

## Questions We Must Answer

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

### Introduction: Deception and Deliverance, 10:12-13

In the Garden of Eden, Satan deceived the bride of the “First Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) by his subtle approach; today, he is trying to deceive the bride of “the last Adam” (2 Corinthians 11:3). The last Adam is Christ, and His bride is the church. In the garden, Satan tried to portray God’s gracious provision as legalism, seducing Adam and Eve to cast away God’s first gracious limitation.<sup>i</sup> Satan’s deceiving ways are an ever-present reality even to this very moment. How should we respond?

In the last message, we saw the importance of 1 Corinthians 10:12-13: **“<sup>12</sup>Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup>There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”** If you and I begin to think we are standing well, the dangers of self-deception are multiplied. Take heed lest you fall! But verse 13 gives us comfort while we proceed with caution. Yes, all these temptations are “common to man,” but God is faithful and He will give us a way to escape that we may be able to go through it. After the frightening illustrations about Israel (1 Cor. 10:1-11), verse 13 offers comforting assurance to those who persevere.

In this study on the Christian use of liberty (see 1 Cor. 8:9; 9:1, 19) the Apostle Paul has focused our attention on the backdrop of idolatry. None of us lives in a spiritual vacuum. Idols (especially idols of the heart, Ezekiel 14:3) abound to this very day. We can see this idolatry all around us, just as Paul did in his day. Those who descend into idolatry (Romans 1:22-23) do so because (Romans 1:21)

✚ *When they knew God → They did not glorify Him as God → Neither were they thankful → But became vain in their imaginations (idolatry) → And their foolish heart was darkened.*

We can recognize idolatry in ourselves using the words of Ezekiel 8:12: **“Then said He unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.”** Six chapters before the Lord explained that these “had set up idols in their hearts,” he illuminated the darkness of hearts: **“the chambers of imagery.”** They justified the idolatry by saying in their hearts, **“The LORD sees us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.”** According to Ezekiel 9:9, this kind of thinking was very prevalent among the people. Each one of us can use these verses to shed light on the idols or our hearts. Your flesh is whispering two awful lies: The Lord does see me; The Lord has forsaken the earth. You have to recite these lies to yourself in order to make lords out of your lusts. Deny the lies and flee from idolatry.

Where is it that you know God – know His ways, know His will – and yet do not honor or obey Him as God? Where is it that you quench the Spirit of God (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and grieve Him (Ephesians 4:30)? Right there is the idol of your heart in the light of Scripture. Don’t let your vain imaginations carry you away. As one author commented, “What people do when they think no one else can see them reveals their true character.”<sup>ii</sup> When you look at idolatry this way, you realize our whole culture is full of idols. John MacArthur commented, “Every idol is man-made and every idol is helpless to help. Idols only defile.”<sup>iii</sup> The Corinthians insisted that they knew that idols were nothing, and therefore not dangerous. Filled with this “knowledge,” they even attended the sensual, pagan ceremonies where the meat was offered to idols.

Some people virtually worship other people with an intense longing to be like them. Others embrace idolatry by coveting another man's wife, house, car, career, or possessions. Some worship sensations, living for their nerve endings instead of what is never-ending; they sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the passing feeling. Some worship angels, like the Gnostic Colossians (Col. 2:18-21). Pharaoh exalted himself (Exodus 9:17; 10:3); the Edomites (Obadiah 1:4) did the same by their national pride. Rebellious Israelites worshiped the dead by eating the sacrifices to the dead (Psalm 106:28). Some worship their appetites (Philippians 3:18-19) making their belly their god. Why is it necessary to think of this as idolatry instead of just iniquity? First, "idolatry" is a Biblical category. This helps us to think clearly about our iniquity as the spiritual adultery that it really is. Second, by calling idolatry what it really is, we take the first step toward a powerful alliance with the one true God. When we confess our idolatry, and call out to him from broken and contrite hearts, he will show Himself strong against our idols. We have hundreds of testimonies in the Old Testament that show us that He will deliver us when we ask Him.

### Overview for this series

- In chapter 8, we saw this danger of the misuse of liberty against the backdrop of idolatry; it could destroy your brother, 8:11-12
- In chapter 9, we saw the danger of the misuse of liberty against the backdrop of idolatry; it could hinder the Gospel ministry, 9:12, 23
- In chapter 10, we see the danger of the misuse of liberty against the backdrop of idolatry: it could destroy your testimony and shorten your life, 10:6-10.

### Wise and Beloved Believers

With this in mind, it is no surprise that we find the command in verse 14: "**Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.**" And this is followed by Paul's gracious appeal in verse 15: "**I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.**" Though there were spiritually immature believers at Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), Paul believed that they could embrace wisdom.

There is an important conversation taking place with the next generation right now about the use of Christian liberty. Our church has been in existence for more than eighty years. Across the years, many have served in leadership – and they have now taken their place in glory with the Lord they love. They prayed for you – interceding before the throne of grace. They rejoiced over the way that the grace of God has labored in each new generation of believers. But life is a vapor, and the time came when they needed to turn over leadership to a younger generation. They did their best to convey their understanding of Scriptural teaching – its wisdom and its warnings – to a new generation. They wrote confessions of faith and covenants to try to clearly communicate Biblical doctrine, discernment, and dangers. But ultimately, they needed to hand over leadership to younger, capable membership (2 Timothy 2:2) who will be to teach others also. If the Lord does not return during our lifetime, we will also pass the leadership to a new generation. So we need to clearly communicate legitimate concerns to the next generation. If we just impose our standards on them without reasonable explanations, they will toss those concerns aside as manmade truisms. Samuel Butler, a satirist of the late 1600's in England wrote:

*"He that complies against his Will,  
Is of his own Opinion still;"<sup>iv</sup>*

It is the same way today. Paul had the same conversation with the Corinthian believers that we are having today. The principles, based on the Word of God, are unchanging; but each new generation must make wise applications. It will not work for older or younger generations to reject a reasonable approach and merely react to each other.

David Garland aptly described Paul's humble approach in verse 15: "He tried to persuade the 'knowers' to stop fraternizing with idolaters in idolatrous settings – except that it might avert the weak from falling into ruin – if they do not recognize and accept in their hearts and minds how and why it is wrong. In the end, however, what counts is not just what they can understand but also their willingness to be faithful to Christ no matter the cost."<sup>v</sup> Each new generation must respond to the appeal: **"I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say."**

### **Seven Crucial Questions to Appeal for Understanding**

It has been said that "a question stirs the conscience, but an accusation hardens the will." Carefully consider the seven questions that Paul asked the Corinthians in verses 16-22.

#### **Three Questions about Communion**

**"<sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. <sup>18</sup>Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?"**

These first three questions draw attention to the believer's close fellowship with Christ. Paul is going to make the point that it would be totally inconsistent to commune with pagan idols. But watch the way he goes about it. In Matthew 26:27, Jesus commanded that every believer should partake of the Lord's Table (see also Luke 22:19). Those who claim to be Christians but will not partake of the Lord's Table are making at least two mistakes:

1. They disobey the Lord.
2. They practically deny their communion with Christ and other Christians by refusing to partake.

Every believer was called into this fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9); it is the fellowship of the Spirit (Philippians 2:1) and the fellowship of the saints (2 Cor. 8:4, 1 John 1:3). The Lord's Table is a joyous celebration of our common fellowship. The cup is the cup of blessing – representing our fellowship with Christ through His blood. The bread represents our common communion with the body of Christ. In the Old Testament, the Jewish people enjoyed a similar fellowship around the sacrifices which were a shadow of the coming Christ. Paul established the mutual nature of the fellowship between Christ and Christians. He did so to show us something by contrast. Christ allowed His blood to be spilled on the cross for our sins. He gave His body to bear the curse for our iniquities. He rose again to show that His payment for sin justified all who will believe. This is the Gospel, and Paul described the impact of the Gospel ministry in 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10: **" . . . and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; <sup>10</sup>And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."** By its very nature, salvation involves a turning from idols; why would anyone want to return to idolatry?

#### **Two Questions about Idols**

**<sup>19</sup>What say I then? that the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?**

**<sup>20</sup> But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. <sup>21</sup> Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.**

Paul had agreed with the Corinthians that “an idol is nothing” (1 Cor. 8:4). In chapter 10, he did not deny his agreement. But the questions in verse 19 follow naturally from the earlier questions about communion and fellowship. Idols were imaginations, but they were wicked imaginations – denying the one true God. So verse 20 pulls back the veil on idol worship. “. . . the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils [demons].” Pagans blindly make their sacrifices to demons; they do not commune with the one true God. Their feast is a fellowship with demons. Christians (v. 21) cannot commune at the Lord's Table and feast at the fellowship with demons. Believers must not entertain themselves with the very sins for which Christ died!

### **Two Questions about the Lord**

**<sup>22</sup> Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?”**

The understood answer to the first question is “yes.” The answer to the second question is “no.”

Here is the very real danger for Christians. Paul used the word “we” to show that we are all vulnerable; he included himself. Paul consistently used this approach to the Corinthian believers:

- 10:6, “these things were for our examples”
- 10:8, “neither let us commit fornication”
- 10:9, “neither let us test Christ”
- 10:11, “these things . . . are written for our admonition [warning]”
- 10:14, “My dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.”
- 10:16, “the cup of blessing which we bless . . . the bread which we break . . . we are all partakers of one bread . . .”

Idolatry puts us all in danger, individually and collectively. The Lord our God is a jealous God (Deuteronomy 6:15), zealous that the whole world should see His glory. Every new generation must recognize the dangers and flee from idolatry. Our Christian use of liberty must be carefully considered against the dark backdrop of idolatry.

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<sup>i</sup> Jones, Mark. Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest? (p. 1). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition: “Adam was the first antinomian (Rom. 5). In the garden, he was against (anti) God's law (nomos) when he transgressed by failing to guard the garden and to forbid his wife to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve's own doctrinal antinomianism (Gen. 3:2–3) led to practical antinomianism (3:6). Thus, antinomianism was birthed by our original parents. Interestingly, though, their antinomianism was in response to Satan's legalism, for it was he who had (willfully) misconstrued God's gracious loving-kindness to Adam and Eve and made God out to be a legalist, reflecting his own heart (3:1–5).”

<sup>ii</sup> Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, vol. 17, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 122.

<sup>iii</sup> John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Chicago: Moody Press, 1984, p. 237

<sup>iv</sup> Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*, 1664. This is a satirical poem aimed at the Puritans' part in the sectarian controversies in England in the 1660's- 1670's. His point is that morality which is merely imposed will not convince anyone. accessed at [https://archive.org/stream/cu31924013360841/cu31924013360841\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/cu31924013360841/cu31924013360841_djvu.txt)

<sup>v</sup> David E. Garland, 1 Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007, p. 475.