

Christians Gone Wild!  
**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, week 22**  
Resisting Idolatry Like Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:1–14)  
June 18, 2006  
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*Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.*  
1 Corinthians 10:14

*<sup>1</sup>For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup>They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup>They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup>and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. <sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do 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 pagan revelry." <sup>8</sup>We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. <sup>9</sup>We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. <sup>10</sup>And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup>So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! <sup>13</sup>No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand up under it. <sup>14</sup>Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.*

In this packed section of Scripture Paul connects idolatry and sin for us, clearly showing that sin in our life proceeds from our idols. Therefore, before we can understand sin we must first establish some basic principles regarding idolatry.

God made us to worship, by holding Him alone in highest regard and living our life to sacrificially glorify Him above all else. This was to be done by ruling over created things that He gave to us as gifts (Genesis 1: 26–28). But by sinning, we inverted God's intended order for our lives and we now worship created things instead of the Creator; this is the definition of idolatry (Romans 1:21–25).

The implications of this inversion are profound. Martin Luther wisely noted that the first two of the Ten Commandments from God were against idolatry and that only through idolatry do we break the other commandments (e.g., lying, stealing, murder, sexual sin). So idolatry is not merely one sin among many but instead *the* sin which underlies all other sins. We are worshipers who will continue to worship seemingly anyone and anything. In our day this can be a person we seek the approval of, an achievement we desire to obtain, or possessions we long for. Our worship is reflected in the time, money, energy, and thought we devote to that person or thing above all else. Anything from food, houses, pets, spouses, children, sports teams, hobbies, and musicians qualify as idols in our culture. They become little false gods that rule over us.

Simply, idols are our way of making life worth living, being happy, and finding self-worth. So idols are often a good thing (e.g., a child, hard work, sexual pleasure) inordinately elevated from a good thing to a false god. Asking yourself some questions about your emotions can help you locate your idols.

- What am I most afraid of?
- What do I long for most passionately?
- Where do I run for comfort?
- What do I complain about most?
- What angers me most?
- What makes me happiest?
- How do I explain myself to other people?
- What has caused me to be angry with God?
- What do I brag about?
- What do I want to have more than anything else?
- Who do I sacrifice the most for in my life?
- If I could change one thing in my life what would that be?
- Whose approval am I seeking?
- What do I want to control/master?
- What comfort do I treasure the most?

Tragically, our idols are false gods and false saviors that offer us a false salvation through works-righteousness. The result is that we fail to see that we are loved by God and are continually saved from our idols by Jesus. Salvation is achieved solely by Jesus and not our own performance, which only leads to pride if we succeed, or despair if we do not. Idolatry cannot produce joy, contentment, or peace because those things only come through loving Jesus for who He is and what He has done. The sick false gospel of idolatry says that we can only be saved from our self-defined hell (e.g., rejection, failure, insignificance, responsibility, aloneness, poverty, ugliness) by loving ourselves over Jesus and cherishing what we have done over what He has done for us.

The solution to idolatry is fourfold:

- **Recognize** — see and name your idols
- **Repent** — confess to Jesus your false gods and break them
- **Replace** — worship Jesus as your only Savior and Lord
- **Rejoice** — through Jesus, idols are exchanged for the real God, and works-righteousness is replaced with transforming grace, thereby enabling us to worship as God created us to

In sum, the key to keeping ourselves from idols that lead to further sin is to repent of our idols and worship Jesus alone as our highest treasure, greatest joy, and only God. This enables us to rule over created things rather than allowing them to rule over us, thus worshiping as we were made to—rightly placing Creator above creation—which brings great joy. This worship means we can eat without our god being our stomach, work without sacrificing our family and our soul on the altar of promotions and achievements, and enjoy Sabbath without making it our life's goal to just have comfort and leisure.

**Note:** I would like to personally acknowledge that many of the concepts I have used here come from some unpublished papers Dr. Tim Keller has given me to help explain this important theme of Scripture, for which I am grateful.