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The Truth About Idolatry

10: 14-22

The truth about idolatry DIG: What is meant by drinking “the cup of blessing” and “breaking bread?” How is that “sharing in the body of the Messiah?” Why mention that the Levites ate the sacrifices offered by the Israelites in this context? How do these two illustrations relate to Paul’s call to avoid participation in the feasts at pagan temples?

REFLECT: Idolatry can take many forms. What kinds of “idols” do you see people “worshiping” by those around you? What is a contemporary parallel of how these examples and warnings apply to you? Have you ever found yourself attached to an “idol?” What steps can you take to guard against that happening again?

If anything gets between you and God, He wants it out of the way.

Paul is now getting ready to bring **his** lengthy section of **eating meat sacrificed to idols** to a conclusion. In these verses we discover beyond any doubt the specific issue that began in **8:1**. As **Paul** has made clear, **idolatry**, immorality, and grumbling against **God** are not gray areas - they are outright **sins** (**to see link click [Br](#) - Blessings and Abuses of Freedom in Messiah**). Believers had no freedom in regard to such things. Next, **the apostle** explains why the **sin** of **idolatry** is especially offensive to **God**. It is not a moral issue **to eat meat sacrificed to an idol**; but it is a serious **sin** to engage in any form of **idol** worship. Some of **the Corinthians** were taking **their** freedom **in Messiah** too far, and were becoming involved in the wickedness of **idolatry**. They were free to attend pagan functions, but were not free to participate in pagan **idolatry**. **Paul** strongly rebukes those who would do that.²⁶⁴



Paul could not state **his** conclusion more clearly. **Therefore, my dear friends, run away from** (Greek: *phuego*, present imperative is durative, meaning *continue to run*) **idolatry!** The preposition **from** (Greek: *apo*) instead of (Greek: *ek*, meaning *out of*) implies that **Paul** is not calling **them out of idolatry**, but encouraging **them to “run away from” idolatry (10:14)**. The command to **“run away from” idolatry** here matches the prohibition to **“run away from sexual immorality” in 6:18**. The two are intertwined in **Paul’s** mind (**Romans 1:18-32; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5; First Peter 4:3**). **The Corinthians** were not yet bogged down in the miry swamp of **idolatry** and in need of being extricated, but **they** did need to be warned that **they** were walking into spiritual quicksand. **Idolatry** is like radioactive waste: it requires **them** to **run away** from this area immediately to avoid contamination and certain death.²⁶⁵

Paul never asks for mere blind obedience: **he** always labors to secure obedience as a result of thorough conviction. Now **Paul** seeks to show **them** how **sensible** it is based upon **their** own experience of **the Lord’s Supper**. **I speak to you as sensible people; judge for yourselves what I am saying (10:15)**. **The Corinthians** prided **themselves** on **their wisdom (Second Corinthians 11:19)**; now **Paul** appeals to it. **He** did not have to demonstrate the point. **They** could see it for **themselves**.²⁶⁶

Idolatry is Inconsistent (10:16-18): Paul now moves to an important step in **his** argument: **the Lord’s Supper**. This becomes the key to **his** climactic argument. **His** words give us the impression that participating in **the Lord’s Supper** is a regular practice among faithful believers. It is commanded by our **Lord (Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:24-25)** to remind us of **His sacrifice** for us and our oneness with **Him** and with fellow believers. **The “cup of blessing” over which we make the b’rakhah (Hebrew: blessing) - isn’t it a sharing (Greek: koinonia, meaning fellowship) in the bloody sacrificial death of the Messiah?** The third cup of the Passover Seder is called **the cup of redemption, or the cup of blessing** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Kk - The Third Cup of Redemption](#)). And **the bread we break, isn’t it a sharing in the body of the Messiah (10:16)?** Both of these rhetorical questions begin with *ouchi*, which means that a “yes”

answer is anticipated.

Because there is one loaf of bread, Yeshua said: I am the bread of life (John 6:35), we who are many constitute one body, since we all partake of the one loaf of bread (10:17). Because we are one with **Messiah** we are one with each other. As we come into *fellowship* with **Messiah** through **the Lord's Supper**, we come into *fellowship* with each other in a unique way: **The person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (6:17).** All believers stand on the same ground at the foot of the cross, as forgiven **sinners** who possess **eternal life** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**).²⁶⁷

Look at physical Isra'el, literally, "the Isra'el according to the flesh" (**10:18a**). This is the key verse for evaluating those who believe in Replacement Theology, that the Gentile Church has replaced **the Jews** as "the true Isra'el," or "the new Isra'el." In the present verse the argument goes as follows: does **Paul** use the phrase "according to the flesh" to imply the existence of a different **Isra'el** "according to the Spirit?" **Paul** contrasts these two phrases in **Romans 1:3-4, 8:4-5, and Galatians 4:29**; and these are the only places where the phrase, "according to the Spirit" appears in the entire B'rit Chadashah; although 19 other places where the phrase "according to the flesh" is found, one can usually imagine an alternative "according to the Spirit." However, it is in **Romans 11:17-24**, in his analogy with cultivated and wild olive trees, that **Paul** expresses most clearly **his** understanding of **Isra'el** in the present Dispensation of Grace as consisting of three groups - branches of the cultivated tree which have been cut off and remain off (non-Messianic **Jews**), branches of the cultivated olive tree which have been cut off and then grafted back into their own olive tree (Messianic **Jews**), and wild olive branches that have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree (Gentile believers, see **Romans 11:23-24**). Thus, **physical Isra'el** is a subset consisting of the first two of these three groups: non-Messianic **Jews** plus Messianic **Jews**. Nowhere in the B'rit Chadashah is the Church called "the true Isra'el" or "the new Isra'el." For more on this see the commentary on **Romans Da - The Redemption of Isra'el**.²⁶⁸

Again, **Paul** uses **Isra'el** to illustrate **his** point. **Don't those who eat the sacrifices participate in the Altar (10:18b)?** When **the Israelites** brought **their sacrifices to the Bronze Altar** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fa - Build Altar of Acacia Wood Overlaid with Bronze**), some of the offerings were burnt as **the sacrifice**, some of the offering was eaten by the priests, and some of it was eaten by those who offered it. In those offerings, everyone was involved with **the sacrifice**, with **ADONAI** and with each other.

Likewise, to **sacrifice to an idol** is to identify with **it**, to participate with **the idol** and with

all others who **sacrifice to it**. Religious ceremonies, whether believers or pagans, involve participation of the worshipers with the object of their worship and with each other. Thus, it is completely inconsistent for believers to participate in any expression of worship that is apart from and contrary to their **Lord**.²⁶⁹

Idolatry is demonic (10:19-21): Much worse than being inconsistent, **idolatry** is **demonic**. So, what am I saying? That food sacrificed to idols has any significance in itself? or that an idol has significance in itself? No, what I am saying is that the things which pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice not to God but to demons; and I don't want you to become sharers of the demons (10:19-20)! Since **idols** do not exist, the **Corinthians cannot become sharers with idols**. But **demons do** exist, and pagan sacrifice is **demonic**. However, the **Corinthians would become sharers with demons if they** willingly participated in pagan sacrificial feasts.²⁷⁰ All altars, all sacrifices, and all worship that is not intended to serve the true and living **God** are actually, although not necessarily consciously or intentionally, devoted to **demons**. As these **wicked angels**, under the leadership of **Satan**, rule the entire world, so **they** are the originators of the spiritual darkness of which **idolatry** is the most terrible evidence. Hence, all **idol sacrifices**, whatever the **pagan** ideas concerning **them** may be, are actually **sacrifices to demons (Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37 and 95:5)**.²⁷²

Fundamental allegiance was at stake. **You can't drink both a cup of the Lord and a cup of demons, you can't partake in both a meal of the Lord and a meal of demons (10:21)**. Paul is not giving advice but stating a fact. **Yeshua** made it clear that we cannot **serve two masters (Matthew 6:24 NASB)**. It is not simply that we should not . . . but we cannot! It is impossible to do both at the same time. It must be one or the other. We will **hate the one and love the other**, or we will **hold to the one and despise the other**. When we *fellowship* with **the Lord**, we cannot *fellowship* with **demons**, or vice versa.²⁷³

It's as if **Paul** is saying: **You** can't have it both ways. That's exactly what **Isra'el** did in the wilderness. **They** worshiped the true **God**, and then turned around and worshiped a false **idol** (see the commentary on **Exodus Gq - The Golden Calf Incident**). That's exactly what the pagan Gentile do. By saying that **they** wanted to worship **God**, but worshiped **an idol** instead, the **Corinthians** would provoke **God** to **jealousy**.

Idolatry is offensive to the Lord (10:22): Idolatry is inconsistent, **demonic**, and offensive to **the Lord**. It will **make the Lord jealous**. Paul alludes to the Song of Moses: **They aroused My righteous zeal with a non-god and provoked me with their vanities (32:21a CJB)**. The reason that **idols** are not to be worshiped is that **ADONAI** is a

jealous or **zealous God**. The Hebrew term *qanna'* combines the two concepts of **jealousy** and **zeal** (not envy or suspicion).²⁷³ So, **zeal**, or **zealousness**, meaning *a passionate devotion to*, would be a better term to use than **jealous**, which has negative, even petty connotations. Therefore, **idolatry** would cause **God's zeal** to burn like a husband's **zealousness** would burn against **an unfaithful wife (Hosea 2:2-5)**.

Paul's final question: **We aren't stronger than He is, are we (10:22)?** Is obviously rhetorical. Does the idol foolishly think he is more powerful than **YHVH? God** will not allow **idolatry** to go unpunished; therefore, no one can escape. Even **His** own **children** will not escape **His** severe discipline if **they** persist in worshiping any sort of **idol**. Some of **the Corinthians** had done that and had paid with **their** health, or even **their** lives: **This is why some among you are weak and sick, and some have died (11:30)!**

What does this passage mean for us today since we probably have no inclination **to eat meat sacrificed to idols**? If I was traveling and found myself in a country where there were people actually worshiping an **idol**, I would be more inclined to take a picture of it than to bow down and worship it. But does this mean that I am no longer susceptible to the temptation to worship **idols**? No, all it really means is that I'm not tempted to worship *that* kind of **idol**. Like **Isaiah**, I have figured out the inconsistency of cutting down a tree and using part of it to make a fire and cook food, and part of it to make a phony **god**, saying: **Save me for you are my god!** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Hy - Worship the LORD, Not Idols**).

If an **idol** is whatever takes the place of **God** in my affection, then all of us continue to be tempted by worshiping **idols**. Just as in a primitive society a person might make **an idol** of any material, in our day we may make **an idol** out of anything - our work, our family, our body, our house, our hobby, or even our religion. If anything besides **ADONAI** gets our best thoughts, our tears, our feelings, and our energy - are we not just more sophisticated **idolaters**?²⁷⁵

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, What a wonderful blessing it is to have **You** as our awesome **father**, always watching over **His children (Hebrews 13:5)**. It is easy for us to point the finger at others and call them wrong, just as **Isaiah** looked at **Israel's sins** and called **them** wrong. **Woe to those who . . . (Isaiah 5:8, 11)** and **Oy to those who. . . (Isaiah 5:18, 20, 21)**. Yet **Isaiah** was wise when **he** saw the holiness of **God**, **He** said, "**Oy to me! For I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:4)**.*

***Isaiah** was so wise to look inside **himself** and to move from finger pointing at others to seeing **his** own **sin**. **Idol** worship is both worship of stone or wooden "gods" and living to*

please oneself over living to please **God**. **ADONAI**, **You** alone are worthy of giving **You** our best, and loving **You** with all we have. **And Yeshua said to him: You shall love ADONAI your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38). You** are a joy to love and to put first in my life! I bow in humble worship of **You**. In **Yeshua's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen