

**CHRISTIAN LIBERTY LIMITED BY CHRISTIAN'S ALLEGIANCE**

**1 Corinthians 10:14-22**

**February 5, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

We continue this morning in our series on “The Limits of Christian Liberty” that we will conclude, Lord willing, next Sunday morning. Paul’s emphasis in 1 Corinthians 8-10 has been on the rights of the believer and how the exercise of those rights might affect others (chapter 8), the gospel (chapter 9), and the individual believer (10:1-14). The exhortation in chapter 8 was that the more mature believer should be willing to give up those rights that were his in Christ for the sake of the weaker brother, lest they become a stumbling block to them. In chapter 9, Paul gave a word of personal testimony as to how one can give up these rights without forfeiting their freedom in Christ. There is a responsibility with the freedom that comes with the gospel. Then, as we saw last week in the opening verses of this chapter, Paul offered the history of Israel, well-known to these at Corinth, as a bad example to follow in this area. However, these things happened and were written down for the benefit of the believer (10:6, 11).

In our text this morning, Paul returns to the question under girding this entire discussion, the eating of meat that was offered to idols. However, while his emphasis in chapter 8 was on the mature believers at Corinth who ate this meat, perhaps to the detriment of the weaker believers and their consciences, they did not necessarily participate in the feasts and gatherings where this meat was offered. Here, he deals with those who were participating in these civic functions.

One of the great dangers in Christianity, past and present, is syncretistic religion, a commingling or blending of that which is Christian with that which is not. Simply defined, it is an effort to live the Christian life while holding onto beliefs and practices that are worldly. Paul’s warning in this text is clear: *the believer cannot mix the things of the world with the things of God*. By way of loving exhortation (“**my beloved**”), Paul offers four things the believer should do to show his allegiance to Christ.

**I. Flee from idolatry (10:14-15)**

Paul begins, “**Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.**” I have probably brought to your attention in times past that whenever you see the word “therefore” in Scripture, you need to ask yourself the question, “What is the ‘therefore’ there for?” Most often with Paul the “therefore” is a conclusion to an argument preceding, tying it to what follows. Here, Paul is both concluding and continuing his argument concerning idolatry that is a dominant thought in this chapter. He had already warned these believers, “Do not be idolaters, as some of them were” (v. 7), them being the Israelites in the wilderness. He then gives three other areas of sin that the nation had succumbed to, and here he returns to the sin of idolatry. Paul shows that idolatry is the seedbed for all types of sin. Therefore, his first exhortation is simple, “**flee from idolatry.**” In doing so, you will also be fleeing from all sorts of other temptation to sin.

So the obvious question is, “What is idolatry?” We certainly cannot have our hearts and minds set on fleeing from what we do not know. I have a genuine concern today that many do not understand the seriousness of idolatry. This misunderstanding is bred in a couple of ways. One is the way the term “idol” is casually used today. One of the leading television programs today is “American Idol.” Millions view this show each week, many of those professing believers. My purpose is not to condemn or condone watching the show. We often watch it in our home. However, my concern is that there is a lack of discernment when it comes to accolades that are heaped on the creature rather than the Creator. It breeds an incipient form of

focusing on self rather than God, which leads to chasing after the wrong things. While this show is perhaps accurately named, it can breed a genuine lack of concern for idolatry.

Another thing that leads to this casualness concerning idolatry is the thought that an idol is nothing more than an object worshiped by heathens in uncivilized countries. The danger here is that idolatry does not reside in the heart of an individual, but somewhere “over there.” By focusing on an object, idolatry is confined to the external object rather than the internal spirit of a person. This too is to misunderstand what an idol is and can lead to one’s being wrongly convinced that they have no idols in their life.

So what is *idolatry*? “Idolatry is worshiping something other than the true God in the true way, it is the most serious and contaminating of sins” (John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, 232). “Idolatry” is an affront both to the character of God and to the way He has prescribed in His Word that He is to be worshiped. Simply put, an idol is anything that affects one’s devotion to God and Christ alone. It certainly was no accident that the first two commandments address the issue of idolatry. Man’s tendency since the Fall is to worship the god of their imagination or to worship God in the wrong way. A genuine result of our sin nature is that we are willing to be God-centered as long as God is willing to be man-centered. That is idolatry. That is to make God something that He is not to satisfy our own desires.

What form does idolatry take? I would encourage you to read John MacArthur on this in his commentary on this section. He has done a fabulous job of looking in Scripture and identifying those things that the bible calls idolatrous. The list includes: libeling the character of God, worshiping the true God in the wrong way, worshiping any image or person, worshiping angels, worshiping demons, worshiping dead men, supreme loyalty in our heart to anything other than God, covetousness, and inordinate desire or lust (234-236). I think that about covers it.

From all of these things that affect our communion with the holy God, Paul says we are to “**flee.**” However, by our very nature, we often tend to see how close we can get to the line without crossing it. But Paul says, “**flee.**” As one writer put it, “They must not try how near they can go, but how far they can fly” (Robertson and Plummer), and another, “he did not say, simply, depart, but ‘flee’” (Chrysostom).

Paul then writes, “**I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say**” (v. 15). Paul gives them the benefit of the doubt. It does not take a rocket scientist to see the simple truth in this exhortation. If they would be willing to listen to the Scripture, in the Spirit they should be able to understand Paul’s logical conclusion. So the first solid and sensible reason that Paul gives for showing one’s allegiance to Christ is to “**flee from idolatry.**”

## II. Focused on fellowship (10:16-18)

Paul next turns to an illustration of the Lord’s Supper. Another of the primary ways that one can show their allegiance to Christ is to remember the fellowship they have with Christ and one another as is demonstrated at the Lord’s Table. Paul uses a form of the Greek word, *koinonia*, four times in these verses. It appears twice in v. 16, translated “sharing” in the NAS, “participation” in the ESV, or “communion” in the NKJV. Another form appears in v. 18, and a third form in v. 20. The emphasis, taken from the Greek *koinonia*, is on fellowship between those who have things in common.

### 1. Fellowship with Christ (v. 16)

The first of these “fellowships” is the fellowship the believer has with Christ as is portrayed in the Lord’s Supper. Paul asks, “**Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the**

**blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?"** This is a clear reference to the Lord's Table that we will partake of together in a moment. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the communion, the fellowship they have in Christ through His blood and His body. We observe the Lord's Supper together because of the things we have in common. Those who are in Christ have been delivered from the penalty of sin through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. It is this we commemorate at the Lord's Table. We share in the blood of Christ as a memorial to Christ's blood shed for us. We share in the bread as a memorial to Christ's body who bore the penalty of God's wrath on our behalf. His death was atoning. It was substitutionary. And it was satisfactory.

There is great spiritual significance to this occasion. It is done "in remembrance of Him" and drives us back to the cross and His finished work on our behalf. Roger Ellsworth writes,

While the Lord's Supper is clearly symbolical in nature, the drinking and eating are not merely mechanical experiences for the Christian. As he drinks the cup and eats the bread, he is made aware again of what great price the Lord Jesus paid for him, and his heart goes out in love and adoration to Christ. So while the Christian is engaged in the Lord's Supper, he is enjoying fellowship or communion with Christ... In other words, there is a spiritual reality behind the Lord's Supper. While partaking of the elements, the believer is, at the same time, fellowshiping with that spiritual reality—Jesus Christ himself. [*Strengthening Christ's Church*, 168-169]

Therefore, we actually share in the blood and body of Christ, as Paul put it. We are in actual fellowship and communion with Him. We participate with Christ. I ask that you remember this spiritual reality as we partake together of the Lord's Supper this morning.

## **2. Fellowship with the body (vv. 17-18)**

Not only does Paul refer to the fellowship we have in Christ, but also with one another. Those who are one with Christ are one with each other. **"Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."** We will look more fully at this unity of the body in chapter 12. There Paul wrote,

For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. (12:12-14)

One bread, one Spirit, one body, of which we are all one. We who have all in common with Christ also have all in common with one another. We all stand at the foot of the cross as forgiven sinners with the hope of eternal life with Him, our hope of glory.

Paul illustrates this principle of fellowship with an Old Testament reference to the priestly sacrifice. **"Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?"** When the sacrifice proper was burnt, the remaining meat was divided between the priest and the offerer to be eaten. They shared together **"in the altar,"** that is, in sacrificial worship to God together at the altar. They were in fellowship together. Paul uses this illustration to remind these at Corinth, and us, that just as there was this commonality in worship together with national Israel, so is there with those who are in Christ, His church. We all worship together and are **"sharers"** in the body. We identify together one with another when we partake of the Lord's

Table. It is a point of identification for the body of Christ. Therefore, as Roger Ellsworth correctly claims, "Our participation in the Lord's Supper clearly marks us out as belonging to the Christian realm, and anyone who sees our participation would be justified in assuming we are followers of Jesus Christ" [169]. Which leads us to Paul's next point in this text.

### III. Firm in devotion (10:19-21)

In verse 19, Paul returns to the issue of idols. He quickly reminds them of the fact that was established in chapter 8. You remember the quandary Paul helped the Corinthians solve. If they ate the meat sacrificed to idols, they could appear to be sanctioning idolatry. If they refrained from eating, it could imply that the idol was real. Paul asks a rhetorical question in v. 19, "**What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?**" This question reiterated the truth that the sacrifice, the meat, was nothing because the idol itself was nothing.

Then, in v. 20, Paul uses a strong adversative in the Greek, *alla*, here translated "**No,**" to show a stark contrast to what he just said. Just because an idol was nothing did not mean that it could simply be treated as a block of wood. He now addresses those believers that not only ate meat offered to idols but continued to participate in the banquets and activities where these sacrifices were made. In relation to one's devotion, Paul presents two problems that occurred when these fellowshipped with those in these situations.

#### 1. Problem of identity (v. 20)

Paul carefully structures a logical formula to confront the Corinthians with the danger of this practice. He begins, "**the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.**" This may sound like a rather obvious statement, but notice Paul's change in subjects here. The subject is not an *idol* receiving the sacrifice, but a *demon*. While the idols were not real, demons were. Further, the sacrifice was "**not to God,**" a sign that there was nothing spiritual in it. It was, in fact, anti-Christ. Paul begins his argument by showing the Corinthians that they could not remain neutral in this matter. When they participated in these festivals and banquets, they were identifying themselves with not only the people, but the demons as well. The point was this: just as one would be right to assume that those who partook of the Lord's Supper were believers, so they would be just to assume that those who partook of the meat in these festivals were associated with demons. Do you see his point? Paul is saying that they were guilty by association. Paul's concern, "**I do not want you to become sharers (I do not want you to fellowship) in demons.**" Which leads to the second problem when one tries to remain neutral in their devotion.

#### 2. Problem of masters (v. 21)

Paul drives home his conclusion, "**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.**" Paul here states a plain and simple fact. Jesus stated it this way, "No man can serve to masters." It is not that we may not, but we cannot. We have this discussion in our home with the difference between "can I" and "may I." "Can I" is a question of ability; "may I" is a question of permission. That is the case here. It is not that man simply should not or may not serve two masters, but he cannot. He is unable because it is impossible. Curtis Vaughan demonstrates this truth well, "One cannot be a worshiper of Christ and at the same time be a worshiper of demons.

Sharing at the table of the Lord is a renunciation of demons; sharing at the table of demons is a renunciation of Christ" (*1 Corinthians*, 103).

The problem here is what we described in the opening as syncretistic religion. These at Corinth wanted their cake and eat it too. They tried to straddle the fence. But the bible does not speak of such a cake or fence. The danger in this is one can be lured into a false sense of security as well as succumb to the schemes of the devil. As Leon Morris states, "The demons use people's readiness to worship idols" [*1 Corinthians*, 144]. In Ephesians 6:11, Paul exhorts believers to "put on the full armor of God." Why? "So that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." I don't think Paul had participating with them in mind with this exhortation.

There will be times in the Christian life where it is extremely difficult to stand firm. It was difficult for these at Corinth. We must not forget the cultural milieu in which they lived. These banquets and festivals were often attended or even led by other family members. They included weddings, funerals, and just about any occasion that there was a public gathering. To stand firm for them often meant parting with their families and friends. It is often this way with us as well. However, Jesus taught that the believer must be willing to give up all to follow Him, even earthly family (Luke 12:53; 14:26). Jesus further taught, "Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). We often hear that "blood is thicker than water." While this might be commendable on this earth, the blood of your family will do you no good when you stand alone before the throne of God. Only the blood of Christ will do! Joshua's exhortation is just as applicable today as it was when he addressed the Israelites, "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

#### IV. Fear of God (v. 22)

Paul now comes full circle. He began with the exhortation to "**flee from idolatry.**" He closes with a terrifying question, "**Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?**" Our God is a jealous God, and He will share His glory with no one or no thing. The reason that so many Christians walk in defeat is that they do not have a healthy fear of God, the God whose very name is Jealous.

**Exodus 34:12-17** – "Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. <sup>13</sup> But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim <sup>14</sup> – for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God – <sup>15</sup> otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, <sup>16</sup> and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons *also* to play the harlot with their gods. <sup>17</sup> You shall make for yourself no molten gods."

Make no mistake about it, God will not allow His name to be profaned. He will bring judgment on those who continue to worship Him in the wrong way. It might be today, it might be tomorrow, it might be at the judgment, but He will vindicate His holy Name.

You remember the story of Nadab and Abihu.

**Leviticus 10:1-3** – Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire

before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'"

Let this serve as a humble reminder to us of what happens to those who worship God in the wrong way, which is idolatry.

### **Conclusion**

As you prepare your heart for the Lord's table this morning, ask yourself: Am I truly fleeing idolatry, anything that hinders my worship and loyalty to God? Am I focused on communion with Christ and the fellowship of the body? By my actions, do I show a clear devotion to Christ? How would others look at my identity, as associated with the things of the world or the things of God? Are you firm in your devotion, or do you too try to serve God while keeping one foot in the world? And finally, do you fear God? Remember, God is a jealous God, and He will not be mocked.