



Last Sunday morning when I was reviewing my sermon, I was overwhelmed by the amazing grace that Paul was proclaiming to the Corinthians that I decided that the final song had to be changed. You might recall the verse we sang together. The lyrics are, “Now, Lord, I would be yours alone and live so all might see the strength to follow your commands could never come from me. Hallelujah, all I have is Christ. Hallelujah, Jesus is my life” (*All I Have is Christ*, Sovereign Grace Music).

Why did I think these lyrics so accurately summed up Paul’s teaching from the text last week? Because Paul has been so emphatically pointing out the Corinthian’s sin of being more focused on a worldly mindset that seeks to look good and be respected by the culture as opposed to taking the mind of Christ and sacrificing rights and freedoms in order to showcase Christ and his glory. We even see how the meat-offered-to-idols question seems to be more of a smokescreen for the Corinthians. What they really want is to be accepted by society by eating meat in the temple. Their heart isn’t in the right place. Their heart isn’t wanting the Lord, but wanting themselves. At this point, you could think Paul is going to condemn them, but he doesn’t. Instead, he gives them hope. The answer to their idolatrous actions is not to try harder and prove they’re sorry, but instead, the answer is to humble themselves at the foot of the cross. They need to recognize their sinfulness and then behold the glory of God in his forgiving and strengthening grace. In verses 12-13, Paul writes, **“¹²Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”¹**

The “Therefore” is Paul’s conclusion. Paul doesn’t want us to hear about our sins and then say, “Ok, God, I’m sorry. I’ll show you I’ll do better.” Paul just finished talking about the Israelites as a bad example, and that’s often what they’d do. Instead, God wants people who say, “I could give you sacrifice, but you won’t have it. You want a broken and contrite heart.” That’s what Paul is saying here in verses 12-13. Paul calls all of us to recognize our sins and our idolatry when we cling to our rights and freedoms. Paul calls us to recognize that God’s call to lay down those rights and freedoms for the sake of the gospel are impossible for us to live out unless the Lord faithfully gives his grace. But Paul also calls us to believe our faithful God to actually give us the grace to endure in this life and live for his glory! Therefore, the song was entirely appropriate. Oh Lord, I want to live that all may see that the strength to follow your commands could never come from me! Hallelujah, all I have is Christ!

Now, we move forward in Paul’s letter and in verse 14, we read another “therefore.” Paul writes, “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”² Because God is faithful and gracious – on the basis of who he is and what he promises to us – flee from idolatry! Paul isn’t saying, “Do this in your own strength.” This isn’t legalism for Paul to call us to run away from idolatry. This is a promise-based, gospel-driven, hope-filled command. On the basis of God’s love for you, obey. On the basis of God’s promises to you, do not worship other things. Worship the Lord in your words, actions, and thoughts.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:12–13.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:14.

Again, I want to emphasize that idolatry isn't simply carving idols. But idolatry is anything we value at the level of, or above, God. Paul uses sexual immorality as an example of idolatry in the last couple verses. Having said this, Paul is talking in a specific context to the Corinthian Christians, and these Corinthians are really dealing with idol worship in a temple. As I stated last week, the way Paul writes here indicates that the Corinthians were also wondering if they could eat meat offered to idols *in the temple*. While Paul says eating the meat itself isn't a sin, he's going to move on here to say that eating the meat in the temple is going to confuse who you worship – thus it's sinful. As you think about Paul's application here, I think we can come up with many examples in our own personal life. Depending on the culture in which you live, there are things Christians could do that would confuse who we worship. I recall talking to Christians from Laos who said they would never cremate a Christian because cremation was part of the false worship in the Laotian culture. In the same room were Scottish Christians who said they literally have no room for dead bodies in Scotland and so cremation is almost the only viable option for the average person. Do you see how being in a certain culture can communicate different things? So we find ourselves in these situations in our day – and we can't simply say, "Well, the thing in and of itself isn't sinful." We must ask if doing that thing communicates a division in our worship. Honestly, I don't know how this specifically applies to you, but I ask you to pray that the Lord would reveal situations to you for application so that your life might shine all the more brightly for Christ – that believers and the world might see more clearly who you prize and value supremely!

As you heard the passage read, you know that Paul now talks about communion, but he speaks of communion as an example. This passage isn't intended to be a treatise in communion, but instead an example to reveal the purpose of the Christian life and also to emphasize that eating in the temple is sinful. Paul goes to the most basic practice of Christianity to show how we ought to live. I'm very grateful that today we're celebrating communion because this text reveals to us that communion is a reminder of Christ and his sacrifice, while also reminding us the basic principles of how we ought to live. As a result, I think the big idea of this text is that **Genuine believers must be devoted to gospel fellowship, while fleeing demonic fellowship.**

"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." When Paul writes, "my beloved," he's again emphasizing the special relationship he has with them. His confrontations haven't been out of disdain for them. He's been pointed because he loves them! Like a family member who yells to another who is in danger. Paul says, "my beloved," which means "dearly loved." I can use the same phrase to all of you. I dearly love you all – each one of you, Ventura. So, with Paul, I say on the basis of God's faithful grace towards you, flee from idolatry. I love what one commentator wrote regarding Paul's tone here regarding idolatry. David Garland said, "**Idolatry is like radioactive waste: it requires them to bolt from this area immediately to avoid contamination and certain death.**" If you were in a contaminated area, you'd run! Paul gives the Corinthian's no option to stick around and evaluate how contaminated or how bad their idolatry is. All idolatry is like radioactive waste. Therefore, run as fast as you can! Ventura, this is how we ought to view our sinful valuing of other things above God. Run!

But the Corinthians could say, "But why run away from the Gentile temples if eating the meat isn't sinful and many don't even think of worship when they're eating at the temples?" Or we could ask, "But I can do this or that and not worship that thing. I'm just doing it because others are – and it's really no big deal." But is it no big deal? I have found in my life that I often know when I'm trying to justify something. And, if I'm trying to justify something, I more-than-likely shouldn't do it. I think the way Paul communicates here reveals that he believes they know they're trying to self-justify. In verse 15, Paul

says, “I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.”³ Paul is simply saying, “I know you are reasonable, and if we go to the example of communion, you’ll understand that you can’t self-justify your sinful behavior anymore.” So, as we move forward in this text, Paul will show the Corinthians (and us) how communion emphasizes our need to be devoted to gospel fellowship, and then he’ll move on in verses 19-21 to emphasize what we ought to flee.

Genuine believers must be devoted to gospel fellowship, while fleeing demonic fellowship. Let’s start with devotion to gospel fellowship. What does that mean?

Devoted to gospel fellowship?

In verse 16, Paul uses communion to go back to the basics, and he first states that our participation in communion actually reveals our fellowship with Christ. Therefore, to be devoted to gospel fellowship includes being **devoted to our fellowship with Christ**. Let’s read the first half of verse 16 again: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?⁴

When the Corinthians were participating in the Lord’s Table, what are they communicating? When we have communion, what are we communicating? This argument comes up with Paul because he said that the meat offered to idols doesn’t matter. It’s fine to eat it, but then it’s not fine to eat it in the temple. Is Paul a hypocrite? Is he inconsistent? No. Think of it this way. Let’s say we have communion together. And, to fit the illustration, let’s say it’s our Good Friday communion where we have pita bread and I break the bread. Now, during our celebration, I do not allow some of my children to participate because they have not professed faith in Christ and/or have not been baptized as a public profession. But, let’s say we have leftover pita bread. I take it home. Then, let’s say the next day, my daughters are eating lunch, and Tracy cuts up pita bread for them to dip in hummus. Have they participated in the Lord’s Table because they ate that pita bread? No! The bread itself isn’t miraculous or magical. But, there is a difference if they were to eat it while all the believers were eating it. Why? Because we’re coming together to communicate something specific.

What is it communicating? Fellowship with Christ. In the ESV, we read, “participation in the blood of Christ.” I use the word “fellowship” because that’s another way of translating this Greek word. Fellowship means we have union with Jesus and his sacrifice. Jesus’ sacrifice isn’t just some abstract truth – something that happened 2,000 years ago, but has to bearing on my life. Communion, first and foremost, reminds us of Jesus’ sacrificial death on our behalf. That’s what Paul means when he says “blood.” Hebrews states that without the shedding of blood, there’s no forgiveness. Why? Because the blood spoke of atonement – meaning, Jesus took the just wrath of God on himself in the place of sinners. Jesus took our sins on himself so that he could do this. He took the sin and the shame and the guilt. He went to the greatest lengths of enduring hell in the place of people like you and me who deserve it. Yet, he was without sin. And, in taking the punishment, he satisfied the laws demands. He drank the cup of God’s punishment. He drank it to the very last drop so that there is none left for me and for you – if you have truly turned from your sin and turned to him for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. You are free – not because of your works, not because of your status, not because of how moral you are. It’s all of God’s free kindness and grace that you are forgiven!

This is what Jesus’ blood communicates. This is what drinking of the cup communicates. We have fellowship with Jesus’ death. We are united with him; therefore, all these things are true of us through

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:15.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:16.

faith. It's not the beverage that is magical. It's the faith in Jesus that speaks to the reality of our hearts before God – and when we are with others we are saying, "We believe this! We are one with Christ's sacrifice. My sin would condemn me, but Jesus took my condemnation!" So, when we drink the cup, we communicate our fellowship with Jesus by grace *alone* through faith *alone*.

Paul then moves on in verse 16 through verse 17 to say, "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."⁵ Paul shows us that gospel fellowship is a **devotion to our fellowship with other believers**. When he talks about the body of Christ here, while he is speaking to the literal body, which was scourged and broken so we could be made whole, Paul moves on in verse 17 to speak of the further reality that all those who have turned from their idolatry and turned to Jesus are now one body in Christ. He says we all partake of (i.e. – have fellowship with) one bread. But, we are many. So, what does that mean? The many of us are one in Christ.

So, when the Corinthians (or we of Ventura) partake of communion, we reveal two essential truths. First, we have partook of, and fellowship with, Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. We rejoice in Jesus Christ and him crucified! Secondly, we have a special fellowship with those who have trusted in Jesus. I have a special relationship with you, Ventura. You have a special relationship with me – all because of Jesus! May we always communicate the special nature of this to one another. All because of grace we are one with God and one with each other.

Now Paul moves to verse 18 to say, "Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?"⁶ Quick example back to Israel. The entire sacrificial system was to show they were a separated people unto God. And they were commanded to be a unified people as well. So it is to be with Christ's Church. We are separated unto God by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And, by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we together are one. We could boil this down even to our mission statement as a church family. We are a people pursuing Jesus together. This is what communion communicates. Freedom in and devotion to Christ within the body of Christ. Communion reminds us that genuine believers must be devoted to gospel fellowship.

Ok, so does all of this make sense? Paul says he's speaking to sensible people. He's assuming the Corinthians would understand this. I assume we all understand this. But there's more. In verse 14, Paul said to flee from idolatry. He doesn't say, "Figure out how close to sin you can get," but instead to "run from idol worship." Based on the preceding verses of 12-13, running from idolatry means running to the Lord. He's the direction we should always go because he's the One who will empower us to live for us. But sometimes we need to know specifically what we ought to run from.

I think verses 19-21 tell us what it means to flee from demonic fellowship: **To see the devil's deceptive influence and worship God alone (vv. 19-21)**. In this scenario with the temple, the Corinthians need convincing on why they shouldn't eat meat in the temple. So, let's read verses 19-21 together: ¹⁹What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹You 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.⁷

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:16–17.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:18.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:19–21.

“Paul, get to the point.” Verse 19 is Paul’s point. What does he imply? Neither the food nor the idol are anything. Is there really a mountain with Zeus and other gods? No. Paul denies the pluralistic worship of the Roman culture. There is only one God. When Paul speaks this way, he emphasizes the truth that God has taught through the ages. God is the sole object of worship. Yet, every society throughout all time periods has been pluralistic in their worship. Even we in America worship many gods. We may not have names like Hermes or Athena, but we have gods like money, sex, societal acclaim.

God is to be the sole object and receiver of worship. Everything else pales in comparison. No stone idol can rescue you or me. No paper money or sexual encounter or mere person can give you what only God can give, which is eternal life and eternal joy. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? ⁸ In the temple at Corinth, what are they worshipping – even if they feel innocent? Paul doesn’t mince words. He says they’re worshipping the devil. Just because gods aren’t real doesn’t mean demons aren’t. Satan’s goal is to deceive people through various forms. Whether it’s through a temple with a carved idol or through distracting people with various pursuits. Satan and the demons are always at work to keep people living in their blindness.

Ventura, this is the reality in our world today, which should cause us to have immense compassion and grace towards the world around us. It shouldn’t cause us to do exactly what they do, but instead should cause us to care for their souls. They should see a difference in our attitude, demeanor and actions so they might ask “Who we value most.”

Paul’s words here are almost scary to me. They didn’t seem to really understand they were fellowshiping with demons. It’s not that the meat was mystical, but in being in the temple and participating in the food and the fellowship with people, they were fellowshiping with the devil. “Wait, Pastor Timothy, are you saying a Christian can fellowship with Satan?” I’m not saying this. Paul says it! When we are not glorying in the gospel of Jesus and focusing on self, we are fellowshiping with the devil. What does that mean? That clearly doesn’t mean we lose our salvation, but it does mean that we are giving credence to the Lord’s enemy. If we truly value God supremely and know his superior worth, why would we ever want to give Satan or the demons any help in their deception of this world. May it never be! In verse 21, Paul adds, ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?⁹

This is a warning. This word for “jealous” doesn’t always have to mean sinful. God never sins. I can be jealous for someone’s wellbeing – meaning I have a passion for their good. Anything that works against their well-being causes a response in me to overcome those problems. That’s what jealousy means. God is jealous for his glory – which is the good for all humans. But if people, like Israel, provoke the Lord in their sin, he will do whatever it takes to ensure his glory is seen clearly. And, in case someone might say, “Well, I’ll get away with it,” Paul adds, “Are we stronger than he?”

Does this make sense, Ventura? God is stronger! Now here you could say, “This doesn’t sound as encouraging as last week’s sermon! Here it sounds like Paul is saying, “Obey. . .or else!” But we must keep all of Paul together. Paul wants us to admit our sinfulness and our need for the Lord. Verses 12-13 remain true. But I know that sometimes my tendency is to admit my sin and then soft-pedal it and try to say it’s not *that* bad. God calls for honest humility! Let’s not play around with God. Let’s not think we

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:22.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:22.

can better ourselves on our own. Let's be humble and say, "Lord, I need you." Let's together trust the Lord who is faithful!

So, Ventura, how's your life and your living? **Are you communicating one thing with your words but in your action your communicating idolatry? Are you honest with your sin and rejoicing in the Savior saying, "Now Lord, I would be yours alone and live so all might see the strength to follow your commands could never come from me?" Are you communicating to the world that you are reconciled to God by grace and now you do not live for the world's approval. Instead, you live in the approval of God with others who have been rescued by him!**

With this in mind, let's rejoice in the truths of communion together.

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