

## Don't Dine With Demons

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Introduction: C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was a British scholar who taught at both Cambridge and Oxford. He was one of the finest Christian thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, writing classics such as *The Chronicle of Narnia*; *Mere Christianity*; *The Problem of Pain*; and *The Screwtape Letter*. The latter book is a fictional conversion (epistle) between an older wiser demon named Screwtape and his young apprentice named Wormwood. In the preface to this imaginary correspondence Lewis sounds a warning from all who have ears to hear: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialistic or magician with the same delight.” (Lewis, *Screwtape*, 3). I think Lewis is right and his counsel extremely valuable. But, at Corinth in c.A.D. 55, the Corinthians had an issue with demons that actually did not fall into either of these categories. They believed in demons, but they failed to understand how dangerous and seductive they are. When it came to eating food sacrificed to an idol in an idol temple, they did not realize they were actually dining with demons! Paul knew if you dance with the devil, you should not be surprised when you get

burned. Just as we must “flee sexual immorality” (6:18), we must also “flee idolatry” (10:14). These two sins are like twins. They always go together. We must always be on guard against both.

I. Communion with the Lord is essential 10:14-17

Paul will address at some length Communion or the Lord’s Supper in 11:17-34. However, he will address it briefly in these verses drawing a contrast between dining at the Lord’s table and dining at the tables of demons. There are similarities and differences we must recognize and understand. The consequences of how we respond are massive.

1) We are to flee idolatry 10:14-15

Paul is tender, but also direct. “So then” (*ESV*, “Therefore”) draws attention to the importance of the verse and connects it to the previous paragraph, especially v. 13. “Dear friends” (*ESV*, “beloved”) communicates his affection and love for the church. God will provide for you a way of escape from the danger of idolatry. His “way out” (v.13): “Flee idolatry!” The warning is a present imperative, a word of command calling for continuous vigilance and attention. Keep on fleeing, running away from, idolatry. Paul adds to his command saying, “I am speaking as to sensible people” (v. 15). This makes sense if you just think about it. “Judge for yourselves what I am saying.” If you run from idolatry, it will be hard for it to catch you. Stay

away from it and the temptation to give in to it will not present itself. If you are not at the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people, the wrong thing will not happen. That is good common sense and a word of wisdom we should all listen to.

2) We are to fellowship with the Savior 10:16-17

Paul informs us that there is a table of communion we should draw near.

There is a right place and a right time and a right people we should regularly fellowship with. It is the Lord's Supper where we draw close to Christ in participation with our spiritual family. This too is a way to flee idolatry and the worship of false gods.

A) The cup emphasizes our communion 10:16

Paul writes, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing (*ESV*, "participation") in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? (v. 16)." Tom Schreiner notes, "At the Supper a believer's relationship and communion with Christ are deepened, and the solidarity between believers and Christ is attested" (*1 Cor.*, TNTC, 210). A religious meal is more than taking in physical nourishment. They have great spiritual value and significance. Here we draw near to our God as a community, a family, of faith. We seek His presence and pledge our allegiance and devotion to our Lord. This is no mere ritual we thoughtlessly

perform. We reflect on the love of the Lord Jesus so clearly demonstrated by His broken body and shed blood on Calvary's cross. We recall again and again His perfect atoning sacrifice that paid in full the penalty of all our sins. The Lord's Supper reminds us again and again of the truth, "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

B) The bread emphasizes our union

10:17

Verse 17 anticipates Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and the one/many analogy with the human body and the body of Christ. The repetition of the word "one," occurring 3 times, is the key to unlocking this verse. Consider, Paul writes, what is being communicated when we observe communion. "Because there is one bread," not many, "we who are many are one body, since all of us share the one bread." There is a breathtaking beauty to this verse. The body of Christ is one! We are fed by one source who is the Lord Jesus Christ. We share a common bond and unity as one body even though we have different cultural, economic, social and racial backgrounds. In Christ we are one family which is beautifully testified to by the meal of communion shared at the Lord's Table. John MacArthur summarizes the truth of this verse so well, "Christ's body also symbolizes our unity in Jesus Christ...Because we are one with Christ, we are one with each other. As we come into fellowship with Christ through Communion, we come into

fellowship with each other in a unique and deep way (cf 1 Cor. 6:17). All believers stand on the same ground at the foot of the cross as forgiven sinners who possess the eternal life principle within them” (1 Cor., 239).

## II. Association with demons is evil

10:18-22

Paul will now deliver his knockout punch concerning the foolishness of going to an idol temple and eating food offered to an idol. You wind up eating dinner with demons! You also wind up provoking our God to jealousy (v. 22) which only compounds the foolishness of flirting with the world and its gods. Paul provides 3 reasons why eating food sacrificed to idols is foolish and why we should heed his counsel to flee idolatry.

### 1) It distorts our worship

10:18-20

Once again Paul appeals to the history of the Hebrews. He calls us to “Consider (*NASB*, “Look at”) the people of Israel.” He then raises a rhetorical question, “Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?” (v. 18). Given the context, it is very likely Paul again is looking at Israel’s sinful behavior in the wilderness where they were guilty of gross idolatry and sexual immorality. Mark Taylor is helpful, “When the Israelites partook of idolatrous sacrifices, they participated in the altar and what the altar represented. Those who ate the food of the sacrifice entered into a partnership with all that the altar stood for” (*1 Cor.*, *NAC*, 242). They

fellowshipped and dined with false gods and the demons lurking behind them. Paul raises a second and third question for us to consider. First, “What am I saying?” The *ESV* says, “What do I imply then?” (v. 19) The idea is what do I mean by writing these words? Second question, “That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?” (v. 19). He then follows with a devastating and eye-opening truth, “No, but I do say (*ESV*, “imply”) that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.” Then follows his prophetic and pastoral concern, “I do not want you to be participants with demons!” Wow! Let’s unpack this (v. 20). Verses 20-21 are the only time Paul mentions demons in 1 Cor. Apparently, he assumes they know what he is talking about. Not convinced we should make that assumption in 21<sup>st</sup> century secular and biblically illiterate America, let me provide a quick outline summary of demonology!

#### 1) WHO ARE DEMONS (4 Possibilities)?

1. The spirits of a pre-Adamic evil race.
2. The spirits of evil men.
3. The product of angels cohabitating with women in Genesis 6:1-4.
4. Fallen angels. This overwhelmingly is the most likely answer and the one the church has affirmed throughout its history.

#### 2) WHAT ARE SOME BASIC BIBLICAL FACTS ABOUT DEMONS?

1. Possible 1/3 of the angels fell with Satan (Rev. 12:4).
2. Some demons are free to roam now (Mark 1: 21-34).
3. Some demons will be free to roam during the great tribulation (Rev. 9:13-19).
4. Some demons are confined now never to roam the earth again (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6).
5. Demons are powerful but not omnipotent (Mark 1:24). Only God is omnipotent.
6. Their activity may have increased during the time of Christ, and it may also increase again at the end of the age before Christ returns (see Rev. 6-19).
7. They are set up under Satan's control (Eph. 6:11-12), probably in rank, possibly in geography (Dan. 10:10-12).
8. They have authority and can promote disunity, false doctrine, false worship, cause mental difficulties, and hinder Christian growth.
9. Demons can oppress but not possess believers.
10. Demons use idolatry to further false worship of false gods.

So, demons are real (Jesus thought so too!), and they like to use idols for their nefarious work of promoting false worship. They have unbelievers in their clutches, but they also present an ever-present danger to believers in Jesus as

well. John Piper is right, when we dine with demons “we get entangled in their power. We submit to them. We become vulnerable to them. We enter into some kind of fellowship. We affirm them in some way and give them leeway in our lives” (*“Idolatry, the Lord’s Supper, and the Body of Christ,”* 10-4-92).

2) It compromises our loyalty

10:21

Paul draws an irrefutable conclusion in verse 21 from his argument in verses 18-20, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot share in the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” *The Message* says, “You can’t have it both ways, banqueting with the Master one day and slumming with demons the next.” Who will feed and nourish our souls? Christ or demons? Who will provide our spiritual sustenance? Christ or demons? Who will we dance and dine with? Christ or demons? YOU CANNOT DO BOTH! YOU CANNOT HAVE IT BOTH WAYS! Gordon Fee provides food for thought on this verse: “Those who eat at the Lord’s Table, proclaiming his death until he come (11:26), are thereby also bound to one another through the death of the Lord that is thus celebrated. So also with pagans. Theirs is a sacred “fellowship” in honor of demons. Those who are bound to one another through Christ cannot also become “fellows” (=be in partnership) with those whose meals are consecrated to demons.” (*1 Cor.*,



NICNT, 522). In 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah asked the people, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him.” Paul calls the Corinthians to make the same decision. He calls on us to decide as well.

### 3) It provokes God

10:22

Paul concludes this section with a powerful word of warning by means of two rhetorical questions. First, “Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy?” Second, “Are we stronger than he?” The 2<sup>nd</sup> of the Ten Commandments may be in view here. There Moses writes, “Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Ex. 20:4-5). C.K. Barrett ask, “Do we suppose that we (even though we regard ourselves as ‘the strong’—cf. viii. 7, 10) can play fast and loose with our loyalty to [God] (as some in Corinth were disposed to do), and get away with it?... God is not mocked.” (*1 Cor.*, HNTC, 238). God’s position on idolatry has a long history, and He has not changed His mind. Provoking Christ to jealousy is clearly the way of the fool not the wise, no matter what one says. “Are we stronger than He?” Does not the history of the OT and our Lord’s empty tomb teach us anything? We are ants before an elephant in comparison to our God. Warren

Wiersbe in his clear and simple way captures what Paul wants us to understand in this final question. “Are we stronger than he?” (1Cor. 10:22) is directed at the strong Christian who was sure he could enjoy his liberty in the pagan temple and not be harmed. “You may be stronger than your weaker brother,” Paul intimated, “but you are not stronger than God!” It is dangerous to play with sin and tempt God.” (*Be Wise*, 104).

Conclusion: The wonderful theologian, pastor and author A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) wisely said: “Christianity at any given time is strong or weak depending upon her concept of God. And I insist upon this, and I have said it many times, that the basic trouble with the Church today is her unworthy conception of God . . . . Our religion is little because our god is little. (*The Attributes of God*, vol. 1, Kindle location, 567). Tozer is right. Think little of God and you will think that dining with demons and dancing with idols is no big deal. What fools that makes us. What dishonor we bring to the One whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for sinners like you and me. No demon and no idol died for you. Why would you even go near their house?