

DEMONIC WORSHIP 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11:1

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Previously, Paul taught the Corinthian Christians that they have the freedom to eat food that has been sacrificed to idols, but dining in an idol's temple, while seeming like a fine distinction to us, was an act of demon worship which Christians should shun. Christians should learn from Israel's bad example to avoid idolatry at any cost.

AN HISTORICAL EXAMPLE (10:1-5)

Paul began this section with the word "**for**" in order to draw attention to the connections between what he had just said and what he was about to say. He had just used analogies from racing and boxing to demonstrate that Christians must take great diligence and care in living the Christian life. Here, the apostle offered scriptural support for his position just as he had earlier in 9:9-12. He divided his discussion into four parts: an Old Testament example (10:1-5); the relevance of the example (10:6-13); an application to the temptation to commit idolatry (10:14-22); and practical instructions on meat that had been offered to idols (10:23-11:1).

10:1-2. Once again, Paul used the term **brothers** (see also 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,26,39; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15) to address the Corinthians, speaking affectionately to indicate his deep-seated concern for them. When they received his rather harsh teaching, Paul wanted them to keep in mind that he spoke as he did because he loved them and was concerned for their welfare. The believers in Corinth who ate meat offered to idols needed to be aware of the dangers they faced as they arrogantly disregarded their weaker brothers and sisters. Although they had a measure of knowledge (8:1,7,10,11) regarding meat sacrificed to idols, Paul feared they were **ignorant** of the lessons of Old Testament history. They were unaware of the imminent dangers idolatry posed.

The apostle elucidated these dangers by drawing two comparisons between the Corinthians' Christian experiences and the wilderness wanderings of Israel. First, the Israelites **were all under the cloud** and **all passed through the sea**. From Paul's point of view, **all** the Israelites, young and old, male and female, faithful and unregenerate, were **baptized into Moses** in this way. The use of the word **baptized** points to an implicit analogy. The Israelites were baptized into Moses just as the Corinthians had been baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 1:12-17). Paul pointed out this

similarity in order to identify Israel with the Corinthians, and thereby to apply Israel's lessons to Corinth. He strengthened this association by referring to the Israelites as **our forefathers**, even though the Corinthians composed a Gentile audience. In Paul's mind, sufficient continuity existed between the covenant people of God in the Old Testament (Israel) and in the New Testament (the church) that the Old Testament Israelites were the spiritual forefathers of all New Testament believers, Jew and Gentile alike.

10:3-4. Second, the Israelites **ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink**. This **food** and **drink** were not ordinary, but **spiritual**. Of course, Paul did not mean that these items were "spiritual" as in "non-physical." Clearly the Israelites ate real food and drank real water in order to survive. Paul simply meant that the food and drink came from the Spirit and had spiritual power for God's people.

Specifically, Paul spoke of the manna from heaven that God provided to Israel for forty years (Exod. 16:12-35), and of the provision of water on at least two occasions (Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:11). A **spiritual rock**, one miraculously provided by the Spirit and empowering the people, **accompanied them** in the sense that water-giving rocks appeared on at least two occasions. John explained that the manna Israel received foreshadowed Christ himself (John 6:31-58). Here, Paul made the symbolic connection between Christ and the water-giving rock evident. The **rock was Christ**.

In the Old Testament "rock" frequently appeared as a metaphor closely associated with God (Gen. 49:24; Deut. 32:4,15,18,30,31; 2 Sam. 22:2-3,32,47; 23:3; Pss. 18:2,31,46; 19:14; 28:1; 31:2-3; 42:9; 62:2,6,7; 71:3; 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; 144:1; Isa. 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8; Hab. 1:12). It specifically focused on his life-giving role as a victorious warrior-king who saved his people from their enemies. Water flowing to refresh the earth and its inhabitants is a figure also closely associated with God as King. For example, in Ezekiel 47:1-12, water flowing from the temple (God's earthly throne) gives life to every creature near it (compare Pss. 36:8-9; 46:4; 65:9; Isa. 8:6; 44:1-8; Jer. 2:13; 17:13). It was in this sense that Paul spoke of the water-giving rocks in the wilderness as types of Christ. Christ poured forth the life-giving water of salvation on his people (compare John 4:10,13-14; 6:35; 7:37-38; Rev. 7:17; 22:1-2,17).

The close association of **spiritual food** and **spiritual drink** compares closely to the Corinthians' own experience. The Corinthians had partaken of Christ's body and blood symbolized in the Lord's Supper (10:14-22). The Israelites in the wilderness had lived through the Old Testament foreshadows of Christian baptism and the Lord's supper, and the Corinthians had known and continued to know the sacramental fulfillments of these foreshadows. By describing these Old Testament events as "baptism" and "spiritual food and drink," Paul emphasized the similarity between the situations of the Corinthians and of the Israelites under Moses.

10:5. With these basic similarities in mind, Paul drew attention to his chief concern in this section. Five times in four verses (10:1-4), Paul mentioned that **all** of the Israelites shared these common experiences. All the Israelites were joined together in their experiences of God's grace, just as all the Corinthians were joined together in their experiences of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Nevertheless, despite the experience of grace enjoyed by all Israel, **God was not pleased with most of them**. As a result, most of them died in **the desert** and were not permitted to enter the Promised Land. In the subsequent verses, Paul mentioned that most who left Egypt died in the wilderness, and he did so in order to draw attention to a similar possibility within the Corinthian church. Everyone in the Corinthian church had begun a spiritual journey in Christ, and everyone had participated in baptism and the Lord's supper — but these experiences did not guarantee that each of them would complete the journey and receive eternal life. Like the Israelites, the possibility remained that they might die in the wilderness, never receiving the promised blessings.

Once again, we must not think that Paul believed it was possible to lose salvation. Paul taught that those who have saving faith in Christ would never lose their salvation (Rom. 5:8-10; 8:1,29-30,35-39; 1 Cor. 1:7-9; Eph. 1:5,13-14; 4:30). Yet, he also knew that not all people who profess faith in Christ and who partake of baptism and the Lord's Supper necessarily have saving faith. Much like Jesus' Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3-8,18-23; Luke 8:5-15), Paul taught that salvation comes by faith alone, but also that the faith that saves is never alone (Eph. 2:8-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Tit. 2:14). The lifestyles of those who profess faith in Christ reveal the true nature of their "faith" (Matt. 7:15-27; 12:33,50; Luke 6:43-45; Acts 20:28-30; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; Heb. 6:4-8; Jas. 2:14-17; 1 John 2:3-5,19; 3:7-10; 4:20; 5:4). As he hinted in the preceding section (9:24-27), those who do not carefully and diligently pursue the prize will find themselves falling short of entering the promised land of eternal life.

RELEVANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE (10:6-13)

Next, Paul explained the significance (**now**) of the wilderness experience he had just described. He began by saying that the events of Israel's exodus from Egypt **occurred as examples** (10:6). The term translated "**examples**" may also be translated as "types." In this case, a type is an Old Testament event that foreshadows a spiritual reality revealed in the New Testament. Jesus and all New Testament writers did not discard the Old Testament as so many believers do today, but looked to the Old Testament as their sacred Scriptures (Matt. 4:4; 5:17-19; Mark 12:24; Luke 4:21; John 7:38; 10:35; Gal. 3:8; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). They saw the Old Testament's spiritual value as a "God-breathed" text (2 Tim 3:16). Paul's application of these Old Testament texts divides into two parts: five examples (10:6-10); and a concluding exhortation (10:11-13).

10:6. Five times Paul warned the Corinthians against acting **as they did** (10:6), **as some of them** (10:7), **as some of them did** (10:8,9,10). Five times he showed how Israel's experiences under Moses provided negative examples for Christian behavior. Each of these examples drew attention to specific aspects of Paul's overarching concern in this passage: how to deal with meat offered to idols (8:1-13; 10:20-33).

First, the Corinthians were to avoid setting their **hearts on evil things**. Paul's word may be translated more literally, "so that we would not be cravers of evil things"). This terminology occurs only twice in the Old Testament (Num. 11:34; Prov. 1:22), so Paul may have been alluding to Numbers 11:4-6 where the Israelites valued Egypt's food above loyalty to God. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that his third, fourth, and fifth examples all come from Numbers. Also, Proverbs 12:12, which speaks of food, and Proverbs 21:25-26, warn that those with evil cravings may die from them. The desire for meat in the Old Testament strikingly paralleled Paul's discussion of meat sacrificed to idols, and thus offered a tremendous warning that if the Corinthians followed in the greedy sins of Israel, God might severely judge them as well (compare Num. 11:31-34).

In the context of Paul's argument, however, the Israelites' setting their **hearts on evil things** referred to the various sins for which God punished them with death. The following verses refer specifically to some of these punishments (10:8-10), and the Old Testament explains that the idolatry referred to in 10:7 resulted in the death of 3,000 people (Exod. 32:28).

Israel committed so many heinous sins that over the course of their forty years of wandering, all but two of the adults who originally left Egypt died in the wilderness (Num. 14:22-30; 26:63-65; 32:11-13). Even Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:11).

In general, Paul meant these examples to warn the Corinthians of the conditional nature of God's blessings — if they failed to obey God, if they continued to abuse one another, God might judge them as he had judged Israel. God had already killed some of the Corinthians for these things (1 Cor. 11:30). Specifically, Paul wanted the Corinthians not to allow their desire for meat sacrificed to idols to override their loyalty to God, again to avoid judgment.

10:7. Second, Paul also warned believers not **be idolaters as some of them were**. Here he had in mind the specific event of Exodus 32:6, and quoted it to illustrate his point. When Moses went to Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, Israel began to **indulge in pagan revelry** before the golden calf, which revelry evidently included eating pagan cultic meals (**the people sat down to eat and drink**) just as the Corinthians ate such meals in pagan temples (8:10). Because of this idolatry God nearly destroyed the entire nation of Israel. As it was, he had 3,000 men put to death (Exod. 32:28). Paul was deeply concerned over the temptation to idolatry presented by

eating meat offered to idols, and warned the Corinthians to take this temptation seriously in light of the Old Testament example.

10:8. In the third negative example from Israel, Paul warned against **sexual immorality**, referring to the time when **twenty-three thousand of them died** after engaging in idolatry at Baal-Peor and involving themselves in fertility rituals (Num. 25:1-9; 31:16; compare Deut. 4:3; Ps. 106:28-29; Hos. 9:10). Numbers 25:9 mentions that “twenty-four thousand” died as a result. Paul simply approximates this number (just as the original twenty-four thousand was an approximation rather than an exact count), but his point is nevertheless clear. Many died because of involvement in pagan fertility rites.

Fertility religions believed that participating in religious prostitution and orgies brought health, fertility, and prosperity. The idolatry practiced in Corinth in Paul’s day involved similar fertility practices. Paul’s warning was plain: eating meat sacrificed to idols may lead to sexual immorality — to which some of the Corinthians were prone (1 Cor. 6:15-16) — and such immorality stirs the wrath of God.

10:9. Fourth, Paul warned the Corinthians **not to test the Lord, as some of them did**, and mentioned **snakes** that killed many in Israel. This alludes to Numbers 21:4-9 where the people blasphemed God by rejecting his manna, demanding bread and water. Paul drew upon this parallel because some in Corinth were not satisfied with what God had given them in Christ. As the Israelites before them who desired food other than manna, the Corinthians desired meat so much that they disregarded all other considerations (meat and other food were scarce because of famines in Greece at the time Paul wrote). God’s retribution (**killed by snakes**) against the Israelites warned the Corinthians against these practices (see also John 3:14-15).

10:10. Finally, Paul’s fifth warning based on Israel’s example was that the Corinthians not **grumble, as some of them did**. Grumbling or irreverent complaining against God and his leaders took place many times in the wilderness (Exod. 15:24; 16:2-12; 17:3; Num. 14:2,27-29,36; 16:11,41; 17:5,10; Deut. 1:27), but Paul had in mind a time when **the destroying angel** killed those who grumbled. Although the Scriptures do not mention a particular time when such an angel appeared in the wilderness, similar concepts appear in many places in the Old Testament (Exod. 12:23; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chr. 21:15). The rabbis of Paul’s day taught that God had a particular angel who destroyed and killed. Apparently, Paul agreed with this teaching. Paul may have referred to Numbers 16 where the people rebelled against Moses’ leadership and many thousands died, or perhaps to Numbers 14:28-30 where God issued the curse that only Joshua and Caleb would enter the Promised Land. By implication Paul drew a parallel between rebellion against Moses and rebellion against himself.

Those who opposed Paul on the matter of meat offered to idols risked committing against him the kind of rebellion against Moses that brought death to the Old Testament Israelites. This should not be surprising, however, since Paul had already

launched an extensive defense of his apostleship (9:1-27) in order to remind the Corinthians of his authority to speak to the issue of meat that had been offered to idols.

10:11. Having pointed to five ways in which the Corinthians were in danger of imitating the sins of Israel under Moses, Paul formed an exhortation (10:11-13). He reminded them again (see 10:6) that the sins and judgments in the wilderness **happened to them as examples** (or “types”) **and were written down** in the Old Testament **as warnings** for Christian believers. This does not mean that the only reason the Israelites experienced these things was to provide an example for later Christians, but it does mean that in God’s providence this was part of the reason. Similarly, these events were not recorded simply for the sake of the New Testament church — the Old Testament covenant people of God also benefited from these lessons (compare Ps. 106:1-48). Still, part of the reason that God recorded and preserved his word was to provide instruction for the church. Followers of Christ are always in danger of taking their Christian experiences of grace as a license for sin (compare Rom. 6:1), but Paul warned the Corinthians that the Old Testament example prohibited such license.

The apostle qualified his description of followers of Christ by calling them those “**on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.**” This expression may also be translated “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (NASB, NKJV) or “on whom the ends of the ages have come” (NRSV).

Paul and other New Testament writers understood the New Testament age as the “last days,” “latter days,” or “later days” predicted by Moses and the other Old Testament prophets (Deut. 4:30; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1). The “last/latter/later days” are the time of Israel’s great restoration after the exile to Babylon (compare also Jer. 30:3,24; 31:1-9; Ezek. 38:8). The Old Testament held forth the hope that after a great exile God’s people would return to the land and receive unimaginable blessings from God, including victory over all the nations of earth (Amos 9:11-15; Hag. 2:6-9).

When John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven) had come in Christ, they announced that this long awaited age had finally arrived in him (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; Mark 1:15; Luke 10:9,11; 11:20). The New Testament, however, explains that the fulfillment of the ages in the kingdom of God comes in three phases: the inauguration that took place in Christ’s earthly ministry and the work of the apostles (Matt. 10:7; 12:12,28; 16:19; 18:4; 21:43; Luke 7:28; 11:20; 17:21; Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20); the church age which continues today (Matt. 13:36-43,52; Rom. 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18); and the return of Christ in the consummation of the kingdom (Matt. 7:21-22; 13:43; 25:34; Luke 13:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:50-52; 1 Pet. 1:5).

The Corinthians lived after the earthly ministry of Christ, and therefore lived in the “latter days,” or in **the fulfillment of the ages** as Paul put it here. The writer of

Hebrews said explicitly what Paul implied by this reference: the responsibilities of those in the age of Christ are even greater than those of the Old Testament age (Heb 10:26-30).

12. A profound conclusion (**so**) derives from the fact that these Old Testament stories are examples for Christians. Followers of Christ who are overly confident and **think** they are **standing firm** should **be careful** not to **fall** as the Israelites did in the desert. Again, Paul did not mean that true salvation could be lost. Rather, he meant that some who wrongly think they are saved might prove themselves not to be (see Heb. 3:12-13; and commentary on 1 Cor. 10:5).

Probably, he directed this comment to those who ate in idols' temples. These would have been the people most likely to have had confidence that they would not fall, and the ones most likely to have put themselves in jeopardy by attending pagan cultic meals. Paul may also have been thinking of the weak brothers and sisters who gained the confidence to eat in pagan temples by observing others do the same (1 Cor. 8:10). He had already expressed concern that these brothers and sisters might be destroyed by such activity (1 Cor. 8:11). The apostle warned all who ate in the temples of the danger of false confidence, and encouraged them to take to heart the examples he had given them from the Old Testament.

13. The warning to be careful not to **fall** raised another issue that Paul briefly addressed. What if Christians are so tempted that they cannot resist turning from Christ? Perhaps he had in mind the tremendous attraction some Corinthians had toward the idolatrous fertility rituals practiced in Corinth. What if they were not able to resist?

Paul responded with two thoughts. First, all temptations that Christians experience including that of idolatry are **common to man**. Nothing unique was happening in the Corinthian church that could excuse them from resisting. Others had resisted the temptation toward idolatry, and the Corinthians could do so as well.

Second, **God is faithful**, and he will not desert his people (see Deut. 7:9; Hos. 11:12; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:18; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3; Heb. 10:23; 11:11; 1 John 1:9; Rev. 1:5). For this reason, God can be trusted not to allow temptations **beyond what** Christians **can bear**. God will always **provide a way out** of temptation so that believers **can stand up** and not fall into apostasy. He himself tempts no one (Jas. 1:13), but he is in control of Satan who tempts believers to sin (Job 1:7-12; 2:2-6; Matt. 4:1; 6:13; Luke 22:31-32). Because of his great love for his children, God does not allow temptations to be so great that they overcome us. Instead, Christians sin because they do not search for **a way out** (such as fleeing from sin; see 10:14). Christians sin because they give in to temptation.

PROHIBITION AGAINST IDOLATRY, AND FURTHER EXPLANATION (10:14-22)

Next, Paul drew several conclusions (**therefore**) from the previous discussion, and explained further the dangers and idolatrous nature of dining in idols' temples.

10:14. Paul began by appealing to the Corinthians in very friendly terms, calling them "**my dear friends**" ("my beloved" NASB), a strategy he employed in a number of passages (see 4:14; 15:58; compare the use of "brothers" in 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,26,39; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15). Paul's basic advice was simple but dramatic: **flee from idolatry**. On several occasions, Paul instructed his readers to "flee" from sin when he saw that they were in grave danger (1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). As the preceding verses make clear, idolatry is no insignificant peccadillo. It is a deadly sin. For this reason, Christians should never flirt or toy with it. No measure of compromise is advisable.

10:15. He furthered his application by drawing an analogy between participation in idolatrous festival meals and the Christian practice of the Lord's Supper (10:15-22). He wrote to the Corinthians with the assumption that they were **sensible people** ("wise men" NASB), and encouraged them to **judge** the matter for themselves. Paul had strong convictions on the subject that the Corinthians had no basis to dispute. Still, rather than explicitly assert his authority on the matter, he gave them the benefit of the doubt by assuming that the reasonableness of his argument would win them to his position. In so doing, he asked a series of questions about the Lord's Supper to which he assumed they knew the correct affirmative answers. His questions focused first on the cup and then on the bread of the Supper.

10:16. Paul's first question spoke of **the cup of thanksgiving** and **the bread that we break**. These expressions parallel the language in the accounts of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). This particular passage places special significance on drinking and eating. Drinking from the cup is **a participation in the blood of Christ** and eating the bread is **a participation in the body of Christ**. The word **participation** (*koinonia*) may also be translated "sharing in" (NASB, NRSV) or "communion of" (NKJV). The New Testament teaches that believers have at least two types of communion. On the one hand, believers experience fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3,6). On the other hand, believers have fellowship with each another (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:7).

10:17. Paul added another type of fellowship to explain his concern in this matter. He noted that believers, **who are many, are one body**, and that this is true **because there is one loaf** of which **all partake**. In Paul's writings, "**one body**" is a technical phrase that refers to mystical union. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:16 this same phrase (*hen soma*) refers to the union between a man and a woman who engage in sexual intercourse. Paul also used this term in Romans 12:5 to explain the relationship between believers, saying not that they are simply members of the same church or followers of the same Lord, but that because they are "in Christ" (in mystical union with

Christ), they are “one body” and “members one of another” (NASB). Because all believers are in spiritual union with Christ, all believers share spiritual union with one another in him. Paul’s term “one body” refers to this union.

Paul could have said that believers partake of one loaf because they are one body, because this is also true — but he did not. Rather, he said that believers **are one body because they partake of one loaf**. Partaking of the bread does not make a congregation from people who were not formerly a congregation, but it does increase the supernatural quality of their fellowship with each another. Paul assumed a similar spiritual effect also took place between the demons and the worshipers in the idols’ temples, and forbid participation in pagan ceremonies as a result (10:19-22).

10:18. Paul added a comment about **the people of Israel** in the Old Testament. Some interpreters have taken his words negatively, as if they referred to the revelry at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exod. 32:1-6). Others more properly have taken a positive interpretation, suggesting that Paul spoke of the Passover celebration of peace offerings. In the thanksgiving or peace offerings of the Old Testament, the Israelites ate portions of what they sacrificed (Lev. 7:15-16). The Passover meal exemplified the kind of sacrifice of which worshipers ate (Exod. 12:1-14), and the Christian Lord’s Supper had its roots in the Old Testament Passover ceremony (Matt. 26:17-28; Mark 14:12-24; Luke 22:15-20). In this view, Paul referred the Corinthians to the Old Testament practice of Passover as historical support for his views of the Lord’s Supper in 10:16-17.

Once again, he emphasized the fact that those who eat such sacrifices **participate** (“are . . . sharers” NASB; “are . . . partners” NRSV; “are . . . partakers” NKJV) in the spiritual significance of **the altar** of the temple. In a word, Paul did not consider eating the Old Testament thanksgiving offerings to be empty symbolism. Rather, he believed that spiritual fellowship took place that could not be ignored. Union between believers and their God occurs as they partake. In the same way, Paul argued that those who partake of the Lord’s Supper fellowship with God.

10:19-20. Paul warned the Corinthians to **flee from idolatry** (10:14), and supported his command with the fact that participants in biblical sacrificial meals have spiritual communion with God and with each other (10:16-18). Paul’s point is rather plain. If such communion takes place in biblical sacrificial meals, then in some sense it also takes place in pagan sacrificial meals — but Paul anticipated an objection. Did he mean that **a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything?** “No,” he replied. Paul had already argued that pagan religions are false and that their sacrifices are not made to true gods (8:4), and at the same time had qualified that statement by saying that many **so-called gods** exist (8:5). In the verse at hand, he explained his meaning more fully. Pagans are greatly mistaken about the meanings and powers of the sacrifices they make and about their so-called gods, but they are not mistaken about the fact that something supernatural is involved — **the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons**.

Unlike the pagans and the unknowledgeable Christians in Corinth, Paul realized that pagans do not sacrifice to great gods whom Christians should fear. In this sense, an idol is nothing. Yet, the sacrifices of pagans are made to real **demons**, and Paul insisted that the Corinthian believers not **be participants** (that is, not have spiritual communion) **with demons**. The practices of other religions have many aspects to consider. On the one hand, Christians should be aware that the superstitions and fears that control those of other religions are misplaced and misguided. Their gods have no power over Christians; Christians should be free from such superstitions. On the other hand, the religious rites of other religions do have an association with evil, and followers of Christ should avoid this association.

10:21. To drive his point home, Paul referred back to the Lord's Supper. It is inappropriate for Christians to **drink the cup of the Lord** and also **the cup of demons**. Drinking the cup of demons is a sharing of fellowship with evil supernatural beings, and somehow affects a mysterious spiritual union with them, just as sexual intercourse between a man and a prostitute affects a similar union (1 Cor. 6:16). Believers rightfully belong to Christ alone, who purchased them with his blood (Acts 20:28). Because of the sanctity of this relationship with God, believers must distance themselves from idols. Demons have no power over Christians even when Christians eat in idols' temples, but such union with demons corrupts the sanctity of the believer's relationship with Christ just as fornication with prostitutes does (1 Cor. 6:15).

10:22. Paul made this clear when he closed with two final questions. He wondered if the Corinthians really wanted to **arouse the Lord's jealousy**, and asked if they thought they were **stronger than** the Lord. God is often portrayed in Scripture as a jealous, possessive husband (Isa. 54:5-8; Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 6:9; Hos. 2:1-13). He requires exclusive communion from his people. The Corinthians were to flee the practices of idolatry because they risked incurring the wrath of God much like the Israelites under Moses (see commentary on 10:6-11).

PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS ON MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS (10:23-11:1)

Prior to this point in his argument, the apostle presented at least three big issues related to the question of meat offered to idols. First, he agreed with the knowledgeable at Corinth that idols are not truly divine and therefore should not be treated with pagan superstition (8:1-8). Second, he argued that because idolatrous practices involve demons, Christians should never participate in such religious practices (10:1-10:22). Third, he emphasized that the guiding moral imperative in all of these matters is love for others, not asserting one's own rights (8:9-9:27). At this point, he tied all of these principles together into practical guidelines for the Corinthians to follow.

10:23-24. This section begins with a slogan that Paul had already mentioned: **everything is permissible** (see 6:12). There is a measure of truth in the slogan; Christians have much freedom in Christ. Yet, Paul argued that the slogan must be

balanced for practical implementation. He countered the slogan with two similar qualifications: **not everything is beneficial** (“profitable” NASB; “helpful” NKJV); and **not everything is constructive** (“edify” NASB, NKJV; “build up” NRSV).

The meanings of **beneficial** and **constructive** are ambiguous at first glance. Did Paul mean beneficial for the person himself or herself? Or did he have in mind the benefit of others? In line with his previous discussion on the importance of love and humility toward others, Paul made the meaning of these terms clear: **nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others**. In all matters the question of edification of others in Christ must be a constant consideration. As the apostle said before, there should be no doubt that in one sense Christians are free to eat meat offered to idols. Still, such freedom is not always conducive to the edification others. Freedom in Christ must be balanced by a desire to build up and benefit Christians (see 1 Cor. 8:1; compare Matt 22:39; Rom 14:19).

10:25-26. With this qualification in mind, Paul described two real-life circumstances that fleshed out these principles (10:25-31). In short, Paul’s directions may be summarized in this way: Christians may eat any meat they buy in the market so long as the issue of idolatry does not come up. Yet, if the matter of sacrifice to idols is mentioned, then believers should refrain from eating for the sake of others.

In the meat markets of the Greece, some meat was sold after being dedicated to an idol, while other meat had never been so dedicated. Apparently, shopkeepers did not always make the distinction evident.

The rabbis placed many restrictions on Jews who lived in pagan cities like Corinth. Jews had to be sure that shops were entirely kosher, and they had to refrain from purchasing meat in shops that did not meet this standard.

But this was not Paul’s policy. Believers could **eat anything sold . . . without raising questions** about whether or not the meat had been sacrificed to an idol. Why were Christians able to do this? Paul supported his counsel (**for**) by quoting Psalm 24:1: “**The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.**” Jews often used this particular line from Psalm 24 in mealtime prayers. Paul used this well-known prayer to assert that the Lord is the only true God of all things (compare 1 Tim. 4:3-5), and that idols truly are insignificant from a Christian perspective (1 Cor. 8:4). For this reason, followers of Christ did not have to go about asking each shop keeper if the meats they sold had been offered to idols. They could eat without **raising questions of conscience**, that is, without raising issues about the meat’s history that might trouble others’ consciences. Of course, Paul did not encourage weak Christians to eat against their consciences (8:1). Rather, he spoke to those who understood the true nature of idols and of the meat offered to them.

10:27-29a. After speaking of the marketplace, Paul turned to the situations in which believers were guests in unbelievers’ homes (10:27-30). His first statement was similar

to the marketplace advice. Christians may **eat whatever** they receive **without raising questions of conscience**. Even so, the policy changes if someone says that the meat **has been offered in sacrifice** to an idol. When this fact is known, the situation becomes more complex. Followers of Christ are **not to eat** under these circumstances **for the sake of the man who told you**. Paul's outlook is clear. Knowing that meat has been sacrificed to idols raises issues of **the other man's conscience**, perhaps by offending him, but more likely by encouraging him to participate fully in the sinful practices of idolatry.

It is significant that Paul offered instructions on dining with unbelievers. Apparently, this was not a scenario he imagined would be played out in a believer's home. Probably this stems from the fact that, for Paul, there was no doctrinal reason for Christians to abstain from buying and eating sacrificed food in their own homes. Dining in pagan temples was wrong, not because the meat was tainted, but because the act of sharing in the demon's tables — not the simple act of eating — was idolatrous. If the Corinthians followed Paul's advice, they never would have known whether or not the meat they purchased had been sacrificed to idols, and thus would not be in a position to tell their guests the meat's history. Further, Christian guests should not have suffered a moral quandary on this issue.

10:29b-30. It is somewhat difficult to know how to understand this portion of Paul's argument. Was he defending his own actions against those who opposed him in Corinth, or was he speaking hypothetically of himself as if he were in a situation like the one he posited in 10:27-29a? In any event, the two questions in this section seem designed to justify (**for**) his policy regarding eating in unbelievers' homes.

First, Paul wondered why he should do anything that would allow his **freedom to be judged by another man's conscience**. Christians have freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols, but they should not exercise that freedom when it threatens the conscience of another. If an unbelieving host does not mention the meat's history, his conscience evidently is not threatened by that history and Christians are free to eat. If believers ask questions about the meat, however, it indicates to their unbelieving hosts that idols are significant. Thus, when Christians eat such meat after asking its history, their hosts' consciences may be encouraged toward idolatry (compare 8:7). Alternatively, hosts may consider believers hypocritical if believers eat meat they know to have been sacrificed to idols. This seems to be the point of his second question, "**Why am I denounced?**" Christians should not ask such questions because questions can only lead to the unnecessary forfeiture of Christian freedom, or to the harm of their hosts' consciences. For obvious related reasons, Christians should not eat meat when their hosts volunteer the information that the meat has been sacrificed to an idol. Eating under such conditions is just like asking and being told the same information. Eating meat sacrificed to idols is not worth the potential harm it can bring to the cause of Christ and to the mind of the unbeliever. Therefore, when it is known that meat has been offered to idols, it is much better to refrain.

Nevertheless, one should not overlook the fact that Paul also said Christians may legitimately give thanks for and confidently eat meat which has been sacrificed to idols. They may **take part in the meal with thankfulness**. This is most likely a reference to the prayer of thanks in 10:26. In any case, Paul did not here argue for the forfeiture of Christian freedom, but for the protection and careful exercise of Christian freedom. He suggested abstinence only when such freedom had been compromised by the actions of others.

10:31-32. In a final conclusion (“so” NIV, NRSV; “therefore” NKJV; “then” NASB) Paul summarized his outlook into two principles (10:31-11:1). First, whether or not believers partake, they must **do it all for the glory of God**. Believers must make choices that will yield honor and praise to God. This general principle applies to every area of life. The chief end of human beings is the glory of God; his honor should be the principle concern in all matters for those who love God (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37).

Second, whether believers partake or not, they should also be concerned about other people. They should **not cause anyone to stumble** that is, they should not cause anyone to sin, nor hinder their receptivity to the gospel. The principle of love for neighbor goes hand in hand with love for God (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). Paul insisted that this concern for others applies to **Jews, Greeks, and the church of God**. He mentioned these groups because each kind of people raised different considerations (compare 9:20-22). Both **Jews** and **Greeks** are unbelieving, but each group has different standards and expectations. Moreover, the principle of love for neighbor must also extend to **the church** because Christians have different issues to be taken into consideration as well. Each situation requires wisdom and care as the principles of love for God and neighbor are applied.

10:33-11:1. Paul closed this section by reminding his readers that he did not require of them something he himself was unwilling to do. He reminded them of the practices he described in 8:13-9:23, insisting that he sought **to please everybody in every way**. Of course, as he had said earlier (9:21), Paul did not carry his service to others to the point of sin. He sought to serve others because he was **not seeking his own good but the good of many**, or more specifically, he was seeking **that they may be saved** (see 9:19-22). Paul’s commitment to seeking the salvation of the lost led him to subjugate his personal preferences and freedoms to the good of others. As a result of the consistency with which Paul fulfilled this service, he felt capable of encouraging the Corinthians to **follow his example as he followed the example of Christ**. As Paul explained in detail in Philippians 2:5-8, Christ gave up all of his freedom and honor, humbling himself to the point of death on a cross, in order to save others. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to remember Christ’s great sacrifice as the perfect model of love and concern for others (compare Rom. 15:1-3; Eph. 4:32-5:1).

DIGGING DEEPER

A. Setting our hearts on evil things (10:6)

The verb in the phrase here translated “setting our hearts on evil things” is the simple verb of being *einai*, modified by the word “not.” Thus, Paul did not literally tell the Corinthians what they were not to do, but rather what they were not to be. The noun “cravers” (*epithumetes*) denotes what they were not to be.

B. Participation, Participate (10:16,18,20)

In Paul’s writings, “participation” (*koinonia*) and “participate” (*koinonos*) have multiple meanings, though all their meanings seem to revolve around the idea of “fellowship” or “mutuality.” Some occurrences speak of a mysterious union believers share with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and with each other through Jesus and the Spirit: “called . . . into **fellowship** with . . . Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:9); “the **fellowship** of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14); and “**fellowship** with the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1). Philippians 3:10 relies on this underlying conception in saying that believers share in Christ’s sufferings (“**fellowship of sharing** in his sufferings”). Colossians 1:24 expresses the same thought, saying that believers “fill up in [their] flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions.” That is, Christ completes his own suffering through his union with suffering believers. Akin to this is Paul’s statement, “You **share** in our sufferings” (2 Cor. 1:7), which in context means not that the Corinthians suffer the same kinds of things that Paul suffers, but that their union with him means that they experience his suffering with him (compare 1 Cor. 12:26). In Philippians 1:5, Paul referred to his readers’ “**partnership** in the gospel.” The context of this statement suggests better translations would be “participation” (NASB), “sharing” (NRSV), or “fellowship” (NKJV), because Paul did not mean that the Philippians shared in the work of the gospel, but that they were in the process of being changed by the gospel.

In fact, the foregoing verses represent all Paul’s uses of *koinonia* with God, except for those in 1 Corinthians 10:16. Paul’s incorporation of his “one body” (10:17) theology with *koinonia* in 10:16 buttresses the argument that 1 Corinthians 10:16,18,20 also should be read as referring to spiritual union with Christ. It is the living bond between God and believers, and between all believers in Christ. This is the same meaning that John regularly accorded to the word group (1 John 1:3,6,7).

C. Anything sold in the Market (v. 25)

In Paul’s day, most of the meat available for purchase in the market had been butchered by pagan priests, and much of what those priests butchered they also sacrificed to idols. It should have been fairly easy to question vendors regarding the history of the meat they sold. Still, not all may have known whether or not particular cuts had or had not been sacrificed to idols, even if the vendors knew that the meat had been butchered by pagan priests. Pagans also offered other foods to their idols, and many of these also found their way into the marketplace. Paul’s exhortation “**whether you eat or drink**” (10:31) reflects the understanding that much of the food and drink available for public purchase came from idols’ temples.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. What things in the Corinthian church did Paul think had been foreshadowed by the Israelites' baptism into Moses, and by their eating and drinking of spiritual food and water? What happened to the Israelites? What does this imply about Christians in the New Testament age?
2. What sins did Israel commit? How did God's respond to their sins? How does God's response to these sins serve as an example to the church? Were these sins evident in the Corinthian church's past? Do you see any of these sins being committed in the modern church, especially in your church?
3. What is the "fulfillment of the ages"? How does this concept relate to Paul's argument?
4. Exactly what promise does God make regarding the support he will give us in times of temptation? How is this promise commonly misunderstood or abused?
5. What type of supernatural reality takes place in the Lord's Supper? Are you satisfied with your ability to understand or explain this reality? What does this supernatural reality imply about idolatry?
6. Exactly what did Paul forbid the Corinthians to do? What did he allow them to do? Does this agree with or contradict your understanding of what he told them to do in chapter 8?
7. What guiding principles did Paul give the Corinthians to help them determine the proper course of action in any given situation? Were these principles primarily behavioral or emotional?
8. Do these guiding principles characterize you? If not, how can you affect a change so that they do?
9. In chapters 8-10, what is the basic flow of Paul's argument? How does this argument anticipate the things Paul said in chapter 11?