

**08/03/2025 Who Do You Worship?
1 Corinthians 10:14-22**

Welcome...

Corinth was a city that was overrun by idolatry. As you first approached the city, the first thing that you would see would be the Acrocorinth, a great fortress with huge limestone walls that was built hundreds of feet above the city of Corinth. At the peak of the Acrocorinth was a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and erotica. Upon entering the city, you would find temples and idols of every kind. At the edge of the city marketplace stood a temple to Apollo, the pillars of which still stand to this day.

It was into this culture that Christianity had come. People had been called out of their former life of idolatry to come and to serve the living God. The only problem was that they still lived in Corinth.

A number of years ago, I met a young believer who was attending a church belonging to a denomination that taught salvation is not by faith alone but that certain rituals are necessary for a person to undergo in order to be saved. When I talked to this believer about that church and the heresy being taught, he said, "I know that what they teach is wrong, but they are such nice people."

There were those within the Corinthian church who took a similar attitude toward the pagan temples. Some of the believers in Corinth were continuing to go to the temples for different reasons.

Some may have thought that this would be a good opportunity to be a witness for Christ from within and perhaps change the teachings of the pagan temples.

Others regarded the temples as the focus of their social lives. All of their friends came to the temple and this was the place to come and see them. Marriage ceremonies, parties and other affairs were commonly held within the temple. If you cut yourself off from the temples, you were isolating yourself most of the social life of the community.

But there were greater dangers here than appearing non-social. Eating meat purchased in the market that had once been offered to idols, as discussed back in chapter 8, was a grey area to Paul. But participating in idolatrous services is a black and white issue. At the heart of it is the problem of idolatry.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22...

In traveling to different countries on missions trips or when I was flying in Navy, I have seen many idolatrous statues that are worshipped by pagan people.

But the concept of idolatry is much broader and far more personal than statues and man-made idols. You don't have to go to foreign lands today to find false gods. America is full of them. Whatever or whoever you love more than God is your idol.

An idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled, or secure. In biblical terms, an Idol is something other than God that we set our heart on that motivates us, that masters and rules us, or it is something or someone that we trust, fear, or serve. In short, an idol is something we love and pursue more than God.

That is why I have entitled my sermon Who Do You Worship?

Because life for us is better when we're delighting in the gospel and loving Jesus Christ as our highest treasure. We are free to walk in joy when we believe Psalm 16:11, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."

Life for us is better when we're focused on God and free from idols

Main point: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 gives three truths of worship so that the jealousy of God will lead us to be zealous for God.

The Spiritual Reality of True Worship in verses 14-17

The Spiritual Reality of False Worship in verses 18-20

The Incompatibility Between Two Realities in verses 21-22

My prayer is that God will help each of us identify and destroy the idols that keep us enslaved to certain sins in our lives, sins that keep us from experiencing gospel joy and freedom. I pray that as God reveals more of the ugliness and deception of our idolatrous hearts, He will also show us more of the beauty, majesty, and power of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I. The Spiritual Reality of True Worship

Verse 14...

Paul speaks tenderly but directly. The address "my beloved" communicates his affection and love for the church.

"Therefore" draws attention to the importance of the verse and connects it to the previous paragraph, especially verse 13...

God will provide for them a way of escape from the danger of idolatry. His "way out" is this: "Flee from idolatry!" The warning is a present imperative, a word of command calling for continuous vigilance and attention. Keep fleeing. Keep running away from idolatry.

Idolatry is forbidden in the First and Second Commandments of the Ten Commandments. Earlier Steve read Exodus 20:3-5 says: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God."

Webster dictionary defines idolatry as "excessive reverence for or devotion to a person or thing." Why is idolatry forbidden in Scripture? Because it stirs up the Lord's jealousy. That's exactly where Paul takes us in his closing statement in verse 22, "Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy?"

Perhaps you have never considered jealousy as an attribute of God. We tend to think of many other characteristics of God such as God is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Or we can mention other attributes like mercy, love, omnipresence, or sovereignty. But jealousy?

Yes! The Bible refers to God as a jealous God. God even refers to Himself that way in Exodus 20:5: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God." In fact, He goes so far in Exodus 34:14 as to tell Moses, "The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

God's jealousy is not our jealousy. We typically are jealous of that which belongs to someone else.

God's jealousy is not the result of frustration, envy and spite that human jealousy so often is, but rather it is a praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious to Him, namely a love relationship with His people.

Interestingly, God's jealousy is almost always mentioned in connection with idolatry. He loves us so much, and has done so much for us, that his jealousy is stirred up whenever we give allegiance to someone or something other than Him.

Imagine you walked into a store and found your spouse affectionately hugging another person. You confront your spouse, only for him or her to say, "What's the matter? This is all about you! This person makes me feel like I used to feel with you. I could not help myself. But it was all about you!"

Under no circumstances would that be an acceptable answer. Yet this is how we treat God when we worship someone or something else in the place of God. God is a jealous God and He will not condone idolatry.

Exodus 34:14 says, "You shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." In Isaiah 48:11, God says: "My glory will I not give to another."

If God were ever to act in such a way that He did not seek His own glory, He would be saying that something more valuable than Himself exists, and that is a lie. Worse still, it is idolatrous.

God created our hearts to worship. If you are not worshipping God, you are worshipping something or someone else. Who or what do you worship? Here is how you find out what your worship: What am I willing to sin to get what I think I must have? Do I sin if I don't get?

Anger, irritability, and verbal outbursts are indicative of heart issues gone awry. When you react with anger to someone else, what is it that you are protecting? What is it that you must have?

Husbands, doesn't the Bible say that your wife should respect you? Yes. But if you go around with the old "respect me" chip on your shoulder, constantly telling yourself, "My wife must respect me," you will inevitably be hypervigilant and hypersensitive; you will be perpetually angry, policing your wife's behavior, because for you, respect is not just something that God commands your wife to do, but something that you think you must have in order to be happy.

James 4:1-3 helps us to see that our desires become demands and then we deify them into idols. When you don't get what you demand, then you cry out to God in prayer, and still don't receive because you ask amiss: "God, change her. God, you know I need respect. God, you know how important that is. God, you need to convict my wife. Go get her God."

But God won't answer a prayer like that. He tells you in Ephesians 5 "Shut up and sacrificially love her like your Savior loves you! Stop worshiping yourself and thinking you are so important." Our sin can be traced back to our idols every time. John Piper has summed it up this way: "Sin is what we do when we're not satisfied in God."

A desire for a good thing (like security, intimacy, respect, or love, or honor) becomes a desire for a bad thing when that desire becomes a ruling thing.

Some years ago I was invited to preach at The Master's Seminary chapel. I chose 1 John 5:21 to be my text. After giving us 105 verses on the vital importance of a warm, vibrant, loving fellowship with Christ our Savior, how does John, the apostle of love, wrap it all up? Of all the ways he could have ended this passionate letter, he closes it, in 1 John 5:21, with this sober warning: "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." Did John lose his train of thought? Is he changing subjects? Is it a scribal error? Not at all.

You see, we are worshipers by nature. If Jesus is not the first love of your heart, then you will love something or someone else. The last little line in John's letter leaves us asking the most basic question of all, the question that God brings to our hearts every moment of every day: Has something or someone besides Jesus Christ taken the title deed to your heart? Is there someone or something that is getting your attention, your passion, your love, your interest, your devotion, your time, your money, your worship? Does something or someone else hold your heart's trust, loyalty, and desire?

Verse 15...

In other words, Paul's words make sense if the Corinthians will reflect on them. "You judge for yourselves what I am saying." Flee from idolatry and pursue Christ. If you are not at the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people, the wrong thing will not happen. That is good common sense and a word of wisdom we should all listen to.

Idols exist in our lives because we love them and invite them in. But once idols find a home, they are unruly and resist leaving. In fact, they change from being the servants of our desires to being our masters. So don't play with idols, instead love Christ, abide in Christ, and be fruitful for Christ.

Look at what Paul says in verse 16...

There is a right place, a right time, and a right people with whom we should regularly fellowship. At the Lord's Supper we draw close to Christ in participation with our spiritual family.

Tom Schreiner comments: "At the Lord's Supper a believer's vertical relationship and communion with Christ are deepened, and the horizontal relationship between believers and Christ is affirmed and deepened."

At Communion we draw near to our God as a community, a family of faith. We seek his presence and pledge our allegiance and devotion to our Lord and at the same time we draw closer to one another.

In communion, the bread and wine (or juice) are not transubstantiated—turned into the actual body and blood of Christ—as Roman Catholics believe, or consubstantiated—having the actual body and blood existing alongside them—as many Lutherans believe. Christ cannot be sacrificed again, because Hebrews 9:28 says Christ was offered only "once to bear the sins of many,"

Nor can His body and blood actually be consumed by us, either in place of the bread and wine or along with them. Not only that, but at the first Lord's Supper, in which Christ Himself passed the cup and the bread, He had not yet been crucified; His physical blood had not yet been shed.

So, when we as believers partake of Communion in faith, the Holy Spirit uses those symbols to grow in awareness and appreciation of our Lord's great ministry and sacrifice for us. Communion is a remembrance and a 'participation' together in the 'body' and 'blood' of the Lord, that is, in the benefits of his death, in the hearts and minds of the community of faith gathered in His name.

We reflect on the love of the Lord Jesus demonstrated by his shed blood on Calvary's cross. We recall his perfect atoning sacrifice that bore the full penalty and paid the full debt of all our sins.

Notice verse 17...

The repetition of the word “one,” which occurs three times, is the key to unlocking this verse. The body of Christ is one! We are fed by one source, the Lord Jesus Christ. We share a common bond and unity as one body even though we have different cultural, economic, social, and ethnic backgrounds. In Christ we are one family, which is beautifully testified to by the meal of Communion shared at the Lord’s Table. As we come into fellowship with Christ through Communion, we come into fellowship with each other in a unique and deep way.

This the spiritual reality of true worship. But Paul now contrasts that with the:

II. The Spiritual Reality of False Worship

Verse 18...

Once again Paul appeals to the history of the Hebrews and raises a rhetorical question: “are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?” Given the context, Paul is likely referencing Israel’s sinful behavior in the wilderness where they were guilty of gross idolatry and sexual immorality.

Mark Taylor writes, “When the Israelites partook of idolatrous sacrifices, they participated in what the altar represented. Those who ate the food of the sacrifice entered into a partnership with all that the altar stood for.”

That is, they fellowshiped and dined with false gods and the demons lurking behind them. Paul raises a second and a third question in verses 19-20...

The thing sacrificed has no spiritual power or nature (8:8); nor does the physical idol to which it is sacrificed (8:4). Those things are nothing in themselves. But more importantly than they not being anything, idols represent that which is demonic.

Demons are the spiritual force behind all idolatry. Those who sacrifice to idols sacrifice to demons.

So what is the problem with believers still going to these temples in Corinth? Simply this. ‘What you sacrifice you sacrifice to demons and not to God’ (verse 20). There is no true God but One. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul declared “there are many gods yet there is but one God, the Father.” In other words, all of these Greek gods are not realities. There is no Apollo. No Zeus. No Poseidon. No Aphrodite. No Artemis. There are no gods or goddesses. They do not exist. In this you are right.

But there is not therefore nothing there. There are demons present in the temples of the gods as the priests offer sacrifices and the people eat the sacrifices. They worship demons. They open their lives to demons. So Paul says at the end of verse 20, ‘I do not want you to become shares in demons, I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.’

In Deuteronomy 32:15-18 Israel made God jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. “They sacrificed to demons, which are not God— gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear. You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.”

The fact is all false religions have a demonic origin and are sustained by demons. The temple of Artemis of the Ephesians was based on a supernatural image of Artemis which fell from heaven... a false miracle.

Islam began with supernatural visions given by an angel to Muhammad in a cave named Hira near Mecca, 610 AD; he was assaulted by a supernatural being who pressed him hard and commanded him to recite. Three years later, Muhammad identified this being as the angel Gabriel... but Satan can masquerade as an angel of light.

So also Mormonism and the angel Moroni who appeared to Joseph Smith in 1827 on the Hill Cumorah in upstate New York. Demons are god and goddess impersonators.

Paul's point here in verse 20 is that the sacrifices of pagans involve spiritual union with demons.

Born again Christians cannot be possessed by demons. However, we are not totally immune from the influence of demons. When we willingly ignore the Lord's way and flirt with the things of Satan by setting up idols of any kind, we open ourselves up to demonic influence.

In rebuking the believer Ananias in Acts 5:3, Peter said, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" Through the idol of their greed, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, left themselves open to being corrupted by the chief of demons.

F.F. Bruce writes, "Christ by His victory on the cross has disabled these demonic forces and liberated His people from their control, but His people might foolishly put themselves in situations where demonic influence was still present."

It is clear from this passage that all religion is not intrinsically good, and it is also clear why God continually and unceasingly warns believers to flee from false religion. Having affirmed that there is a spiritual reality behind true worship and also a spiritual reality behind false worship, Paul offers his conclusion:

III. The Incompatibility Between Two Realities

Verse 21...

Paul is not giving advice but stating a fact. Jesus made it clear in Matthew 6:24 that we cannot "serve two masters." It is not simply that we "should not" but that we "cannot." It is impossible to do both at the same time. They are incompatible. It must be one or the other. We will "hate the one and love the other," or we will "hold to the one and despise the other."

When we fellowship with the Lord we cannot also fellowship with demons, and vice versa. Some attempted it in Corinth, but they were not truly fellowshiping with the Lord. Their worship was hypocrisy.

In 1 Kings 18:21 Elijah asked the people, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him." Paul essentially calls the Corinthians to make the same decision. He calls on us to decide as well.

Paul concludes with a couple of rhetorical questions which bring us back to the issue of God's jealousy. Verse 22...

The words translated "jealous" and "zealous" are the same in both the Hebrew of the OT and the Greek of the NT. The person who is jealous should also be zealous for the object of His love. The jealousy of God requires us to be zealous for God.

You and I should be righteously zealous for God's name and reputation. Our lives are the only Bibles some people read. They may form their entire opinion of Christ by observing our behavior. Let us not forget that we bear the name of Christ and we must be zealous for His name.

You and I should be zealous for God's people—both those who are already His and those who will respond when they hear the gospel. When Paul was preparing to establish the church at Corinth God gave him a very encouraging word and told Paul, "I have many people in this city." Well, there weren't any Christians there yet. What God meant is that there were many chosen who were destined to become Christians, but they needed to hear the gospel. Likewise we should have a zeal for knowing Christ and making Him known? We should have a zeal for serving God's people and also serving people who don't yet know God.

You and I should be zealous for God's house, which in the New Testament is His church. Do you remember what Jesus said, "Zeal for Thy house has consumed Me." How do you rate in this area?

For many American Christians it might well be said, "Zeal for my job has consumed me," or "Zeal for sports has consumed me," or "Zeal for my family has consumed me," or "Zeal for relaxation has consumed me" rather than zeal for God's house. May we focus our zeal on that which will last for eternity.

In Revelation 3:14-16 The Lord Jesus says to the complacent church of Laodicea...

In verse 19 Jesus says therefore be zealous and repent.

Jesus works with those who are healthy, and He works with those who are sick. But Jesus does not help people who are sick but think they are healthy.

The Laodicean church claimed to have reached his lofty spiritual status on their own and that they needed nothing or no one, including the Lord.

Jesus, however, has a completely different perspective on this church and the picture is not pretty. Using imagery and illustrations that would hit them right between the eyes and right where they lived, Jesus exposes their spiritual destitution, deception and desperate condition.

We cannot fool Christ as He is the Amen and the faithful and true witness.

So we are to be wise and pray each morning and evening, Psalm 139:23-24...

David is praying, "Lord, I do not want to be offensive to You, I do not want to make You sick. Lord, I do not want to be lukewarm for you."

Do you pray, "God, you know me intimately and I know I cannot fool you. Lord I don't want to make you sick, so please show me the ways that I am offensive, ways that I am keeping the door shut. Lord show me my idolatry and my sin so that I can by your grace live in the truth. I want to know you Lord and make you known."

Let's pray...