

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 12

The Gospel in an Idolatrous Culture Part 2

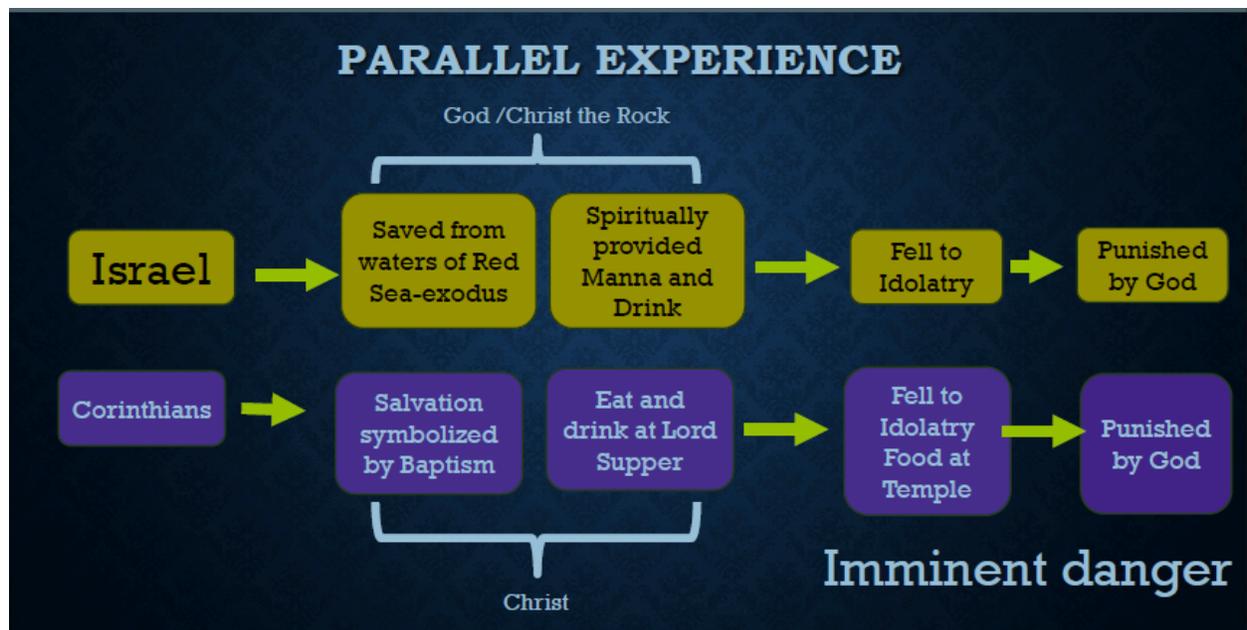
1 Corinthians 10:1-33

A. We Can Not Rely on Past Spiritual Experiences or Blessings

1 Corinthians 10: 1-5 (NIV)

¹For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food and ⁴drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

1. a) Discussion question. Compare the parallel experience between Israelites during the time of Moses in the wilderness and the Corinthian church. Does experiencing a miraculous blessing or having a spiritual experience mean we are not in danger of falling into idolatry?



b) Objective question. Verses 3-4 say “They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ”. Why is it that although we all attend the same Sunday service, read the same Bible, and have the same God, not all of us are transformed spiritually at the same rate or at all?

- A. Some of us are smarter and we “get it” better
- B. Some of us are more moral, so we can discipline ourselves to transformation
- C. By God’s mercy, He opened our eyes, so we “see it!” and He replaced our heart of stone with a heart of flesh, transforming us from the inside out. Although God is the one doing the miracle work of change, people need to continuously accept God's invitation and invitation from others for this change of heart. There is a combination of God's sovereignty in our transformation as well as our free will to accept this invitation through prayer. Perhaps this explains why some grow and mature at a faster rate and some none at all. Those who are transformed into maturation are thankful for God's mercy and grace in their transformation and continue their journey of transformation. Those who are not transformed or immature have the option to accept His invitation to a journey of transformation to be more like Him.

B. We Need to Wrestle with Desire in Our Own Lives

1 Corinthians 10:6-12 (NIV)

⁶Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” ⁸We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

¹¹These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹²So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!

- 2. a) Reflection question. Verse 6 says “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.” Verses 11-12 say: “ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful

that you don't fall!" Do you personally think you are in danger of letting evil rule your heart?

b) Discussion question. Does "do not grumble" in verse 10 mean we can't complain to God about anything? If not, then what does the grumbling in verse 10 refer to?

No, there are Godly complaints about Fear in Psalm 69, Longing in Psalm 85, Sorrow in Psalm 137, Confusion in Psalm 102, Desolation in Psalm 22, Disappointment in Psalm 74, and Depression in Psalm 88. Grumbling in verse 10 refers to the voice of unbelief, the unwillingness to believe that God is allowing this disappointment to grow our faith.

C. God will Provide a Way to Endure Temptations

1 Corinthians 10: 12-13 (NIV)

¹²So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

3. Discussion question. Verses 12-13 assure us that God will help us, but what are the things we should do to endure the temptation of evil?

D. We Need to Flee From Idolatry

1 Corinthians 10: 14-22 (NIV)

¹⁴Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

¹⁸Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

¹⁹Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. ²²Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

4. a) Comprehension question. Apostle Paul says: "Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are

offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons".
If you can paraphrase this, what was Paul's point in saying this?

Paul is saying that there is no power in the food sacrificed to an idol and that technically the idols are fake gods, but the sacrifices of these rituals are not offered to our real God, they are offered to the (demonic) forces who are trying to distract and detract us from the actual God. We should not put ourselves in situations where we are sharing the same table with demons through the rituals.

b) Discussion question. What does fleeing from idolatry look like today? Is it avoiding pubs and clubs? Is it avoiding secular or haram shows on Netflix? Is it rejecting the idolatrous desires in our hearts when we detect it?

1 Corinthians 10: 23-24 (NIV)

²³"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

5. Discussion question. What main point was Paul trying to drive home?

Paul pleads with Christians freedom (right to do anything), to use this freedom for the good of others, considering their needs and weakness of understanding not just our own needs or what we feel like doing, even if we have a stronger conscience than understanding. Here's an article comparing the Strong and Weak based on Romans 8:

https://fbc.com.my/?sdm_process_download=1&download_id=14977

1 Corinthians 10: 25-30 (NIV)

²⁵Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

²⁷If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. ²⁸But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. ²⁹I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? ³⁰If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

6. Discussion question. In verses 25-30, Paul gives SOP when it comes to meat sacrificed to idols. Summarize the SOP.

Step 1: Don't ask so much, God created everything, so everything is good.

Step 2: If someone says: “Chrisitan can eat food offered to idols meh?” Then for the sake of the understanding of the weaker person, we clarify that all foods are clean, but say: “I will refrain from eating this (in front of you >D) because you don’t seem to be convinced that Christian can eat this.”

1 Corinthians 10: 31-33 (NIV)

³¹So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³²Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— ³³even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

- 7. Discussion question. According to verses 31-33, what is the reason behind all we do? For seeking the good of many, so that they may be saved for the glory of God.**

Takeaway

- A. We Can Not Rely on Past Spiritual Experiences or Blessings**
- B. We Need to Wrestle with Desire in Our Own Lives**
- C. God will Provide a Way to Endure Temptations**
- D. We Need to Flee From Idolatry**

Case Study

Case 1 – Miraculous Experience Does not Guarantee No Idolatry

Mira Keel had converted to Christianity because she was healed from her colon cancer six years ago. She often shared this testimony when asked, sharing how God saved her. She regularly attends Sunday service and attends a life group as well as serves in the usher team.

However, Mira is often drawn to Feng Shui talks and Energy-related talks to improve her health or the peace of her house. Slowly, she attended so many of these talks that it took

up more time than her personal Bible reading time or the times she listened to Christian content. Instead of discussing and talking about God and His goodness, she talks non-stop about the latest trends of Feng Shui and Energy-related ways to improve her health and back pain.

She would invite her life group members to attend these Feng Shui talks and Energy-related talks instead of inviting her friends from these talks to church. She started buying and selling the enchanted items from these talks.

1. a) Discussion question. Does Mira seem more excited about the Feng Shui/Energy-related talks or the sermons/talks at church?

b) Discussion question. Does how we spend our time, what we keep thinking about, and what we keep talking about reveal where our interests and priorities lie?

c) Discussion question. Mira stopped attending these talks after a while but continues to attend church. However, she is interested in all types of health fads. Is it wrong to be interested in health-related topics? When does it become idolatry?

Depending on Mira's behaviour, it may be a phase of interest or curiosity, or if she gets into another health-related talk obsessively, then her idolatry maybe her health. One way to know is that if a health affliction strikes her and she rejects God permanently because of that health condition, then her idolatry is her health. Because if God did not give her this, she did not want this God anymore.

d) Discussion question. When is a thing considered idolatry?

Supplementary Reading

Our hearts are idol-making factories that make good gifts from God ultimate in our lives, thereby replacing God in our affections. Tim Keller writes:

"What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give." (xvii)

How can you identify these insidious idols? How can you tell if you are worshipping a counterfeit God? Keller says:

“A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.” (xviii)

Full article:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/counterfeit-gods-tim-keller-takes-on-our-idols/>

e) Discussion question. When a person converts to Christianity, does this mean they are immediately immune to idolatry, or would there be a process of God unveiling the idols in our hearts layer by layer?

f) Reflection question. When you discover an underlying idol in your heart, what would you do about it? Do you snitch on yourself to God or do you try to hide it from God?