

PREFACE

In this session we continue our examination of the apostle Paul's commands ("Do not...", "Nor let us...") backed up by illustrations from the past ("...as some of them did."). All this is to warn the Corinthians, and us, away from having *anything* to do with idols.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-11.**v8**

Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

We have several things to look at in this verse; let's take them in order. Paul follows his call against idolatry and "play[ing]" with another reference to the sexual component, but note that he softens the blow by including himself in the warning (v7: [You] Do not... v8: Nor let us...).

All our common translations make this explicitly "*sexual* immorality" except the NASB, where that is left implied. We must understand that in the ancient world, and specifically in God's word, sexual immorality and idolatry were "two sides of the same coin" (Garland). In a number of passages God uses the language of adultery and harlotry—of Israel being unfaithful in her "marriage" to the Lord—euphemistically to refer to idolatry—i.e., straying from Him to worship other gods.

Read Jeremiah 3:6-10.

The Lord speaks to this again in Jeremiah 13.

"As for your adulteries and your lustful neighings,
The lewdness of your prostitution
On the hills in the field,
I have seen your abominations.
Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
How long will you remain unclean?" (Jeremiah 13:27)

God sees Israel, and Christians today, who follow after other gods or idols, as a wife being unfaithful—even openly playing the harlot, the prostitute, selling herself to strangers—unfaithful to her husband and the marriage bed. So in speaking of sexual immorality in vv7-8 Paul is still talking about idolatry.

Here Paul does not explicitly cite the original event, as he did in v7, but we can easily deduce the reference (and most commentators agree) by the judgment he cites. We find it in Numbers 25.

Read Numbers 25:1-9.

In this alarming story of Yahweh commanding Moses and the “judges” of Israel to slay—openly, publicly—the leaders of this abominable idolatry, we have an instance of what Paul referred to earlier of bodies being strewn about in the wilderness. It’s not clear the manner of execution, but the word translated “execute” means more than just putting to death.

yāqa = a primitive root; properly **to sever oneself**, i.e. (by implication) **to be dislocated**; figurative to abandon; causative **to impale (and thus allow to drop to pieces by rotting)** :- be alienated, depart, hang (up), **be out of joint**.

The Lord said it was not enough to “dismember” the leaders, but they were to be “[exposed] in broad daylight” for all to see the penalty for their gross idolatry. In the ancient Middle East, as well as today, such treatment of the dead was considered a curse. To not properly bury someone, and soon after death, was to consider them accursed. Another interpretation of this is seeing the executed leaders as bloody sacrifices, laid out similar to when the Lord made His covenant with Abram regarding a son ([Genesis 15](#)). There it was to affirm a promise; here it may have been to quench the anger of Yahweh against the people.

In the narrative, however, what really stopped the plague was the extraordinary act of Aaron’s grandson Phinehas. The level of idolatry had become so brazen that a man brought a Midianite woman into the camp—in full view of Moses and the congregation—into his family’s tent, and lay with her ([Ronald B. Allen, in his interpretation, suggests an even more outrageous public location for this licentious act](#)). Phineas was outraged, grabbed a spear, and pinned both of them to the ground with one thrust.

Paul’s use of this OT event underlines the seriousness of the offense—on two levels. First, the Lord God takes any form of idolatry very seriously; His first and most important commandment is “You shall have no other Gods before Me” ([Exodus 20:3](#)); He goes on to say,

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me...” ([Exodus 20:4-5](#))

Second, this OT event illustrates what happens—just how far from a holy God these idols can carry us—when we dabble in them. Even just eating in their presence.

Sidebar: I would be remiss if I didn't point out that v8 in our text, referencing the passage in Numbers, includes the famous "Case of the Missing Thousand." Paul says twenty-three thousand, while Moses, in Numbers, says twenty-four thousand died as the result of the plague. There are some rather fanciful and contortive theories advanced for this apparent discrepancy, none of which, as far as I am concerned, make as much sense as the one they, for the most part, ridicule. To wit, the total number as reported by Moses was twenty-four thousand; the number who were killed "in one day," as reported by Paul, were twenty-three thousand, with another thousand subsequently succumbing to the plague ([as MacArthur, Mare](#)).

v9

Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Still in the book of Numbers, we find the reference cited in v9 in Chapter Twenty-one.

Read Numbers 21:4-9.

The Numbers passage does not mention trying or tempting the Lord, but the summary of the incident in Psalm 78:18 does.

Read Psalm 78:17-18.

Sidebar: The NASB is the only one of our versions to translate *kyrios* literally: "the Lord." But every occurrence of "the Lord" (*ton kyrion*) in the NT refers to Christ, hence the other versions. This also ties back to v4, where Paul writes, "they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ" ([discussion in Session 92](#)).

To try, tempt, or test the Lord means to test *thoroughly, to the utmost*. When Israel did this in the wilderness Yahweh sent snakes—"fiery serpents"—to kill many of them.

fiery serpents = *sarap* (saw-rahf') = from <H8313> (saraph); **burning**, i.e. (figurative) **poisonous** (serpent); specifically a saraph or symbolic creature (from their copper color) :- fiery (serpent), **seraph**. "[Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.](#)" (Isaiah 6:6 KJV).

Fee: It is Christ whom the Corinthians are putting to the test by trying to eat both at the Lord's Table and at the table of the demons.