

1 Corinthians 10:1-22

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[0:00] Well, please turn up 1 Corinthians chapter 10. It's page 957 in the Black Church Bible Church.

It's not uncommon to be in Richmond Park and for tourists to try and get as close as they possibly can to the deer for a photograph.

There's a deer there with massive antlers and somebody just getting as close as they possibly can in order to get a picture. Really dangerous. Do you remember Steve Irwin, the Australian TV star, used to cozy up to deadly animals?

He used to get a crocodile in a headlock and point at how big the teeth were. Look at how dangerous this little fella is, kind of thing. And it was great viewing until one of those animals killed him.

He'd got too close and he died. Here's the thing. Some of us do the very same thing when it comes to sin.

[1:28] We put ourselves in situations where we get as close as we possibly can to the danger. Think we're going to be okay, but we get as close as we can and then we fall.

We've seen it happen to others and we've convinced ourselves that we're different, that it's not going to be that way for us, and that we have more self-control or we're more resilient.

And then we drop over the edge. We weren't that resilient after all. Our self-control wasn't at the level that we convinced ourselves that it was. We got too close and like Steve Irwin with that stingray, I think it was, that killed him.

Well, we're over the edge. As we come back to 1 Corinthians this morning, we've been away for a few weeks. This is the issue that the apostle addresses in the church. They're playing fast and loose with sin, especially in regards to the idolatry of the old religion that they have come from and the associated practices that go with that, like eating meat that was offered in pagan worship.

And Paul has told them that they shouldn't think that they are too mature. Or if you remember last time, a few weeks ago, they were talking about their knowledge. We know certain things.

[2:42] Their theology is good. And he's saying, don't think that your theology, however right and good it might be, is enough to keep you from sin. You're not above falling into sin, he tells them.

And you shouldn't behave in ways that might lead others. You might have all the knowledge that you need, but actually the way that you're behaving may lead others into sin, and that is serious as well. And so, to press this point further, as we come to the start of chapter 10 this morning, we're continuing in the argument that Paul began back at the beginning of chapter 8.

And Paul starts with a history lesson, and then he teaches the Corinthians what is really going on in sacred meals. He wants them to look at an example from history, and he wants them to understand what is going on in sacred meals, so that they won't fall into sin.

So, here's the first point. History as a caution. He gives them some history as a caution. Verse 1, For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.

And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

[3:57] Paul starts by connecting this church to those who have gone before. Do you see? He says there are fathers. So, as far as God's dealing with His people is concerned, as one commentator has said, the community of faith under the old covenant flows uninterrupted into the community of faith in the new.

The people of God did not begin with the disciples of Jesus, but back with Abraham. And so, Paul reminds the Corinthians here what happened to their forefathers, those that have gone before. Israel were under Pharaoh's tyranny in Egypt, and God redeemed them through the Red Sea, taking them towards the promised land under the oversight of Moses. And the way Paul describes it, he says they were all under the cloud.

That is, they all experienced God's protection on that journey. They were baptized into Moses. Now, not that they actually received the rite of baptism, but just as Moses was brought out of the reeds in the water, they were brought through the Reed Sea, the Red Sea.

This was their baptism as they were marked out by God. They were brought under Moses' leadership. That's what he means. They ate the same spiritual food. They drank the same spiritual drink.

[5:06] God provided for them supernaturally in the wilderness. The manna, the bread from heaven in Exodus 16, and the water that flowed from the rock in Exodus 17. God graciously provided for His people as they were in the wilderness.

Paul says then, interestingly, did you notice, that the spiritual rock that went with them was Christ. Sounds a bit strange to speak of Christ all the way back then. Surely, He comes later.

But if you remember, back in chapter 8, we were reminded that there is one God and Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Paul has told us in chapter 8, Christ is the one through whom God created everything. So, we should have no problem seeing Him as the source of the food and the water that nourished Israel in those wilderness days.

It's the same Christ acting across history, the same Christ behind the salvation and the redemption and the sustaining of God's people as He is today.

[6:06] There is only one Savior. There is only one source of blessing. There is only one place that you can go to receive the grace of God, and that is Christ. That is just as true for us as it was for the Corinthians, as it was for Abraham.

We are counted righteous before God by faith in Christ and Christ alone. Let me say, by the way, if you're looking into Christianity, and you've been here on these Sunday mornings as we've been looking at this wayward church in the first century, and we've been talking over these weeks about their idolatry and idol feasts and things like that, and you think, that sounds a bit out of touch with my life, let me simplify it for you.

Go to Jesus. Go to Jesus. He will deal with your sin, He will reconcile you to God, and He will sustain you all the way to glory.

Go to Jesus. God was gracious to Israel back in the day. This point here, Paul's point here, is what they did with that blessing. What did they do with it?

They rejected it. 7 to 10. Verse 7, Do not be idolaters. Exodus 32, When Moses was up the mountain talking to God, the people got bored waiting for Him to return.

[7:20] So what did they do? They got all their jewelry together. They melted it down. They built a golden calf to worship. They wanted a God who was strong and who would make them fertile.

So they made a bull that reflected that wish, and they bowed down in worship. Verse 7, Israel rose up to play. That is a euphemism for sexual immorality, and that then is made explicit in verse 8, where Paul reminds them of the events of Numbers 25.

The Israelites were sleeping with the Moabite women. They'd been told not to do that, because if you go after the Moabite women, God said, you'll go after their gods, and that's what they did. Sexual immorality that led to the worship of false gods.

Verse 9, They put Christ to the test. He was the rock, remember, that followed Israel in the wilderness. But we're told in Numbers chapter 21 that the people doubted God's ability and willingness to provide for them.

They tested Him. You're not who you say you are. You're not good enough. And then verse 10, they grumbled. They grumbled against Moses' leadership.

[8:25] They whinged the whole way through the wilderness experience. And we're told in Numbers 14, Numbers 16, that that kindled God's anger towards them. Syncretistic worship, sexual sin, tempting Christ by failing to trust God and grumbling against authority.

Look how God responds. Verse 5, He overthrew them in the desert. Verse 8, 23,000 were killed in a moment. Verse 9, He unleashed snakes on the people and many died.

And verse 10, God's destroying angel destroyed them in their sin. You can't mess about with God. You can't play fast and loose with sin and think that God is going to be okay with that. God is jealous for His honor and His glory and He will not share that with anyone or anything else. Not because He's petty. Not because there's some unmet need in Him that if you don't meet it, He then is offended in some way.

No, because He's God. Because there is no other. He is supremely holy. But the history lesson isn't just a history lesson for the Corinthians because Paul likes history.

[9:48] Verse 6, He uses Israel as an example. Why? So that the Corinthians might not desire evil as they did. He wants them to learn from Israel's history.

And He didn't choose a random list of sins. Striking. The sins that He chose to point out, it's a pointed way of speaking to the Corinthians. So remember what we've seen is going on in the church in Corinth.

Their theological knowledge made them think that they can go to idol feasts and they can eat the food that has been offered to those idols. You know, we know that an idol is nothing. It's nothing. These people are saying that they've offered this food to such and such.

Such and such doesn't exist. So it's fine. We'll go along. But it looks very much to everybody else that they are fully taking part in the worship that is involved.

They have a problem in the church with sexual immorality. Chapter 5, there's a man sleeping with his stepmother and the church are fine to tolerate this. The Corinthians are struggling to trust God in their circumstances.

[10:51] They would rather, we saw in chapter 6, sue another Christian than preserve the unity of the church. We'll say more on that at the end of the sermon. They would rather fulfill their own appetites than honor God with their bodies.

They don't, to put it simply, they don't trust that God is enough. There's an injustice. They've got to go and get justice because God won't, they can't trust Him with that. And of course, it definitely feels, doesn't it, as we read 1 Corinthians that the church is grumbling about Paul's ministry.

Chapter 1, some are choosing to follow other teachers. Yeah, well, Paul's style doesn't really track with us so we're going to go with Apollos. Oh, you know, we're more Cephas people.

Chapters 2 and 4, Paul has to defend his ministry. Chapter 9, he talks about his integrity, do you remember, in giving up his apostolic rights for the sake of the gospel. Why does he have to do that? He has to defend himself because the people are grumbling against him.

The same sins that caused Israel to be judged are present in the Corinthian church. And just as Paul wanted them to learn the lesson, we must also see their example and avoid the same behavior.

[12:01] Don't think that we can't fall into sin in exactly the same ways. Don't think that you can get really close to the deer for your photograph and think that that antler won't cut your head off or whatever might happen.

There was probably a time when the idea of making and worshiping a golden bull would have seemed absurd to the Israelites. There was probably a time when the Corinthians, if you'd said to them, you know, you're going to tolerate unrepentant sexual sin in the congregation, they would have said, not us, we know our theology.

And let's be honest, there was probably a time when holding on to some sinful behavior, cherishing it, rolling it around in your mouth, would have been a no-no.

You would have said, oh, that's not me. That's not biblical. I'm not going to go there. Gossip, bitterness, lust, anger, not me. I'm not going there.

But now you've found a way to justify it. We are very good, if we're honest with ourselves, very good at justifying what we want.

[13:11] Verse 12, don't think you can't fall. Here's what happens. You lose sight of the holiness and the majesty and the jealousy of God.

When that happens, you think that you can mess around with sin. What was one of the things that was happening when they made the golden calf? They were creating a God that they made, that they could control, that they could move around, that they were able to do what they wanted with. That's what we all do. We domesticate God. We put Him in a box. We put Him in the cupboard, close the door, keep Him over there so I can carry on living my life however I want.

God is easy to disobey when you domesticate Him. When you stand above God, He is easy to disobey. But if you remember His majesty and His holiness and His power, if you see Him as He is revealed in the Bible, you try to avoid sin rather than get close to it.

You could say, well, yeah, you don't understand. The temptation is really strong. It's really tough. She's really beautiful or He's really amazing or, yeah, but I just needed to say that thing at that particular point because it was right and it was true.

[14 : 35] Verse 13, 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.

You don't have to give in to sin. Paul starts with history. The Israelites are an example to teach those who follow, but then He applies the principle into the Corinthians present context.

Here's why the idol feasts that they're going to are such a problem. Here's the second point.

Number two, sacred meals as a participation. History as a caution, sacred meals as a participation. That's 14 to 22. Meals devoted to a deity aren't just meals. Something more is going on. A cup of blessing, verse 16, that we bless.

Is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? Bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

[15 : 46] Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? Why do I imply, what do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything or that an idol is anything? No.

I imply that what pagan sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. Paul starts with the Lord's Supper.

He then goes to the example of Israel, then the idol meals, and his point is this. To partake in the meal is to partake in, to commune with, to have fellowship with, the one to whom the meal is devoted.

I want to make two observations here. The first concerns the Lord's Supper, and the second concerns demons. That's what Paul says. So that's what we're going to do. Now I suspect that if I was to ask you at the door, not this morning because after this sermon you'd give a different answer, but last week if I was to ask you at the door why Jesus instituted the Lord's Table, why did He institute the Lord's Supper, you'd say something like to remember His death.

And of course that's right. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. But Paul here is telling us that more is going on at the Lord's Supper than mere remembrance.

[17 : 03] More is going on than remembrance alone. When the cup is blessed, when the bread is broken, we are participating in the body and blood of Christ.

Not that the bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Jesus as the Roman Catholic Church believed, nor that Christ is present within the bread and wine as the Lutheran tradition teaches, but we participate covenantally.

What that means is when we receive the bread and wine rightly, that is by faith in the Lord Jesus, we receive Christ and we share in His benefits.

We share in the benefits of His saving work. This is a remarkable thing. It is the highest privilege of the meal because it is a wonderful expression of the love of God.

At the cross, Jesus' body was broken as He bore the anger of God at sin. At the cross, Jesus' blood was shed as He took what we deserved in our place in order that both God's holiness could be upheld and that His love could be experienced by those who put their faith in Him.

[18 : 19] And that glorious sacrifice, that work that He did at the cross is sufficient for all who will turn from their sin and trust themselves to Christ. And it is received as a gift.

We can't earn it. We can't do anything to be part of that in our own strength. We can only receive it as a gift of His astronomical love. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, let me be crystal clear, that is what saves you, not the Lord's Supper.

But God's love continues to flow to us such that when we take the supper together in true faith, we are not simply remembering those glorious things, we are participating in them and we are being strengthened and changed by God.

Now, there is mystery there. For sure there is. John Calvin said that the Lord's Supper was better to be experienced than explained. But what is certain is this. The Lord's table is a gift of God's love to us.

So, don't play it down. Don't think lightly of it and don't treat it lightly either. Don't treat it as just a bland ritual. But come and participate in Christ by faith.

[19 : 38] That's the first observation. The second observation relates to what Paul says here in verse 20 about demons. Verse 20. Now, Hollywood is more taken with the ideas, with ideas of evil than in previous years.

That's certainly the case. And I think probably the exposure of darker elements in society has led more people in the mainstream to use the language of demonic, that kind of thing. But there is a lot of confusion, so it's important that we understand these verses.

What does it mean to participate with demons? Paul has said earlier that we know that idols are nothing. There is no Apollo or Zeus. There is no God.

There are no gods or goddesses. There's one God. There are no others. So, when that meat is being offered to those gods, nothing happens to the meat because they're non-gods.

But because they are nothing, doesn't mean that nothing is happening when they are worshipped. There are demonic forces of evil behind these so-called gods who draw people away from the true God.

[20 : 50] Australian theologian Paul Barnett says this, demons exist and they are present in the temples of the gods as the priests offer sacrifices and the people eat the sacrifices. They worship demons. They are in touch with demons.

They open their lives to demons. Behind every false god, everything that demands our devotion, whether those are the gods of Corinth or Islam or Hinduism or secularism or big tech, anything that we devote ourselves to, anything that claims lordship over us, behind them all are supernatural evil forces.

and to play around with them, verse 20, is to participate with demons. If you have had a religious background that involved worship by means of idols, don't let your Christian knowledge, knowledge that those things are just wood or metal or stone, don't let that knowledge lead you to ignore the dark spiritual reality behind them.

and don't think that anything that demands your obedience and commitment in some way, be it a godless state or a tech company or anything else, don't think that that thing is neutral.

Anything that takes your allegiance away from the Lord Jesus is at root demonic. Now, what that means then is to be loyal to Christ is going to be costly.

[22 : 25] To recognize that and to distance yourself from it is going to be costly. For the Corinthians, their loyalty to Christ meant they couldn't do business with those at the idol temples.

Now, doubtless for some of the Corinthians, coming to Christ meant their professional success will have vanished. In the same way, when we refuse to bow the knee to the gods of this age, our professional success will surely take a hit as well.

For the Corinthians, saying no to the idols meant that they would be outliers and they'd get a reputation for being weird or awkward or difficult. It'll be exactly the same for us.

Alongside what is very evidently a growing interest in Christianity and our culture, there continues to be pressure for all of us to bow the knee to the new orthodoxies and the pressure to just do what everyone else is doing so that we're, you know, just like everyone else.

The pressure to do that is immense, especially for those of you that are in your teens, especially in the school environment, especially where everyone else is doing this thing and you think, well, you know, I just want to fit in.

[23 : 35] However hard we try, I want to say that you cannot be a consistent Christian and have people think that you're normal.

You cannot be a consistent Christian in this day and age and think that people will speak well of you. And that is the cost of faithfulness. Paul takes the Corinthian laxness about idle feasts so seriously because sacred meals involve participation and to mess about with this is to participate and it is to provoke the Lord to jealousy.

Verse 22. The God of heaven and earth deserves our wholehearted devotion. We shouldn't flirt with sin. We shouldn't try and get as close as we can and think we'll be okay.

Caution. Your forefathers fell. Don't be like them. Sacred meals involve participation. Don't flirt with other gods because that is actually how you fall. That's how you go over the edge.

If you're nowhere near the edge, you can't fall over the edge. I'm about to finish but as we close I do want to bring us back to this table that we are going to meet around in a moment or two and I want

to point out one other important implication of this participation for us.

[25:02] We are participating in Christ this morning as we come to this table but verse 17, do you see? Look at verse 17. Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread.

we are united to Christ by faith in Him. When we participate in Christ in the new covenant, that means that we are also united to everyone else who is in Christ as well.

And we are united to one another when we gather in this way at the table. Our participation, Paul says, in the one loaf makes us one people.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper here, we always say that this is a meal for those who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus. That is because, in part, you can't be united to others in the sense that Paul means here if you aren't united to Christ.

It is a participation in Christ first before it is a communion with each other. But for those who are in Christ by faith, there is profound unity at the table of the Lord.

[26:11] One meal served in one setting, creating unity among many people in the one body. That is symbolized in the one loaf that we share. It is also the reason why we don't celebrate communion in other contexts like home groups or a summer camp or the couple at a wedding.

That is a kind of factionalism that distorts the intention of the meal. The intention is that it unites us. It unites the whole body. And Paul talks about this unity here because for the Corinthians to go to the idol temple and eat at an idol feast is to participate with idols and so break the unity of the body of Christ.

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, verse 21, and think that God is okay with that. Those who are united in the supper should not do anything to fracture that unity.

You can't sit down at the Lord's table on Sunday as a member of the one body of Christ and then willingly break that unity by giving yourself to some idol or other at another point in the week.

Let me put it another way. You can't sit at the table and then willingly head off into sin in the context of the week and think that God is okay with that. The unity that we share in Christ that is created by the supper is something we should be jealous to protect.

[27:36] Just as the Lord is jealous for our undivided loyalty so we should be jealous for unity in the church. Paul is very clear there, clear here how serious the sin of this unity is.

Sins that divide the body are particularly serious because they tell a lie about God and the power of the gospel and they tell a lie about God on the one hand and the power of gospel on the other.

They tell a lie about God because a divided body speaks of a divided God but God is one. And they lie about the gospel because they communicate that it somehow doesn't have the power to unite.

But the gospel of the Lord Jesus reconciles God and His enemies so by definition it is able to reconcile lesser enemies. And I rejoice. I want to say I rejoice that we see this so clearly here.

We as a church enjoy a remarkable unity and long may it continue. Long may we make the effort required to preserve that unity. If there is a sin that affects our unity whether it's outside in the way that we carry on out there or it's inside in our relationships it must not be brought to the table.

[28:47] Repent of any idolatry. Paul's language here is flee. Don't get as close as you can. Go the other way as fast as you can. Repent of any idolatry. Any sin and resolve any conflicts that you may have within the church before you come and when you do that you can fully participate and you can enjoy the unity this meal creates.

Part of the way we flee from idolatry is participating in this meal. We are renewed in Christ and having been with Him when you've been with Christ sin feels much less enticing.

Part of the way that we experience the unity is by looking around. When you're eating and drinking look around look around at the fruit of the cross of Christ.

Look around at the diversity of the body that Christ has brought together into one. Appreciate what God has done in calling people from all kinds of places all kinds of backgrounds into this one body. I'm excited. Let's sing and then we'll eat together. Let's sing. I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus in Nazarene.

[30:01] .