

Flee from Idolatry!

Food Offered to Idols

1 Corinthians 8-11

Introduction: The New Testament world was very much like our world now. The more we read the Bible the more we see that the Bible has answers for all of our questions about life, even though the last book of the Bible was written almost 2,000 years ago! The first book of the Bible was written around 1,500 years before the birth of Jesus. All that Christians need to know about God and how to live for Him is right here in this book.

Just as most people today throughout the world worship idols, angels, and spirits of the dead, so they did also in the days the Bible was written. People have been following demons and idols ever since the beginning of the world. All of God's people since the beginning have had to know how to act as believers in the True God when the people around them worshipped idols. In many ways Cambodia today, especially Phnom Penh, is like Corinth in the New Testament times when Paul wrote his letter to them.

The believers in Corinth were confused about what to do about food offered to idols. Some Christians said that Christians should never eat food offered to idols or go to the idol temples. Other Christians were saying that it was ok for believers to go to idol temples and eat food there because they did not believe in those gods any more. Which was right? What should God's people do to please God? This is why Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 8-10, to show us how Christians should act in regards to temples and food offered to idols.

Before we look at these verses, we need to understand some things about the customs of the Corinthian idol worshippers so that we can know more clearly what Paul is saying here. The Corinthians worshipped many gods, not just one or two. Each god required different sacrifices. Corinthians sacrificed animals in their worship of their gods. Each god required different parts of the animals in sacrifice, so not all of the animal parts were burned up in the sacrifices. Some of the meat was given to the priests as payment for their services and the rest was sold in the market. Apparently meat already offered to idols in the temple that was sold in the market was cheaper than other meat in the market. If it was not cheaper, maybe people wanted to buy it because they thought that the meat offered was blessed. Worship feasts and other feasts were held at the temples and food offered to idols was eaten there.

This caused the Corinthian Christians to ask questions like: Should Christians ask for the meat offered to idols when they shopped in the market in order to save money? Can they buy meat offered to idols? Could Christians go to the temples and eat if they were invited to a party there? Every Christian knew that they could not worship idols, but what if they just went in and ate and did not worship—could they do that?

These questions are a lot like questions that new Christians in Cambodia ask. Maybe some of you wonder about things like this. Sometimes Cambodian Christians ask questions like this:

- At Chinese New Year can we eat food offered to the ancestors? What if we do not worship with everyone else? Could we then eat the food with them?
- At Pchum Ben when most Cambodians are going to the temples and having a great time and eating food there, what should Christians do? If they go just to have fun but not to honor the monks, should they go?
- When our family comes together to make cakes or food for the festivals, can we make food with them, even if we know that the food is going to be used for idol worship?

Now let us look at God's Word to see how God answers these questions for us in 1 Corinthians 8-10.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-3

In these first three verses, Paul is rebuking some of the Corinthians who are eating meat offered to idols because they think that they have "knowledge." Paul wants them to know that knowledge is good but they do not have as much knowledge about food offered to idols as they thought they did. They were proud and lacked the love of God towards their brothers and sisters in Christ. We will understand more of what Paul means in the verses below.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

1. Strong Christians have knowledge.

- a. They know that idols are not really gods. They know that idols are not real and that worshipping them has no real value (v.4).
- b. They know Jesus is the One True God & Creator of all things, the source of all life. They have the truth are not tempted to go back to idols & demons (v.5-6).
- c. They know that food is not important to God. They know that the dead and demons do not really eat food offered to them (v.5).
- d. They are no longer afraid of gods & demons. They are not afraid of temples or evil spirits in the village or the fields because they know God is with them (v.4-6).
 - These Christians with knowledge are right about many things but they are wrong to think that they can eat food offered to idols and go to temples.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:7-13

2. Weaker Christians do not have knowledge.

- a. Some Christians are still afraid of their old gods and the evil spirits around them. They are not secure in their trust in God (v.7).

- b. Some Christians who are not strong, who do not have “knowledge” like the others, they are easily tempted to fall back into idolatry and worship of demons. If they go to a temple or eat food offered to idols they will be tempted to follow two paths and then fall away from Jesus. They remembered that not too long ago they were eating this kind of meat in worshipping demons and they did not want to eat it again (v.8-9).
- c. Some might have been afraid that if they bought meat offered to idols their unsaved family and friends might see them and think that they are going back to their old ways. If they ate it their conscience would be defiled (v.7).

Read 1 Corinthians 8:10-13

Conclusion: No Christians should eat food offered to idols, even if they are not afraid of demons or false gods (v.10-13). No Christian should eat food offered to idols or go to the temples because they must not cause their weaker Christian brothers to be tempted. We must love our Christian brethren and think about them and not ourselves. We must have the fear of God about hurting His people by leading them into sin by our example.

In Corinthians 9, Paul uses himself as an example of someone who sacrifices his rights in order to help people believe on Jesus and stand firm in faith. I encourage you to read this passage later and see how Paul sacrificed to be a good example to new believers.

3. All Christians must flee from idolatry.

- a. In 10:1-13, the Apostle Paul shows us that Israel was not careful about idolatry. Idolatry is very dangerous for Christians. When we read the O.T. we see how many of the people of Israel fell into idolatry and worshipping demons, even when they saw many great miracles of God. We always have a way to escape temptation. This is God’s promise. We do not have to sin!

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13: Emphasize this promise in context!!!

Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-15

- b. Even if we have knowledge we must realize the danger of idolatry and flee from it. If we go into temples during worship or eat food offered to idols we are taking part in the worship. We are setting ourselves into the path of sin. The way of true knowledge and wisdom is not eating but fleeing (v.14-15)!
- c. Idolatry and demon worship usually includes other kinds of sin as well: immorality (like at Corinth), drunkenness, etc. We must stay away from these sins that destroy our faith.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-21

4. All Christians must choose between the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

- a. If we eat food offered to idols we are telling those around us that we want to worship their gods with them, no matter what we say or feel in our hearts. We cannot eat it for the sake of others (v.16, 19-20).
- b. If we eat the Lord's Table it means that we are telling those around us in the church that we believe on Jesus Christ with them and have left our false gods and idols. When we take the Lord's Table we are unifying our hearts with God's people, we are part of the Body of Christ (v.16-18).
- c. We cannot eat food offered to idols and also eat the Lord's Table! We must choose! To do both is great sin against God (v.21)!

Read 1 Corinthians 10:22

5. God's wrath is upon those who seek to follow two paths.

- a. God is angry with those who eat food offered to idols and go to the temples because it shows that they are unfaithful to Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31

- b. God is angry with those who eat food offered to idols and go to the temples because they are tempting other Christians to fall into their old ways. We must always ask ourselves whether our actions bring glory to God or make Him jealous.
- c. When evangelizing, do not take away repentance from salvation. We must tell people of God's judgment and the need for them to turn away from idols and unto Christ for salvation!

Read 1 Corinthians 10:32-33

6. Taking the Lord's Table is not a protection against falling back into idolatry.

- We must not be proud and think that we are safe from falling back into idolatry and demon worship. It may be that some Corinthians were looking at the Lord's Table as a form of spiritual protection against demons. Many who have been proud and have eaten food offered to idols and gone to temples have fallen back into idolatry—like Israel!!!! We must be afraid of opening the door to Satan's influence in our lives!

Conclusion: Chapter 11 tells us how to take the Lord's Table together as believers. After describing to us how to take the Lord's Table, the Apostle Paul gives to us a very strong warning from God: we must not be hypocrites when we take the Lord's Table or we will be judged by God. Paul tells us that some in Corinth are sick and others have died because they have taken the Lord's Table in unfaithfulness. God chastens to bring us to faithfulness and blessing.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:28-32

We cannot walk two paths. We cannot take the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. Even if we are not tempted to go back to the old ways we must still flee from idolatry. We must protect the weaker believers and not cause them to fall back into demon worship.

- This means that when Chinese New Year, Khmer New Year, and Pchum Bun come around, we must be very careful to unite together in faithfulness to God and not enter the temples or eat food offered to idols.
- This does not mean that we must reject our family. Ladies should still join in making special food and cakes with family. We should still enjoy our relatives.
- If they want us to come and eat with them they must know that we cannot eat food offered to idols. We can eat the same food if it is set aside and not offered.
- When family goes to travel for vacation we can go too as long as we do not take part in any worship of demons and do not drink beer or rice wine with them.
- If we sell cakes we must be careful not to sell them at temples or try to make money from idolatry. It is important that we do not cease joining in with family during these times, but we must be careful to be faithful to God.
- During times of religious festivals it is important that we come together for prayer and worship to God to gain strength against temptation. It would be good to have the Lord's Table during the New Year times and Pchum Bun and remember these passages.

God has saved us from Satan and bondage to idols and demons. Let us guard our freedom at times of temptation. Let us think of our weaker brethren and encourage them and not think about ourselves. Love for God and love for people will keep us from sinning in this way.