



## Overcoming Idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14-22)

In the previous lesson, we learned the destructive outcomes of idolatry on the Israelites. As 21st century Christians we may believe ourselves to be immune from the sin of idolatry, but that may be because we do not understand the nature of idolatry.

### I. What Is Idolatry?

In **Exodus 20:3-6** God says, *“You shall have no other gods before me. 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 or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”* These verses form the first of the ten commandments. God does not permit man to place anything in the place that rightly belongs to him.

While most Christians would agree that idolatry is a grievous sin, they don't really see themselves as tempted by idolatry. They believe idolatry was a sin of an unsophisticated people hundreds or thousands of years ago. These people they believe were uneducated, superstitious, and easily misled. On the other hand, in our scientific, enlightened modern age we know much more, are educated more fully, and understand more completely. Idolatry is not on our list of sins we need to conquer.



As 1 Cor. 10:7 recounts the idolatry of the Israelites it was in the form of a golden calf. So in our minds idols are usually man made objects of wood, stone, or metal. We see however that the characteristics of idolatry are found around us today.

First, in Idolatry the Idolater attempts to Reduce the Power or Nature of God.

God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He is all knowing, all powerful, and ever present. God has not beginning and no end. God is Creator and not part of the created. We cannot hold God or limit God, but idolatry attempts to do just that. The Israelites cried out to Aaron for a god and he made a golden calf trying to reduce the all powerful God into an image that they could see, and touch, and hold. A God that can be reduced to a manufactured object loses much of his awe and fearfulness. When people create their own gods or try to recreate the God of the Bible they make Him into what they want Him to be.

1. **What are some of the ways in which people try to reduce the power or nature of God today?**

## Second, Idolatry can be a Substitute for God.

For some of the world's people this substitute is a graven image of some sorts, but it can also be things like money, sex, or power; anything that substitutes for the place reserved for God in our lives. Some Christians place their preacher or an elder or other leader in the place of God following him blindly wherever he leads. It can be religious legalism that relegates our faith to a list of do's and don'ts. These do not require a love and obedience to an almighty Creator.

### **2. What are some of ways people substitute what properly belongs to God to someone or something else?**

## **II. Flee From Idolatry**

Verse 14 begins with the word “therefore” indicating that what Paul is about to write is based upon what he has just written; namely the danger associated with idolatry. The sin of idolatry is so pervasive and so serious that Paul instructs his readers to “flee” just had he had previously said of sexual immorality. This is a strong word that indicates running or escaping. The same word is used in Matthew 2:13 when Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were told to flee to Egypt.

Paul refers to the Corinthians as “beloved” and then appeals to them as sensible people. The Corinthian Christians are urged to think about what Paul said. Is it reasonable? If so they should listen and judge what he says.

Paul presents an argument against idolatry by appealing to the Lord's Supper. In verses 16 and 17 we learn that when a Christian partakes of the Lord's Supper they become participants in the body of Christ. They show that they are in fellowship with him and with one another. In the Lord's Supper we share in a remembrance of Jesus Christ who died for us. In the Lord's Supper we share with other Christians in a celebration of our faith and of our hope and we demonstrate that “we who are many are one body.”



The broken bread refers to the fact that the bread was broken off of a loaf either by one person before distributing it or the Christians broke off a piece of a loaf as it was passed to them. We do note that at the Last Supper, Jesus himself took the bread, broke it, and handed it to his disciples. This “breaking of bread” is symbolic of the broken body of Christ.

### **3. Should Christians today “break” the bread or is it sufficient to have pre-cut bread or multiple pieces?**

### **4. What was the significance of having “one” bread or loaf in verse 17?**

Next Paul moves to the example of Israel. Portions of the Old Testament sacrifices were eaten by the priests and the worshipers (Deut. 12:18, 27; Lev. 3:3). This showed those who ate to be participants in the altar. The point is that those who eat of the meat sacrificed to idols become a part of the idol or involve themselves in idolatry.

The food sacrificed to idols is nothing and the idols themselves are nothing. While the idols may be just wood, or stone, or metal there are demons who stand behind the idols. “Pagan people understand that they are offering up their sacrifices to the spirits which the images represented...idols do represent unseen spirits, evil spirits, demonic spirits. Even though the pagan gods have no real existence, Satan does. In worshiping idols men are worshiping Satan.”<sup>1</sup>

Just as those who participate in the Lord’s Supper are participants with Christ; those who eat meat sacrificed to idols are participating with the idol and by extension demons.

**5. What does it mean to say that God is jealous?**

**6. What does Paul mean when he asks in verse 22, “are we stronger than he?”**

**7. What applications can we make to 21st century Christians from Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 10:14-22?**

<sup>1</sup>Smith, James E. *Teacher’s Commentary: The Encounter Epistles 1 & 2 Corinthians*. Lulu, 2010. p. 166.