying here? It's completely out of place for those of us who have been called to worship the eternal God, to be involved in the practices that instead honor and worship other gods.

And I'm not talking about little idols or even things that you could go into a temple, or a church, or something like that to worship. I'm talking about worshipping the things that people worship.

Here's the question that you and I need to ask as it relates to this passage and applying it to our lives. Since you and I are believers who have partnered with the Lord, and notice that word, partnered, we're connected, right? We're connected by the Spirit.

Since we've partnered with the Lord, what other partnerships have we embraced with the people in the goals of this world that might be considered idolatry? That's the question that I want to encourage us all to ask this morning. Aren't you glad you came?

What partnerships have I embraced in my mind, in my heart, that are actually standing in opposition to the worship of the one true God. That take my attention, that take my devotion, that take my love away from God. And it's not..., if you're like, ah!, I can't think of anything.

Just look around at the world that you and I live in. And just ask yourself the question, what motivates these people? The people living in this world who are outside of Christ, what motivates them? What gets them up in the morning? What drives them? What drives them on? What are the things that draw them to into the world? What goals do they have in life? What loves do they possess that move them, and motivate them, and push them onward.

And then ask yourself this follow-up question, how much of what they love, how much of what they live for, have I opened my heart to, and have I begun to live for in that sense? Okay. How much of what the world lives for? Have I embraced and desired for myself?