

24. Learning to Separate from False Worship

In our last topic, we saw that the Lord gave us instructions to help our children learn to resist temptation. We also saw that God showed the negative consequences for Israel when the people chose to follow the evil desires of their hearts instead of resisting temptation. Just as Israel followed the idolatry of Egypt when they were in Egypt and then followed the evil desires of their own hearts and turned to idolatry in the wilderness, Paul realized that the Corinthian Christians had also grown up in a city that was filled with idols. Paul realized that the Corinthians could be easily tempted to continue to be involved in idolatry in their city. For that reason Paul warned the Christians in Corinth to flee from idolatry and from all forms of false worship.

After telling the Corinthians in verse 13 that God will provide a way to escape temptation, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:14, “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” Before telling them to flee from idolatry, Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to know that he greatly loved them so he began this thought by calling them beloved. Paul had used this same word twice when he said in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that he considered them his beloved children so he reminded them again before telling them to flee from idolatry.

Paul used two illustrations to illustrate why it was important to flee idolatry. The first example was the relationship that we have with Christ as we share in the communion. 1 Corinthians 10:15-17 says, “I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 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? For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” Paul showed his respect for the Christians in Corinth by saying that he was speaking to them as one speaking to wise men. As wise men, they would be able to judge for themselves and see if the illustrations that he used demonstrated why it was important for them to flee from idolatry.

As we have a communion service, we drink the cup of blessing. Paul reminded the Corinthians that as we drink the cup that we are actually remembering the communion that we have with the Lord as we drink the cup that reminds us of the blood of Christ. The word that is translated “communion or fellowship” means *to have in common, to have partnership with or to participate with*. As a result, when we drink the cup, we are showing that we are in partnership with Christ because He shed His blood for us and we are remembering that blood. 1 Corinthians 11:26 says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” We are publicly proclaiming that we are joined to the Lord by His death until He comes for us.

In the communion service, we also break the bread. Paul explained that the bread is a reminder to us of the fact that as we break the bread it is the communion of the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians

12:12-13, we read, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” Each time we have a communion service, we are celebrating the fact that we have all been made one body in Christ because of the fact that we have become one body through His death.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that we all partake of one bread. When you take a loaf of bread and break that loaf into many parts, those parts are all a part of the whole loaf. In the same way, even though we are many Christians, we are all proclaiming our partnership with the Lord and focusing on the fact that we are one with Christ. As a result, we show in two different ways that we are joined to Christ every time that we have a communion service. By these two illustrations, Paul made it very clear to the Corinthians why they should flee from idolatry. We have become one with Christ and we cannot be joined to idols at the same time.

Paul went on to use another illustration from the nation of Israel. 1 Corinthians 10:18 says, “Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” Throughout the Old Testament, the people of Israel offered their sacrifices to the Lord. Some sacrifices would be entirely burned. However, with most of the sacrifices, a part would go to the priests for their food and the rest of the sacrifice would go to the people so that they could eat the meat of the sacrifice. As the people ate the meat of the sacrifice, they were partakers of the altar. In the same way, Paul is showing that if Christians offered a sacrifice to an idol that they were participating with that idol.

Paul went on to say in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, “What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 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.” Paul made it clear that the idols have no power within themselves. However, the people of Corinth felt that their idols had power. Paul explained that the people were actually worshiping demonic power. The people of Israel had even offered their children as sacrifices. Psalm 106:37-38 says, “They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood.” Paul pointed out that when the people offered their children as sacrifices to idols they were actually offering them as sacrifices to demons.

In the same way, Paul made it clear that when the people of Corinth offered their sacrifices to idols they were actually offering their sacrifices to demons and not to God. As a result, that was why Paul had warned the Christians to flee from idolatry because he did not want them to continue to have fellowship with demons. Deuteronomy 32:17 says that the sacrifices of idols were definitely not to God. That verse says, “They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to *gods* they did not know, to new *gods*, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear.” Any sacrifice to a demon is to a false god that the people do not and cannot know.

Paul went on to write in 1 Corinthians 10:21-22, “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. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" Here, we see that Paul tells why it was important for the Corinthian Christians to separate from the false worship and the offering of sacrifices to idols. Paul said that it is impossible to have fellowship with God and fellowship with demons. In 1 John 1:6-7 we read, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." Fellowship with demons is walking in darkness. Fellowship with Christ is walking in the light. It is totally impossible to walk both in darkness and in the light at the same time.

As a result, Paul said that it was impossible for the Corinthians to participate at the Lord's table and at the same time participate at the demon's table. In the same way, we need to help our children learn to understand and explain to others that they cannot participate in both the Lord's table and the table of demons at the same time. Many people today have also participated in false religions before they became Christians. Just like some of the Corinthians, they think that they can continue to participate in those false religions while at the same time say that they are following the Lord. We want to help our children learn to explain to such individuals that they cannot walk in darkness and walk in the light at the same time.

Paul also said that we provoke the Lord to jealousy by trying to worship both God and demons at the same time. God said in Deuteronomy 32:21, "They have provoked Me to jealousy by *what* is not God; they have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation." God is a holy God and will not share His glory with any false gods. That is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians again in 2 Corinthians 6:16-17, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.'" We want to help both our physical and spiritual children understand that God wants all Christians to recognize that their bodies are the temple of the living God.

We all need to realize that Christ said in Matthew 28:18, "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" Because all authority belongs to Christ and He is over all things, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn the importance of helping weak and struggling Christians realize that the only way that they can become strong Christians is by separating themselves from false worship. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to help others separate from false worship.