

FOREWORD

This world, at present, is passing through a peculiar time. Because it dwells, for now, in this world, the church too—the body of Christ—has been passing through the same strange time.

We, however, answer to a different Voice than the rest in this world; the Holy Spirit guides us, He counsels us, He shares with us the mind of the Father.

When all this began, when our local church in obedience to the authorities, ceased gathering on Sundays, I ceased as well our studies in First Corinthians. I realized at the time that, just like the pastor's messages, this too could continue on-line, but then we would not have the intimate fellowship of the classroom. Better to wait a few weeks, I thought, for the storm to pass by, then resume as before.

While there have been indeed a few glimmers of sunshine through the fog, there remains no firm end in sight. This week the Spirit has been prodding me, even in slumber, that this is not a healthy situation—that we need to get back into our study of Paul's letter to the Corinthians—even if by long-distance.

So that is what we are doing. This session, #98, is the one that had already been prepared for March 15—the Sunday when everything was canceled at the last minute. I would encourage you—no, I would implore you—to at least do a quick review of session #97 before continuing into this session. Meanwhile I will be uploading new sessions—both written notes in PDF and audio versions—every Friday.

I dare say we all look forward to the day when we can gather as family in the same room, but for now let us pray that the Lord would pour out His blessings and grace even on this long-distance study.

PREFACE

In vv1-4 of this chapter, the apostle emphasizes the attention and protection God afforded Israel while they were in the wilderness. Nevertheless (v5), "...with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness." In vv6-10, he itemizes their "crav[ing] of evil things." In spite of God's grace and protection, Israel turned against Him: worshipping idols, and participating in drunken orgies; flagrantly breaking His laws; fraternizing with people of pagan nations; grumbling and complaining about just about everything. In v11, as in v6, Paul makes the point that not only were these events recorded, but they actually happened by God's design so that we would learn from the mistakes they made and not do the same.

After the cautionary statement of v12, paraphrased, *If you think you are smarter and better than they, and are convinced you're standing on firmer ground, watch out, for you may be about to step off a cliff*, Paul adds a reassuring word—though perhaps not as comforting as we once might have thought: When we are tempted or tried the Lord God will be there with us (just as He was with Israel through their travails), to give us the ability to endure, to stay with Him as we pass *through* whatever is confronting us.

v13: An Additional Note

...with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Before we proceed into the next paragraph, I would like to add just one more note about v13. Some of us, especially those who have grown up with the more convenient interpretation of this verse, may be struggling to picture just what it looks like for the provision of a faithful God *through* the temptations and trials of life, rather than His providing an escape hatch from them.

For that illustration I would suggest the first ten verses of this chapter. It can't be coincidental that Paul prefaced v13 with the tales of Israel in the wilderness. Geographically speaking, Canaan was a short hop from the Nile delta in lower Egypt (the site of the city of Rameses). Yahweh provided, initially, "the way of escape" from the Egyptians *through* the Red Sea. He did that; He provided that. But when Israel was ready to cross over into Canaan, and Yahweh was prepared to do the same thing by providing a dry way *through* the Jordan waters, Israel blew it. The Lord was faithful to Israel, but they failed to place their trust in Him and take Him at His word. Hence he turned them away from Canaan and sent them back into the wilderness to remove by attrition the unfaithful generation, and replace it with one hardened by the trials and temptations of the desert. All the while the Lord God was sustaining Israel *through* these trials, until the day came when they could, at last, cross Jordan "through" the waters, by His grace.

All of this has been background for the remainder of the chapter—some of Paul's strongest words to the Corinthians, and the conclusion to his extended treatise on "concerning things sacrificed to idols" (8:1). This conclusion begins with a short verse that everyone of us should pin to our shirt every day when we rise.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-17.

v14

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Paul loves these people and loves only what is best for them, best for their relationship and walk with Christ. To that end, and based on everything he has been saying, he tells them to *Run!*

flee = *pheugo* = apparently a primary verb; **to run away** (literal or figurative); by implication **to shun**; by analogy to vanish :- escape, **flee (away)**.

Thus Paul reprises a theme—in places word-for-word—he employed in Chapter Six, regarding a different but equally destructive situation in the Corinthian church. (Refer to [handout](#); [chart from Garland](#).)

**Comparing 1 Corinthians 6:12-18
to 1 Corinthians 10:14-31**

10:14	Flee from idolatry	6:18	Flee (sexual) immorality
10:16-17	The Lord's Supper represents that we are one body with Christ	6:15-17	Your bodies are members of Christ; you cannot become one body with a prostitute
10:23	All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful	6:12	All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful
10:31	Do all to the glory of God	6:20	Glorify God in your body

v15

I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say.

wise = *phronimos* = from <G5424> (*phren*); **thoughtful**, i.e. sagacious or discreet (**implying a cautious character**; while <G4680> (*sophos*) denotes practical skill or acumen; and <G4908> (*sunetos*) indicates rather intelligence or mental acquirement); **in a bad sense conceited** (also in the comparative) :- **wise** (-r).

The Corinthians may be listening to the wrong philosophies, and they have a habit of thinking too highly of themselves, but Paul acknowledges their developed intellect, and appeals to it.

v16-17

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?

Some have tried to make this passage about the Lord's Supper be something more than what it is. Paul is not expounding deep theology here, nor is he outlining liturgical doctrine and practice in the church—just as he was not playing the historian in the first ten verses of this chapter. Here he is using the example of the Lord's Supper as part of his argument against eating idol offerings. As David Garland puts it,

As the Lord's Supper is a sacred meal that represents and creates a fellowship of believers in the worship of Christ, who is considered to be present, so pagan meals represent and create a fellowship of worshipers of pagan deities who also are considered to be present.

The comparison is powerful; this passage reiterates a recurring theme we have seen not just in this letter to the Corinthians, but one I keep running into in my personal studies. To wit, *At some point you must choose*. The follower of Christ cannot straddle the fence, with one foot in the Kingdom, and one in the world. Is Christ Jesus Lord or not? If He is, then get your foot out of the world. This is what Paul says later in v21—

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

—and what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount—

Read Matthew 6:24.

—and what Joshua so eloquently stated shortly before his death:

“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
(Joshua 24:15)

The Christian cannot have it both ways; either Christ is Lord of your life, or He is not—and if He is not, then someone else assuredly is.

(v16) Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?

As Garland’s quote, as well as Paul’s language, makes clear, the overriding theme of vv16-17—indeed, the whole paragraph—is *fellowship*. Using the Lord’s Supper to illustrate his point, Paul asserts that the meal is a ceremony, an enactment, representing, first, our fellowship with Christ. Lying beneath the words of our various English translations—share, sharing, sharers, partake, communion, participation—is a thread that is all about *koinonia*: a spiritual fellowship. All those words translate either *koinonia* or the verb *metechein* (a synonym for *koinonia*). That word, that concept, is all about one person sharing in, participating in, the life of another. The biblical concept of fellowship is not about drinking coffee together and talking about the weather (although, by extension, it can include that), but is far deeper, a concept far more profound than just chatting about last night’s game. It involves bearing one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), accepting one another (Romans 15:7), being devoted to one another in brotherly love (Romans 12:10), loving one another (1 John 4:11), praying for one another (James 5:16). But Paul’s first point is that the Lord’s Supper (Communion) is an enactment of the fellowship believers have with Christ Himself: a sharing in His sacrificial blood in the cup, and in His body with the bread.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:24-25.

Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?

Second, Paul notes the aspect in the Lord's Supper of fellowship or communion in and with the "body of Christ"—the Christian family.

In the first-century social setting of those receiving this letter, Paul's use of the Lord's Supper in an extended treatise on the error of eating meat "sacrificed to idols" would be immediately obvious. This was a society (Greco-Roman) in which a shared meal "incurred obligations." Here, as in most other urban settings, there was a common and active patronage system at work. As today, shared meals were a common, even vital, social element of the society. However, it was understood that one did not dine with one's patron and also dine with one of that patron's rivals; to do so would be tantamount to switching sides: switching patrons. Thus, "participating in a patron's meal display[ed] one's solidarity with that patron" (Garland).

(v17) Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

A Christian "breaking bread" in the precinct of and with the supplicants of a pagan idol had the visible, social effect of "switching sides." And if that was not the believer's intention, then he was trying to have it both ways—which does not work. Participation in the Lord's Supper is, along with a remembrance of Christ's life and sacrifice, a periodic reaffirmation of one's place in—and solidarity with—the fellowship of the body of Christ: His church.

In our next session we will press further into this paragraph, but I would also like to reserve the right to revisit vv16-17, for there is a rich bounty here to be harvested, and we don't want to miss any of it.