

1 Corinthians 10:1 – 11:1

^{8:1} Now concerning things sacrificed to idols...

^{10:1} For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren,
that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;
² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;
³ and all ate the same spiritual food;
⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink,
for they were drinking from a spiritual rock
which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

OT baptism: God's way of escape
OT meal: God's nourishment

⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased;
for they were laid low in the wilderness.

they fell

⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us,
so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

examples for us

⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were;
as it is written,

'The people sat down to eat and drink,
and stood up to play.'

crave: pleasure (Ex.32:6)

⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did,
and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

crave: marriage to unbelieving
women, sex (Num.25:9)

⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did,
and were destroyed by the serpents.

crave: comfort (Num.21:4 – 9)

¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did,
and were destroyed by the destroyer.

crave: blaming others (Num.16:41)

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example,
and they were written for our instruction,
upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

examples for us

¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands
take heed that he does not fall.

we must not fall

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man;
and God is faithful,
who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,
but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also,
so that you will be able to endure it.

God is faithful, makes you able
God's way of escape

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.	no idol worship
¹⁵ I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say.	
¹⁶ Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?	cup
Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?	table
¹⁷ Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.	
¹⁸ Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?	sharing in the altar
¹⁹ What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?	sacrifice is not to the idol
²⁰ No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.	sacrifice is to the demon no sharing in demons
²¹ 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.	cup table
²² Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?	no provoking the Lord
²³ ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are profitable. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things edify.	
²⁴ Let no one ‘seek his own good,’ but that of his neighbor.	seek not one’s own good seek the good of another
²⁵ Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake;	
²⁶ ‘for the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains.’	all things from God
²⁷ If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience’ sake.	eat (without questioning)
²⁸ But if anyone says to you, ‘This is meat sacrificed to idols,’ do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake;	do not eat for the other’s conscience
²⁹ I mean not your own conscience, but the other man’s; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience?	
³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?	eat (with thanksgiving)
³¹ Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.	all things to God
³² Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;	
³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.	seek not one’s own profit seek the good of another
^{11:1} Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.	personal appeal

Historical and Cultural Background



Idols, Gods, and Demons

- The best meat was eaten in the pagan temples, because of all the sacrifices brought there. Almost all major festivals were celebrated there. Meat was sold in the marketplaces but its price was relatively high. Dr. Gordon Fee argues that the entire section 8:1 – 10:22 refers to ‘the eating of sacrificial food at the cultic meals in the pagan temples... Then, in 10:23 – 11:1 he concludes with the matter of idol food sold in the market and eaten in private homes... The eating of cultic meals was a regular part of worship in antiquity. This is true not only of the nations that surrounded Israel, but of Israel itself. In the Corinth of Paul’s time, such meals were still the regular practice both at state festivals and private celebrate of various kinds. There were three parts to these meals: the preparation, the sacrifice proper, and the feast. The meat of the sacrifices apparently was divided into three portions: that burned before the god, that apportioned to the worshipers, and that placed on the ‘table of the god,’ which was tended by cultic ministrants but also eaten by the worshipers. The significance of these meals has been much debated, but most likely they involved a combination of religious and social factors. The gods were thought to be present since the meals were held in their honor and sacrifices were made; nonetheless, they were also intensely social occasions for the participants. For the most part the Gentiles who had become believers in Corinth had probably attended such meals all their lives... and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.’¹
- Paul’s reference to ‘gods’ (8:5) must be understood in context of the larger discussion in 8:1 – 11:1. Beings called ‘gods’ exist but are not peers to the one true God. Rather, ‘gods’ are the supernatural beings to which the physical idols point. Paul regarded them as demonic.
- Paul agrees with Moses on this point, who said that Israel sacrificed to *demons* in the wilderness: ‘They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread’ (Dt.32:17). Luke via Stephen also refers to demons (Acts 7:42 – 43).

Israel’s Exodus Story:

Paul has reminded the Corinthians of the Jewish Exodus story before as a precursor to their own spiritual parallel story.

- *Passover Deliverance*: Christ is our passover lamb who delivers us from sin (1 Cor.5:7 – 8)
- *Unleavened Bread*: We are to be ‘unleavened bread.’ Just as God cleansed Israel of leavened bread, and as Christ cleansed his body (individual) of sin, so Christ cleanses his body (corporate) of sin. (1 Cor.5:7 – 8)
- *Community Responsibility*: The community must participate with Christ in the cleansing of his community, just as Israel participated with God in the cleansing of their community (1 Cor.5:13).
- *Commandments*: Paul gave the Corinthians a ‘ten commandments’ list (1 Cor.6:9 – 10), like Moses gave Israel at Sinai.
- *God’s Dwelling Place*: God came to dwell among the Corinthians by His Spirit (1 Cor.6:16 – 20), like God came to dwell with the Israelites in the tabernacle.

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, also edited by Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1987), p.359 - 361

- *One God, One Lord:* In this section, Paul quotes the Shema creed of Deuteronomy 6:8 (1 Cor.8:6), identifying 'the one God' as the Father and 'the one Lord' as Jesus Christ.
- *God is the 'Rock' of His people:* In the wilderness, God called Himself the 'rock' of His people (Dt.32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31, 37 – 38). The word had multiple connotations, like hiding place, refuge, source of water, etc. The image of a 'rock' may echo Eden, a mountain (Ezk.28:13 – 14) from which four rivers flowed (Gen.2:10), since at Mount Horeb/Sinai, 'the mountain of God' (Ex.18:5), God brought water from a rock on the mountain of Horeb/Sinai (Ex.17:6). Paul says that Christ is the 'rock' which followed Israel in the wilderness.
- *Wilderness Temptation:* Now Paul shows the Corinthians the seriousness of temptation (1 Cor.10:1 – 10), just as Israel was tempted in the wilderness.

Questions

1. Leader: Put up these pictures of the Greek gods Ares, Aphrodite, and Zeus. Or others. Ask:
 - a. Who are these gods? What do they represent?
 - b. Why would anyone have worshiped them back then? Control. To gain control of
 - i. Beauty, love, romance (Aphrodite)
 - ii. War (Ares)
 - iii. Government/storms (Zeus)
 - iv. Commerce/speed (Hermes)
 - v. Safety on the seas (Poseidon)
 - vi. Healing (Asklepios)
 - vii. Fertility, family (Hera)
 - viii. Crops (Demeter)
 - c. Do we still worship these gods today? On the one hand, no. We don't have shrines and temples to them. But on the other hand, yes. If there is a power center like a temple, where would it be for each of these gods? Note that I'm not saying that Christians can't go work at all in the military, Hollywood, DC, or Wall Street. But I do think that we need to ask a lot of questions beforehand, and be spiritually prepared.
 - i. The Pentagon (Ares)
 - ii. Hollywood (Aphrodite)
 - iii. Washington DC (Zeus)
 - iv. Wall Street (Hermes)
 - d. (Possible reflection/sharing) Which god would you be most tempted to worship? Why?
 - e. Read the Historical and Cultural Background note about Idols, Gods, and Demons. Note that the classical world had lots of temples to these gods. And note especially that the meals
2. Questions that tend to come up with this passage:
 - a. What about eating ancestor worship meals in Asian culture? My belief is that it really does depend on what observers around us believe. If everyone else can take it as a sign of honor, it's okay with me. If people take it as a sign of loyalty, allegiance, and fealty, then no. If people take it as something is going on with actual spirits, then no.
 - b. What about secret societies like the Masons? Although I'm no expert in the Masons, I would say No. The whole premise of the organization is questionable.
 - c. What about Haitian voodoo? According to my friends at Haiti Partners, both Haitian and non-Haitian, there is a way to affirm certain values in voodoo as a culture: planting trees, decisions as a community, drums as a musical instrument. Of course you want to stay away from the demons!
 - d. Social effectiveness – you can't join everyone else at standard holidays, celebrations, etc.? Isn't it just about food, which is harmless? No. It's about *what we do with our bodies in certain spiritual and social contexts*
 - i. The Corinthian Christians needed to go to, or even create, neutral spaces where they could eat (more meat) with their non-Christian friends.
 - ii. Illus: We need to create neutral spaces where non-Christians can be with us. Like when my wife and housemates were trying to reach out to young people in our neighborhood. They would often hang out together outside smoking marijuana and swearing. When we tried to hang out with them, they would either laugh at us or ignore us. So we spent \$7,000 remodeling our basement to turn it into a teen outreach and hangout space. We moved a boiler around, cleared and cleaned a big area, and then advertised to friends that we could use thing to reach out. We got a TV, a Dance-Dance Revolution, board games, a foosball table, and some furniture. Our housemate Leslie was the primary person who hung out with the youth during certain times, for homework help and hangout times. That period of time lasted for 6 months or so. During that time, 4 – 5 teenage boys went with Leslie fairly regularly to church worship services!
3. The first chiasm (10:1 – 13): Cravings
 - a. Partying and sex: 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play' (10:7). This refers to Exodus 32:6 when the people of Israel were waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain in his conversation with God. They decided to throw a party and have an orgy. They

made a golden calf from all the golden earrings and other gold things that they had brought out of Egypt.

- b. Marriages with foreign idol-worshipping women; unite with other people by worshipping their gods: ‘Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day’ (10:8). This refers to Numbers 25 when some of the Israelite men probably had sex with Moabite women, one with a Midianite woman. A plague killed twenty-four thousand Israelites in total. It is not certain why Paul said twenty-three thousand in one day. Perhaps there was an oral tradition differentiating one day vs. the whole plague. But there is no other evidence for it.
 - c. Comfort food from Egypt, ingratitude to God: ‘Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents’ (10:9). This was one of the last ways that the first generation of Israelites died in the wilderness. The people became impatient and complained majorly about food and water that God had provided. So God sent snakes to bite them, and also gave a way for them to be healed (Num.21:5 – 9).
 - d. Blaming others, refusal to accept God’s cleansing: ‘Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer’ (10:10). This was probably when the twelve spies went into the promised land. Except for Joshua and Caleb, they felt overwhelmed and refused to take courage, so a plague struck them (Num.14:36 – 38).
 - e. Illus: Notice that Dr. Martin Luther King spoke about ‘the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism’ in multiple speeches. He was using food as a motif of internalizing beliefs, lies, and evil. There are certain *group contexts* or *media contexts* where, even if there is not explicit demonic activity, we have to be very careful about what we take in, just because everyone is taking it in.
 - f. Other possibilities where eating food is linked to ‘eating’ evil:
 - i. Drinking to drunkenness – at certain parties, people celebrate individualism. But how many of you are tempted to get drunk when you’re with your parents??? Context matters. A Christian can go there if s/he has integrity and cares about people. But otherwise, you might want to create alternative fun events.
 - ii. Eating to gluttony – there are certain parties, meetings, where this might be expected.
 - iii. Groups where eating disorders are affirmed and normalized – look online and you’d be surprised
 - iv. Wall Street Secret Society parties:
 1. Kevin Rouse, *One-Percent Jokes and Plutocrats in Drag: What I Saw When I Crashed a Wall Street Secret Society*; <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/02/i-crashed-a-wall-street-secret-society.html>
 2. Kevin Rouse, *Revealed: The Full Membership List of Wall Street’s Secret Society*; <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/02/revealed-members-of-kappa-beta-phi.html>
4. The second chiasm: Demons
- a. Why would food still be okay if it gets sold in the marketplace, and eaten at home, but the context of the pagan temple matters?
 - i. Because the demons are real. Are demons really real? Yes, they are. I am a supernaturalist, and not ashamed of it. For more info, please see: <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-holy-spirit-spiritual-warfare-demons-ppts.pdf>
 - ii. Because the act of communal eating is like a pledge of allegiance
 - b. Why did the Corinthian Christians think they could just go into a pagan temple?
 - i. Possibly, as Gordon Fee thinks, they thought that the bread and wine of Christian communion were some kind of magical protection. Notice that back in 10:1 – 4, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Israelites in the wilderness had had bread and water supernaturally given to them by God. But it wasn’t a magical protection.
 - ii. They wanted to hang out with their pagan friends in those contexts.
 - iii. They wanted to eat meat.
 - iv. They thought it was spiritually harmless.
5. The third chiasm: Conscience

- a. There is a principle here in 10:23 – 24 and in the opposite side of the chiasm in 10:32 – 11:1 . Rather than indulge your body like the pagans do, respect people’s consciences as a Christian. That is a higher calling.
- b. Now we are talking about meat sold in the market (10:25). In that case, food comes from God (10:26).
- c. When it is served to you at someone’s home, you can eat it! (10:27)
- d. Unless someone, ‘anyone,’ whispers to you that this meat was sacrificed to idols. Presumably this ‘anyone’ is like a servant of the household or another guest. And you don’t have the time or space to pull that person aside and discuss the finer points of your theology and spirituality. In that case, ‘do not eat it.’ Why?
 - i. Because the other person will probably conclude that you would be fine eating in a pagan idol temple
 - ii. Because the other person will probably conclude that worshipping Jesus can be synthesized with worshipping Zeus, Hades, Ares, Aphrodite, and so on. Or maybe those beings are really one in the same! Definitely not true.
- e. So when Paul exhorts us to do all to the glory of God, glory means ‘revealing.’ We are revealing something about the truth about who God is, at all times, given the understanding of other people in the moment.
 - i. You can eat meat when someone else’s understanding is not at stake. Why? Because you are revealing that all food comes from God. He quotes Psalm 24 to show it.
 - ii. You can reject meat when someone else’s understanding is at stake. Why? Because you are revealing that this God is different from all the other gods. Hurrah!
 - iii. Probably this is what Paul meant, concretely, in 10:13 when he said:

¹³No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man;
 and God is faithful,
 who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,
 but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also,
 so that you will be able to endure it.

He is saying that he can give you a practical solution to the problem of meat and idol temples.