

From The Pulpit Of



The Table of the Lord and the Table of Demons

No. 24
Series: 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

November 30, 2025
Nathan Carter

Text

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ 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. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Introduction

You're a married man with a family. You've just celebrated Thanksgiving together. You were all around the table in your home, eating and drinking and enjoying each other's company.

Now it's Sunday night. You have a red-eye flight across the country for a week-long business trip. An attractive woman from your office is on the same flight. As you're walking through the airport, she comes up next to you and starts talking. Turns out you're going to the same hotel. She asks you if you'd like to join her for dinner and drinks in the hotel bar when you get there. What do you do?

You run! You flee! You say no and turn and go a different direction. You can't eat and drink with your wife one day and then go out to eat with another woman the next day.

Marriage is an exclusive relationship. Why? Because the Bible says that God made marriage to be a picture of his relationship with his people, the exclusive intimacy of Christ and the Church. The bigger reality we all live in is whether we will belong to the Lord or to the world. And you can't have it both ways.

Where are you today? Are you part of this passing away world? I'm here to tell you that it won't satisfy you. You can leave that abusive lover behind and come be part of God's people! He is a forgiving and merciful Savior of the world who will welcome you when you come to him. If you have; if you're already joined to Jesus and part of his body, the church, then don't let yourself be allured by the world again. Don't flirt with it. Flee it. Be faithful to the only One who truly loves you and can eternally fulfill you.

That's what the Apostle Paul is telling the Corinthian church, and by extension Immanuel Baptist Church, in the passage we're looking at today. We saw last week in

the first part of ch. 10 that Paul warned them against idolatry from the story of OT Israel and how they went after idols. The multi-ethnic church in Corinth represented the new Israel. And they were surrounded by idols everywhere. Pagan temples dotted the landscape. The Corinthian culture was full of false gods that permeated day-to-day life. Similarly, Chicago is awash with idols, alternate allegiances that scream for our attention or subtly seduce us to live for lesser things than the mighty One who made and manages all things.

In light of the constant temptations that surround us and the promise that God will always provide a way of escape, Paul says in v. 14 – “Therefore, my beloved, [that’s a great word – beloved; he loves them with the love that God has for them], flee idolatry.” When you see it and then you see the escape-hatch that God provides, don’t dilly-dally, don’t lolly-gag – RUN through that door that God has opened, run away from idolatry, run back into intimacy with the Lord. Don’t go down that path. Don’t linger at the doorstep. High tail it away. Flee idolatry (cf. 6:18). You can’t have it both ways. You cannot serve two masters. You cannot keep two lovers. It is incongruent to belong to the Lord and belong to the world.

In short, what we’re going to see today from this text is simple and it’s just this: **Let’s keep close to Christ and each other and keep a close watch on our connections with the world.**

Let’s pray...

The Table of the Lord

We’ve seen Paul’s main burden in this section – “[M]y beloved, flee idolatry” (v. 14). He elaborates on this by focusing on two tables. First, the table of the Lord. Second, the table of demons.

Let’s take some time to think more deeply about this table of the Lord. Paul appeals to the Corinthian Christians’ intelligence and encourages them to reflect on these matters and not just mindlessly take someone else’s word for it; don’t just go through the motions. That’s how we should approach all of the Christian life – thoughtfully, theologically, not simplistically, not just doing what you’re told. He says, “I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say” (v. 15). It’s like the noble Bereans we read about in Acts 17 who didn’t just blindly accept what Paul said; “they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11; NIV). We should pay attention and think carefully about any message we hear. Be a thoughtful Christian who wrestles deeply with Scripture; not a superficial one whose religion stays on the surface.

We especially need to think carefully about the Bible’s teaching on the Lord’s Table. The Lord’s Table is one of those primary things, along with baptism, that Christians do. We saw that last week. Paul takes up the topic explicitly in today’s section. And he’ll come back to it again in ch. 11. Thinking rightly about this ordinance is very important. Don’t be someone who just does it, but doesn’t really think about it.

So let’s look at what we find about the Lord’s Table in vv. 16-18. Paul references “[t]he cup of blessing that we bless” and “[t]he bread that we break.” So there are two components to this meal: a cup of drink, and bread to eat. Think about this: it’s not a full

meal with many side dishes and variety of foods, like a Thanksgiving feast. Why? Because it's not a meal to get full on. It's a ceremonial meal.

"The cup of blessing" is a phrase that was used to describe the third cup that Jews drank during the Passover seder. The Passover seder was a special liturgy that Jews celebrated once a year at the annual commemoration of God's redemption of Israel from Egypt. God instituted this ceremonial meal back in Exodus 12. It became an elaborate tradition full of ritual and meaning with different prayers and recitations. The third cup was called "the cup of blessing" because it was with this one that the prayer – "Blessed are you, O LORD, our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine" – was said. That's why it was called "the cup of blessing."

By the way, have you ever heard someone say, "Let's bless the food?" Maybe your grandma said that at Thanksgiving this last week. What does that mean? Are we asking God to put some magic spell on the food to make it more nutritious than it actually is? No, we're not technically blessing the food or drink, but God for providing these things. There was another blessing that was pronounced over the food in the Passover seder that went – "Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth food from the earth." So to bless the food or the drink means to bless God, to acknowledge and thank him as the good Giver of all good things."

So here Paul is talking about "[t]he cup of blessing that we bless" and "[t]he bread that we break." He's using language from the Passover seder, but he's not talking about that ceremonial meal that had four cups and lamb meat and bitter herbs and other elements. He's talking about the *new* ceremonial meal that Jesus instituted during a Passover seder on the night before his crucifixion, when he took the bread and the cup and infused them with new meaning – emblems of his body and blood – and he said that from now on his followers were to eat and drink these two things in remembrance of him (cf. Lk. 22:19). This *new* ceremonial meal commemorates the ultimate Passover, what the Passover had been pointing to all along – Jesus' redeeming death.

So the Lord's Table is a ceremonial meal, instituted by Jesus, involving a cup and bread that replaces the Passover meal for God's people. But what more can we say about it? What does it mean? What does it do? What is it for?

Over time as Scripture got eclipsed by human imagination and tradition this practice of the Lord's Table got distorted into a mysterious mystical experience in the East, and in the West in the Roman Catholic Church the doctrine of transubstantiation developed. Transubstantiation teaches that the priests have the power to transform the *substance* of the bread and wine (not their accidents [it was an Aristotelian distinction]) into the actual body and blood of Jesus. And therefore the priests are then able to represent the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood to God and distribute the actual body and (sometimes the) blood of Christ to the people in order for them to receive grace.

This created a whole host of unbiblical superstitions and gave a lot of power to the priests and the Church to dispense doses of this power. It moved people's attention away from the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and played on the human inclination to introduce our own works into the mix. The Protestant Reformation recognized that the Catholic Mass had strayed far from what the Bible in places like 1 Corinthians had in mind with the Lord's Table.

Luther, for example, knew that transubstantiation was off. He understood that the bread and wine did not become the actual body and blood of Christ. But Lutheranism

developed an idea that has been called consubstantiation (they don't use that term) that is not transubstantiation but maintains that Christ's body and blood are present in, with, and under the bread and wine.

Zwingli thought that this didn't go far enough away from the errors of transubstantiation. Zwingli has become connected with a view called memorialism. In this view the bread and wine are merely symbols that Jesus wanted us to use to help us remember what he did when he offered himself as our once-for-all sacrifice.

Memorialism is certainly part of the Bible's understanding of this ceremonial meal – “Do this in remembrance of me” (11:24-25). But there is more than *mere* remembering happening here. Look at the last half of the two sentences in v. 16 – “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *participation* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *participation* in the body of Christ?” That word – “participation” – is the Greek word *koinonia*, a fellowship, a communion, a covenantal enjoyment, a relational experience.

And so Calvin and the Reformed denounced transubstantiation and didn't follow Lutheranism's consubstantiation, but also didn't go as far as Zwingli's bare memorialist position. The Reformed position has been called spiritual presence. The bread and cup of the Lord's Table is not just an object lesson meant to jog our memories. Yes, Christ's physical body is not present in any way. He remains resurrected and ascended in heaven, having provided satisfaction for our sin and sat down at the right hand of the Father. But, by the Holy Spirit he makes himself and the effects of his sacrifice known intimately to our souls in the act of eating and drinking this special meal together. It is a means of grace. It is an ordained moment of fellowship, of communion, of relational participation with our Savior.

Calvin taught that Christ's body and blood are not locally present in the Lord's Table, yet we truly feed on Christ there by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Institutes*, IV.17). Some Baptists have been bare memorialists, but not all. The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith from 1689 says this about those who receive the Lord's Supper: “outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, [they] do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses” (30:8).

That articulation seems to fit with this language of participation/*koinonia* in 1 Corinthians 10:16. When we gather to eat this bread and drink this cup that Jesus commanded us to eat and drink, we aren't just using a mnemonic device that reminds us that Jesus died for us 2,000 years ago (like a craft you might make at summer camp to teach a spiritual lesson). It does that, for sure. But in the remembering we also relate. Jesus, by the power of his Holy Spirit, is here eating and drinking with us, making the reality that his death created a relish to the tastebuds of our hearts. We have union with Christ; it's an objective fact. At the Lord's Table our communion with Christ is heightened; the subjective experience of the objective reality. The Lord's Table is a crucial way that we **keep close to Christ**.

But there's more! It's also how we **keep close to each other**. Look at v. 17 – “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one

bread.” You can eat bread and drink wine at home alone, if you want to. But you can’t eat the Lord’s Supper by yourself. It’s a *communal* ceremonial meal. Notice the ‘we’s in this section. The Lord’s Table is meant to picture that when I came into relationship with Christ I came into relationship with fellow brothers and sisters who are also in Christ. The Lord’s Table a church ordinance. It’s a picture and it’s a means of grace, not just of individual communion with Christ, but of collective communion with the other members of Christ’s body, the church.

The picture is the one loaf. In America today we are germophobes and individualists. That’s a detriment to our experience of community in many ways. When I go to a restaurant, I usually order my own plate and it may have a piece of sliced bread on it, just for me. But when I was in Central Asia recently when you went out to eat the bread was a central part of the meal. It was a big, round flatbread and the oldest person at the table was supposed to break it and distribute it to all those at the table. That’s closer to what it was like in the NT times and cultures. I think we may be missing something by having tiny broken cracker pieces at our Lord’s Table celebrations. Paul says, “Just as there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.” It’s a picture and a profound experience to eat in such a way that impresses upon us that we are not doing this individualistically but we are all equally united to Christ and therefore to each other.

We used to, many years ago, only eat the Lord’s Table once a month. We stopped doing that when we were preaching through Acts 20 and realized that this ceremonial meal was a central element in the early church’s weekly assemblies. It’s kind of one of the main things that we assemble to do together.

Then for many years we didn’t specify that we should all wait and take it together, so you had people coming up and getting their piece of cracker and taking it right there. Or taking it back to their seat and taking it when they felt ready. Or going off into a corner and turning their backs to everyone else, closing their eyes, and taking it. And we realized that misses the point of the unity this is supposed to foster. We’ll see more about this in 11:33 where it says to wait for one another. This isn’t a closed-eye affair where I either try really hard to remember Jesus’ death for me, or spiritually commune with him. It’s a celebration of our community together, our oneness in Christ.

This is also why we try to be clear that this is for church members only. It’s to be a powerful display of our unity as a body.

Brothers and sisters: regularly gathering to eat and drink at the Lord’s Table is how we **keep close to Christ and each other**.

In v. 18 Paul appeals to the OT, like he’s been doing throughout this chapter. He says, “Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?” In the OT Law there were sacrifices that were made at the Tabernacle or Temple that were placeholders for the final sacrifice of Christ. And one of those sacrifices in particular – the fellowship offering – was slaughtered at the altar, but then a portion of it was given back to the person who brought it to eat together with his family as a demonstration of and participation in the fellowship that they had together with the Lord, through the sacrificial system. It wasn’t just something that you went and did, it was something that you participated in. Today, the Lord’s Supper is not some kind of line you go through to get a superstitious dose of grace. It’s a thoughtful, meaningful way to commemorate *and* commune with Christ *TOGETHER* with your church family.

The Table of Demons

So, that's a little bit on the Lord's Table. Now, what does all this imply about the topic that Paul's had in mind since the beginning of ch. 8 about food sacrificed to idols? Remember: there were pagan temples in Corinth where people would, in a similar manner to the OT Tabernacle of Temple, bring sacrifices and then get to eat parts of them in connection with the worship of the deity. Paul's already sort-of addressed this topic in ch. 8 and indicated that it could be fine to eat leftover meat that had been involved in these temples and then sold at a discount in the market, *if* it didn't cause a brother to stumble. He agreed there that the "idol has no real existence" (8:4). But here he's talking about eating the food as part of the pagan worship experience; not just buying the leftover meat, but participating in the ceremonial meal. Is that okay, since the idol isn't really real anyway? It would make the Christian life in a pagan city a lot easier, if so. But let's follow Paul's logic.

Verse 19 – "What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No." Paul doesn't believe that there are other gods besides the one, true God. BUT he also doesn't think this means that Christians can eat at the Lord's Table on Sundays and then go eat at Aphrodite or Apollo's table on Monday or Tuesday. He asks, "[Do I imply that idols exist? No. But] I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons."

This is based squarely on a teaching in the OT in Deuteronomy 32:17 that says that when Israel sacrificed to idols they "sacrificed to demons that were no gods" (cf. Ps. 106:37). What are demons, then? They're not rival gods to the God of the Bible. They are personal, spiritual beings that were created by God, but have rebelled against God and seek to turn humans against God in whatever ways they can. Sometimes their tact is to convince people that the spiritual realm isn't real at all. Other times they play on humanity's innate sense of something more, but direct them to make up their own gods.

Leon Morris writes about this passage in 1 Corinthians, "The *devils* make use of men's readiness to worship idols. Thus, when men sacrifice to idols, it cannot be said that they are engaging in some neutral activity that has no meaning. They are in fact sacrificing to evil spirits... [and thus to] share [their] food is to establish fellowship [with *devils*]." ¹ Another commentator writes – "[A]lthough the idols themselves do not have any valid spiritual reality and do not represent actual gods, there is a spiritual reality behind them in that they have been created at the instigation of demons posing as gods and those worshipping them worship those demons." ² Tom Schreiner puts it this way – "*demons* are at work where there are idols – and demons are not a figment of the imagination but are all too real." ³

The devil was behind Demeter. Satan supported the building of the shrine to Persephone in Corinth. Modern Judaism is an invention of Evil One to keep people blinded to the true Messiah and fulfillment of the OT Scriptures. Islam is a similar demonic amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity that appeals to morality without redemption. Hindu deities are demons in disguise. Buddhism is a demonic ruse. Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other similar cults are the work of evil spirits. To participate in the them is to participate with demons, to be in cahoots with Satan.

Since that's the case, Paul says to the members of the church in Corinth that they need to flee idolatry, and not play around with it. They can't go to these pagan festivals

and eat and drink there and say, “Oh, they are nothing.” No, they are demonic. And – “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” (v. 21). It’s like oil and water. They can’t mix. You can’t have fellowship with Christ and his Church and then go and have fellowship with demons. That makes it seem like the first fellowship is fake. Your heart really loves God’s enemy, not God.

This has implications for missions. Missionaries are seeking to preach the gospel and plant churches in places where there aren’t churches (or hardly any). And the members of those new churches must come out from their previous religious associations. This is really hard. It may mean death or at least social ostracizing. But this is the call of Christ. There has been advocates of what’s called “The Insider Movement” that would say that converts to Christ on the mission field can stay in their religious communities and participate in all the practices they used to, but just make sure they are worshipping Christ in their hearts. This is safer, and gives them a better chance of sharing with others inside the religious system about Jesus. But Paul would be totally flabbergasted by such an idea.

But how does this apply to us here in the U.S., in American culture? We may not face the same pressures, but there are definite pulls to participate in alternate or additional religious practices that are antithetical to Christ. If you are a Christian, you cannot participate in a Diwali party where prayers are offered to Hindu gods and goddesses. We cannot participate in interfaith worship services. Kim Riddlebarger tries to help us apply this further. He says, “Professing Christians cannot join the Masonic lodge and then come to the table of the Lord. Christians cannot attend Kabbalah classes seeking spiritual insight and participate in the body and blood of Christ. Christians cannot make life’s decisions based upon their horoscopes or Tarot Card readings and then participate in the sacraments. If we follow Christ, we must leave these pagan things behind.”⁴

But I think we need to consider further applications of this beyond just other religions. We live in a culture that has a heritage of being Christianized. Christianity is still the majority religion here, and so the pressures to idolatry and the tactics of the devil will be a bit more nuanced than what Christians in first century Corinth were facing. We need to **keep a close watch on our connections with the world**. Even on legitimate human institutions like friends, family, work, government.

It’s okay to have social connections, even with unbelievers. Human relationships is a good blessing from God. But that friend group could turn idolatrous if it centers on sin – I’m thinking of something like a gang – or if it pulls you away from allegiance to Jesus. Be careful.

Family is a beautiful blessing and basic building block by God’s design for society. But a family can become an idol, a higher allegiance than God the Father and the family he’s put you in called the church. We have to be aware of these temptations.

Work is a good thing. God wants us to be productive and provide for the common good through industry. But your company could become a competing interest. Eating and drinking at your employer’s holiday party could be done in a way that is unfaithful to the Lord.

Country and patriotism and civic engagement is good and right, but can easily turn idolatrous. Is your loyalty to your flag or to a political party trumping your allegiance to Christ? This is a danger we must **keep a close watch on**.

What about sports? I don't know about you, but I just watched a ton of sports the last few days. Yesterday 102,780 people braved the cold and snow to sit and watch Ohio State and Michigan play football. For many of those people, that was an alternate religion, with its own rituals of eating and drinking, that replaces gathering on Sunday with the church to eat at the Lord's Table.

I don't think Paul would be against sports entirely. Remember: he just used a sports analogy from the Isthmian Games, the big game in Paul's day. So he was aware. He saw something noble and admirable in the competition and feats of strength. But here's the thing: he was using these things as metaphors for greater, spiritual realities. You can enjoy a game, but do it as a way of heightening your understanding of and wonder at the victory of Christ and the Christian life; not as a distraction from that.

In all of these worldly pursuits that can be good or permissible – friends, family, work, politics, sports... – always be asking yourselves, “Am I seeking to serve the Lord through these things? Am I using them devotionally? Am I doing them evangelistically? Or are they becoming an idol to me and am I finding more joy and comradery there, than in Christ and his church?” Those questions are best not just reflected on privately, but invite the church community into your life to help you evaluate your **connections with the world**.

Conclusion

Let's keep close to Christ and each other and keep a close watch on our connections with the world. We do this through our regular, intentional celebration of the Lord's Table and by avoiding eating at the table of demons. We flee idolatry (v. 14). Now look at the last verse – v. 22. “Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?” He is a jealous Lover. This is what he said in the Second Commandment – “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God” (Ex. 20:4-5).

God is not detached. Jesus is not aloof. He is not content with you simply doing some Christians things. He rightfully desires your whole heart. He gave his whole self for and to you. And so, when you flirt with idols, you hurt God's heart (in a manner of speaking). It's the covenantal language of Scripture. Deuteronomy 32 describes how God feels about idolatry. It says Israel “stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently” (Dt. 32:16-17). God says there – “They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols” (Dt. 32:21).

God does not take idolatry lightly. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. And if you are in an adversarial relationship with God, who do you think will win? “Are we stronger than he?” It's ridiculous to even answer. Why do we treat God as small and insignificant? He is the most powerful being, not *in* the universe, but *over* the universe. He made the universe! Why would we turn from him to buddy up with demonic idols that we somehow think would have more power than him to make us happy? Why do we fear friends, fall before the “almighty dollar,” think that a political leader will do for us what we need? It's foolish.

The Lord's Table

The Lord Jesus is the Almighty One with all power and authority. And he came down to this earth to bear our sin and shame and wipe it away and make us right with God forever. And he rose from the grave, defeating Death and Demons. And is sitting at the right hand of the Father. And by his Spirit he offers intimacy with himself to us, right here, right now. Why would we not run FROM the idols of this world and run TO the Lover of our souls?

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, November 30, 2025. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

¹ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1958]), 147.

² Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 479.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 212.

⁴ Kim Riddlebarger, *First Corinthians*, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Powder Springs: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), 248.