

Idols and Demons **(1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1)**

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

I. Review from Prior Lessons

- a. In the prior lesson, we looked at Paul's challenge for us to treat the Christian life with the same focus and determination as an athlete seeking to win the prize.
- b. Paul warned of the dangers of Christians falling into sin and thereby being disqualified from the reward we seek. He used the illustration of the Exodus journey. He explained how that journey from Egypt through the Wilderness wanderings foreshadowed the Christian life.
- c. Most of those who were "baptized" (crossing the Red Sea), who "ate from the spiritual food and drank from the spiritual drink", and who even "drank from the rock...Christ" did not make it to the Promised Land.
 - i. They fell because of five specific sins that they committed in the Wilderness.
 - ii. This is a warning to us. We must not become spiritually complacent as Christians, and thereby fall into the same sins that led to their destruction. Those sins were:
 1. Lusting after evil things (such as in **Exodus 17**);
 2. Idolatry (the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai, in **Exodus 32**);
 3. Sexual immorality (with the Moabite or Midianite women, in **Numbers 25**);
 4. Tempting or testing Christ (when they were killed by serpents, in **Numbers 21**); and
 5. Complaining (multiple examples throughout **Exodus** and **Numbers**).
- d. In the next passage, which we will cover today, Paul focuses on the second of the five deadly sins he had just discussed: the sin of *idolatry*.
 - i. In connection with that, we will be exploring a side topic that Paul refers to in this passage: *demons*!

- e. This also is a continuation of the discussion on idolatry that Paul previously raised in **1 Corinthians 8**. Recall what Paul had said there:
- i. Read **1 Corinthians 8:1-13**.
 - ii. Points Paul made there include:
 1. There is only one God.
 2. Idols are nothing.
 - a. Idolatry, a sin that many of the Christians would have repented of when coming to faith, was rampant in Corinth.
 3. In view of the knowledge we have based on the first two points, there is nothing inherently wrong with eating things (meat) offered to idols.
 4. However, weaker Christians who lacked full knowledge could be led to stumble into sin by exercising their freedom to eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol.
 - a. Paul's attitude: he does not want to do anything to cause his brother, for whom Christ died, to perish.
 - b. Paul would rather never eat meat again than risk tempting a weak brother to sin.

II. Flee from Idolatry

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 10:14**.
 - i. *"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."* (**1 Corinthians 10:14**, NKJV)
 - ii. **Question:** What is *"therefore"*, the opening word in this verse, referring to?
 1. **Answer:** I believe it refers back to what Paul said previously, in **1 Corinthians 10:7**.
 2. *"But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.'" (1 Corinthians 10:5-7, NKJV; where Paul is quoting from Exodus 32:6)*

- b. Paul here returns to the subject of idolatry (and eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols). He comes to the same conclusions as in **1 Corinthians 8**, but provides additional reasons.
- c. Read **1 Corinthians 10:15-11:1**.
 - i. I am including **1 Corinthians 11:1** in this reading because it seems to me that verse applies to what precedes it, rather than to what follows.
 - ii. **Question:** When do you think the chapter divisions were added to the New Testament? Do you think they were there from the beginning, or possibly added in the early centuries of the church?
 - 1. **Answer:** For most of Christian history, there were no chapter nor verse divisions in Scripture.
 - 2. Modern chapter divisions are based on a system proposed by Stephen Langton about 800 years ago, c. 1227 AD. He later became the Archbishop of Canterbury.
 - a. The modern verse designations came even later.
 - iii. While the chapter divisions can be helpful, realize that they are not part of the original text. Sometimes the chapter divisions split up a theme or idea, so keep that in mind when you are reading the Bible.
- d. An additional reason to avoid idolatry.
 - i. “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.” (**1 Corinthians 10:21**, NKJV)
 - ii. Paul’s logic here is as follows.
 - 1. It seems to me that here he goes back to the “spiritual food and drink” analogy he had just pointed to, from the story of wandering in the Wilderness.
 - a. “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, *all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink*. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” (**1 Corinthians 10:1-4**, NKJV)
 - b. “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; *for we all partake of that one bread*.” (**1 Corinthians 10:17**, NKJV)

- i. Notice the things that are intended to *unify all Christians*. We are *all* baptized, and *we all* eat the same spiritual food and drink.
 - ii. Baptism and communion have multi-faceted spiritual and physical components, one of which is that they are intended to *unify all Christians*. These are things that all Christians throughout the ages should share in common.
 - iii. One (baptism) begins the journey for all of us, and the other (the Lord's supper) sustains us throughout our spiritual journey to the end.
2. Paul is making the point that we who eat the sacrifices are partaking from the altar. This is just as the Jewish priests ("Israel after the flesh") who ate of the sacrifices were partakers in the altar of God (**Leviticus 1-8**).
 - a. Note that Young's Literal Translation and the Douay-Rheims translation render this phrase from **1 Corinthians 10:18**: "Israel according to the flesh". That is another way of conveying the same concept.
 - b. The term "Israel after the flesh" is in contrast to the church, which is spiritual Israel. Paul develops this idea in **Romans 9-11** and touches on it elsewhere in his teaching (such as in **Galatians**, where he says we Christians are the true descendants of Abraham, since we are living by faith as he was). The physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who rejected Christ have been *rejected by God*. They are like *branches that have broken off* from the original olive tree that represents the kingdom of God (**Romans 11:17-20**).
 - c. Recent unfortunate events in Israel Gaza have brought to the fore some calls from evangelical Protestant circles for the US to support Israel militarily in conflicts they are having with Palestinians and other Arabs.
 - i. **Question:** Should Christians in the U.S. be cheering on Israel and offering military support to that nation as "God's chosen people" in their battles against the Palestinians?
 1. No. First of all, we are called by Jesus to be nonresistant, to love even our enemies,

and to stay out of the wars of this world. We are called to fight another war against another enemy, using different weapons than those of this world. (**Matthew 5:43-48, Ephesians 6:10-20, Romans 12:14-21, 1 Peter 3:9**, etc.)

2. Also, Israel “according to the flesh” is no longer “God’s chosen people”. As Paul explained in **Romans 11** and elsewhere, physical Israel that rejected Christ has been rejected by God. It has been replaced by spiritual Israel, the church.
 - a. The Lord will be happy to graft the Jews back into the kingdom if and when they return to Him and follow His Son, Jesus.
3. This passage is the first (and I believe only) passage where the Lord’s Supper is referred to as “communion”. What is not apparent in most modern English translations is that the same Greek word for “communion” is used to describe both the Lord’s Supper for Christians and the participation of the Jewish priests at the altar. In what is perhaps the most *literal* modern English translation, the American Standard Version (ASV), it reads:
 - a. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a *communion of the blood of Christ*? The bread which we break, is it not a *communion of the body of Christ*? seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we are all partake of the one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: have not they that eat the sacrifices *communion with the altar*?” (**1 Corinthians 10:16-18**, ASV)
 - b. We plan to discuss the Lord’s Supper in more detail in an upcoming message in this series.

III. On Demons

- a. **Question:** Paul has said that other so-called “gods” are nothing and that idols are nothing. What about demons?
 - i. He mentions demons four times in this passage.
 - ii. “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 [= *communion*] *with demons*. 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*." (1 Corinthians 10:19–21, NKJV)

- iii. Paul certainly considered demons (unlike idols and other so-called "gods") to be a present reality in Corinth.
- b. **Questions:** How much do you think about demons? Are they present and active in our own world today? Is there anything we should know about them?
- c. What we know from Scripture regarding *demons*, which are mentioned the New Testament, especially in the gospels:
 - i. Jesus encountered demon-possessed people many times and was famous in Israel for casting out demons.
 1. "Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him." (Mark 1:34, NKJV)
 2. "When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, 'What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?' Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So the demons begged Him, saying, 'If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine.'" (Matthew 8:28–31, NKJV)
 3. "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give." (Matthew 10:7–8, NKJV)
 4. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" (Matthew 7:22, NKJV)
 5. "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse

than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”
(**Matthew 12:43–45**, NKJV)

6. “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.” (**Mark 16:9**, NKJV)
 7. “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues....” (**Mark 16:17**, NKJV)
- ii. They are mentioned in the Old Testament as well.
 1. “They even sacrificed their sons And their daughters to demons....” (**Psalms 105/106:37**, NKJV)
 2. In **Tobit** there is a story of a demon who had killed seven husbands of a woman, immediately after each of them married her. In this story, the demon even has a name.
 - iii. Paul encountered them on his missionary journeys.
 1. In **Acts 16**, Paul got into trouble in Philippi for casting a fortune-telling spirit out of a slave girl.
 2. In **Acts 19**, in Ephesus, Paul and others are exorcising spirits from those involved in the occult.
 3. “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, *giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron....” (**1 Timothy 4:1–2**, NKJV)
 - iv. James referred to them in passing, in discussing how belief alone (without action) is useless.
 1. “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (**James 2:19**, NKJV)
 - v. Things we learn from Scripture regarding demons.
 1. They are real.
 - a. Let that sink in!
 - b. Christians believe in many things we cannot personally see (God creating the universe from nothing, Jesus being raised from the dead on the third day, the presence of

the Holy Spirit, Satan, the Second Coming, angels, etc.). Demons are one more thing in the unseen realm that we are called to believe exist.

2. They can inhabit humans and animals, but also can exist outside of them.
 3. They can cause various illnesses and even kill people.
 4. They can be cast out of people.
 5. They believe in God, but are wicked and try to destroy people.
 6. They can speak.
 7. They can influence what is taught in the church by introducing corrupted doctrines to leaders and teachers.
- d. **Questions:** Are demons active today? Did they go away? Should we be afraid of them?
- i. We don't seem to see as much direct and obvious demonic activity in this part of the world as in some other parts (Africa, Haiti, etc.) and in the New Testament. (However, perhaps it is there, but we are just not seeing it.)
 - ii. I don't know why that seems to be the case; I could only guess.
 - iii. There is a tendency for some to dismiss demons in the Bible as a superstitious, ignorant way to explain the reason for illnesses in ancient times. However, Jesus clearly believed that demons were real, and He even had conversations with them!
 - iv. **Question:** Are there demonic, evil influences around us that most of us are unaware of?
 1. Halloween: Here on the north side of Boston, we are not far from Salem, Massachusetts. In October, for the weeks preceding Halloween, each year we are seeing more and more extreme outdoor decorations in the front lawns of our neighbors. That includes representations of witches, devils, ghosts, giant skeletons and other marks of the occult.
 2. The occult and demons are real!
 - a. These things are not a joke, nor 'cute' as many try to make them out to be.

- e. The Bible does not provide an explanation of where the demons came from. However, we can get some additional information that may be helpful from the writings of early Christians. The following quotations from the Ante-Nicene Fathers are taken from *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs (DOECB)*, edited by David Bercot. For more information, see articles in that work on 'Demons' and 'Exorcism'.
- i. Several of the early Christian writers believed that the demons (all of whom are wicked) came from the race of half-breeds (wicked angels coming down to earth and having relations with human women). The giants that came from those unholy unions were killed in the Flood of Noah, but the demons that resulted have been with us since.
1. "Now there were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of men and they bore children to them..." (**Genesis 6:4**, LXX, OSB)
 2. "The angels transgressed this appointment and were captivated by love of women. And they begat children, who are those who are called demons." Justin Martyr (c. 160, East), Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 190; from DOECB p. 201.
 3. "These angels, then, who have fallen from heaven, and haunt the air and the earth, and are no longer able to rise to heavenly things, and the souls of the giants, who are the demons who wander about the world, perform similar actions." Athenagoras (c. 175, East), ANF vol. 2, p. 142; from DOECB p. 201.
 4. "Furthermore, we are instructed by our sacred books how from certain angels, who fell of their own free will, there sprang a more wicked demon brood, condemned of God along with the authors of their race.... Their great business is the ruin of mankind. So, from the start, spiritual wickedness sought our destruction. Accordingly, they inflict upon our bodies diseases and other grievous calamities. And by violent assaults, they hurry the soul into sudden and extraordinary excesses.... By an influence equally obscure, demons and angels breathe into the soul, and rouse up its corruptions with furious passions and vile excesses." Tertullian (c. 197, West), ANF vol. 3, p. 36; found in DOECB p. 201.
 5. "From the seed [of the fallen angels and women], giants are said to have been born. By them, arts were made known in the earth. They taught the dyeing of wool and everything that is done. When they died, men erected images to them. Yet, because they were of an evil seed, the Almighty did not approve of their being brought back from death when they had

died. For that reason, they wander and they now subvert many bodies. And it is these whom you [pagans] presently worship and pray to as gods.” Commodianus (c. 240, West), ANF vol. 4, p. 203; found in DOECB p. 202.

6. “In my opinion, it is certain wicked demons (so to speak, of the race of Titans or giants) who have been guilty of impiety towards the true God and towards the angels in heaven. They have fallen from it, and they haunt the denser parts of bodies. They also frequent unclean places on the earth. Since they are without bodies of earthly material, they possess some power of foretelling future events. So they engage in works of this kind, desiring to lead the human race away from the true God. They also secretly enter the bodies of the more predatory, savage, and wicked of animals and stir them up to do whatever they choose, whenever they choose. They can turn the fancies of these animals to make flights and movements of various kinds, in order to entrap men by such power of divination.” Origen (c. 248, East), ANF vol. 4, p. 538; found in DOECB p. 202.
 7. “Among angels, some are angels of God, and others are angels of the devil. But among demons, there is no such distinction. For they are all said to be wicked.” Origen (c. 248, East), ANF vol. 4, p. 648-649; found in DOECB p. 202.
- ii. Two of my favorite early Christian quotes regarding demons follow. They may give us some insight into the practical involvement of demons in the temptations we face.
1. “Holy Scripture teaches us that there are certain invisible enemies that fight against us. And it commands us to arm ourselves against them. From that, the more simple among the believers in the Lord Christ are of the opinion that all the sins that men have committed are caused by the persistent efforts of these opposing powers exerted upon the minds of sinners.... In other words, they think that if there were no devil, no single human being would go astray. We, however, who see the reason more clearly, do not hold this opinion. For we take into account those [sins] that clearly originate as a necessary consequence of our bodily constitution.... The devil is obviously not the cause of our feeling hunger and thirst. Likewise, neither is he the cause of that desire that naturally arises at the time of maturity—the desire of sexual intercourse. ...We receive certain initial elements and (as it were) seeds of sins from those things that we use agreeably to nature. However, when we have indulged them beyond what is proper

and have not resisted the first movements to intemperance, then the hostile powers seize the occasion of this first transgression. They incite and press us hard in every way. They seek to extend our sins over a wider field and to furnish us human beings with opportunities and beginnings of sins.” Origen (c. 225, East), ANV vol. 4, pp. 329-330; found in DOECB pp. 203-204.

- a. Origen’s position is that temptation first arises from the desires of our own flesh. However, when we give in to those initial temptations, Satan and the demons then have a foothold and can influence us to even deeper depravity.
2. “The Lord Himself is witness that we have the case of the woman who went to the theater and came back possessed. Accordingly, in the exorcism, when the unclean creature was rebuked for having dared to attack a believer, he firmly replied, ‘And in truth I did it most lawfully, for I found her in my domain.’” Tertullian (c. 197, West), ANF vol. 3, p. 90; found in DOECB p. 268.
 - a. This story is so incredible that Tertullian begins it by saying, “The Lord Himself is witness...”!
 - b. Apparently, there was a common understanding among Christians that a demon could not normally possess someone who was a Christian.
 - i. Those who had been baptized and were walking in the light were protected from demons and did not need to fear them.
 - c. The theaters were known for celebrating immorality and violence. In this story we have a sober reminder to stay out of those places that could be considered ‘the domain of demons’!
 - f. In conclusion on this point, here are a few thoughts regarding demons.
 - i. Let us ‘see’ the unseen host arrayed against us in the spiritual realm (Satan, the wicked angels with him, and the demons).
 - ii. Christians who have been baptized and are walking in the light do not need to fear demons.
 - iii. Let us take up the full armor of God, in the spiritual battle we are involved in (**Ephesians 6:10-20**).

- iv. Avoid the occult; don't give the enemy any foothold via sin.
- v. Don't be surprised when you see great evil in this world and bizarre teaching invading Christian circles.

IV. On Food Sacrificed to Idols

- a. Paul reminds the (mostly Gentile) Christians that all things on earth (including all the plants and animals for food) are from and for the Lord, by pointing back to the opening line of **Psalm 24** (designated **Psalm 23** in the LXX)
 - i. "...for *'the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.'* If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for *'the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.'*" (**1 Corinthians 10:26-28**, NKJV)
 - 1. Paul says it is okay to eat any foods. They can go ahead and eat if they are not aware that it was sacrificed to idols.
 - 2. However, if they are told that the meat was sacrificed to idols, they should not eat for the sake of the conscience of others.
- b. Let us be careful to imitate the loving concern that Paul had. Meat in and of itself was clean (since idols are nothing, and everything on earth is "the Lord's"). However, Paul never wanted to do anything that could cause his brother to stumble.
 - i. Paul simply wanted as many as possible (Jews as well as Gentiles) to be saved.
 - ii. He said he would rather *never eat meat* if that would cause someone else to stumble in their faith. (**1 Corinthians 8:13**)
 - iii. In closing, Paul challenges us to follow his attitude, as he followed that of Christ.
 - 1. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." (**1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1**, NKJV)