

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Week #12 – Adult Bible Study

I Corinthians 10:1 – 11:1

December 3 & 4, 2024

10:1-22

1. The larger context is important to remember here: Paul is addressing matters related to the worship of idols
2. The Corinthians seem to think that anything related to idols is of no concern to them because they now know that there is only one God
3. Paul sees the situation differently
4. In Chapter 8, Paul has asserted that association with idol worship is a concern for the weaker members of the church
5. In Chapter 9, Paul urges the spiritually strong to surrender their rights for the sake of the spiritually weaker members
6. Now, in Chapter 10, Paul will argue that engaging in temple meals of idols actually produces spiritual peril for Christians, whether strong or weak
7. The basis of Paul’s argument in the opening (and major) section of Chapter 10 is an appeal to the story of Israel in the wilderness
 - a. Though Paul is writing to people who are primarily Gentile, it is clear that he considers the story of Israel (Jews) to be also the story of Christians – whether Jew or Gentile
 - b. This move is important for the particular point Paul is making here, and also important for the larger implication: Gentiles are the spiritual heirs of the Jews insofar as they believe in the Jewish Messiah – Christ, making the Church the “new Israel” that is based on faith, not on biological or historical heritage
8. Paul makes several metaphorical points regarding Christian baptism being like the “baptism” of Israel in the Cloud and the Sea that both figured prominently in the Exodus story
 - a. This metaphorical move is simply to make the more important and powerful spiritual point that Israel experienced signs of God’s favor and power in the event of the Exodus and the Wilderness
9. Going further with the Exodus/Wilderness story, Paul makes the point that even while the Jews were experiencing the saving power and favor of God, they were susceptible to wandering and thus to judgement from God
10. Paul warns the Corinthians not to repeat the mistakes of the Israel, making 4 specific points
 - a. The worst sin of the Wilderness Generation was their idolatry – of the Golden Calf – and for this Israel was judged. Just as they “ate and drank” and then “played” (reference to sexual promiscuity), so the Corinthians are in peril when they eat and drink as part of idol worship (v7)
 - b. The next point (v8) is that when Israel worshiped idols, they also intermarried with pagan peoples and thus polluted the purity of their faith and relationship with the God who had saved them
 - c. The next point (v9) is an allusion to Numbers 21:4-9, where the people are punished for complaining against God by the introduction of poisonous serpents. Such complaining is tantamount to testing God
 - d. The final point (v10) seems to be related to Numbers 14, and is again about the people complaining against God, and the punishment was that this generation must wander and die in the wilderness before the next generation is allowed to enter the Promised Land
11. The overall impact of these warnings is to indicate that God is not to be trifled with, nor presumed upon for his grace and mercy. God demands complete and total allegiance – a pure relationship – and any flirtation with anything other than him – other gods – is not to be tolerated
12. Paul goes on to discuss the spiritual implications of meals
 - a. Pagan worship meals – eating meals sacrificed to idols – create a form of relationship among the believers, just as the Lord’s Supper does
 - b. The Lord’s Supper also creates relationship with God, which pagan meals cannot do, because the gods worshiped there do not, in fact, even exist
 - c. The meal and the eating is still dangerous, though, because of the temptation to begin believing in idols and the reality of fellowship created with those who are not in Christ’s body
 - d. And...further...though other gods do not exist, there is the existence of demons – spiritual powers who are opposed to God – and to eat within context of pagan worship is to open the door to the power of these demons

13. With v13, Paul provides an important positive point: that all people are tested, and God gives power to withstand. Still, life itself brings enough testing on its own: we do not need to subject ourselves to further tests by making foolish decisions

10:23 – 11:1

14. In this section, Paul addresses another concern related to food offered to idols
15. Here, the problem is not participation in actual ritual or worship of idols and the subsequent eating of food sacrificed to them
16. The problem is whether one can eat such meat outside of the context of worship – to eat the “leftover” meat that is then sold in the public market
17. Paul makes two major points:
- a. Again, care should be taken for the spiritual well-being of the weaker among them. If the weaker cannot in good conscience eat such meat, then the stronger should not do so in their presence
 - b. The meat itself is not, however, impure or corrupted, because there is no such thing as a god other than the God of Israel/Christians. Eating such meat is allowed, so long as it does not cause another to stumble
 - i. With this view, Paul breaks from traditional Judaism, which held that any meat associated with idol worship was corrupt and not to be eaten, whether in a worship context or in a simple meal
18. Paul ends this section (with 11:1, not 10:33) by urging the Corinthian Christians to imitate him
- a. He does so not of any conviction that he is a “super Christian”
 - b. He is merely pointing out that he is more experienced and educated in the Way of Christ, and just as any student learns from a teacher, so should the Corinthians learn from him
 - c. The ultimate example, of course, is Christ himself

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. Paul urges us to be humble about our own spiritual strength. Is there a particular part of your life where this advice hits home?
- B. Paul considers the spiritual legacy and history of the Jews to be equally important and operational in Gentile as well as Jewish Christians. What does this mean for your own faith?
- C. What are modern forms of idolatry that tempt and derail us?
- D. Discuss the importance of “table fellowship” and how you can engage it more successfully in your Christian community
- E. Christian faith erases all superstition about the spiritual power of objects or empty rituals. Is there a place in your life and thought where you still ascribe power to these kinds of things?

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

Resources:

- Interpretation Commentary on First Corinthians, Richard B. Hays, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997
- Interpretation Commentary on Second Corinthians, Ernest Best, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1987
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 1 Corinthians – Life in the Local Church, David Prior, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 2 Corinthians – Power in Weakness, Paul Barnett, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1988
- The Communicator’s Commentary, 1, 2 Corinthians, Kenneth L. Chafin, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1985