

Why NOT to Party With Aphrodite 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

January 23 & 24, 2010
Steve DeWitt

Paul is concluding a long answer to a question the Corinthians asked him about whether or not Christians can eat meat offered to idols and whether they should attend feasts given in honor of the pagan gods, specifically in Corinth, the goddess Aphrodite. Both of these were a normal part of Corinthian culture. For us, it would be like watching the Super Bowl or the Fourth of July fireworks. I'll not review it all again but a summary is that meat offered to idols is okay to eat if your conscience is okay with it and if eating it doesn't do damage to a fellow Christian's conscience and spiritual walk. Real spiritual maturity is the freedom to not exercise rights if it is more helpful to abstain. There are more important things than idol meat issues – our relationships with fellow Christians and the advancement of the gospel. Like the Israelites, their spiritual pride blinded them to the precariousness of their condition. Paul concludes with an apostolic directive on the matter. He hasn't really answered whether Christians could participate in the idol parties of Corinth. He does now. Let's stand for the reading of our Scripture passage today....

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 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? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 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. 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. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:14-22)

Verse 13 tells us that God never gives us more than we can handle because He always provides the resources we need to endure every trial and temptation. In isolation, the Corinthians might have taken that promise and thought, *It's time to party with Aphrodite since I can never fall! I am spiritually invincible!* Actually, we are spiritually fragile and it is only God's grace that keeps us secure. Muhammad Ali was flying on an airplane when the flight attendant asked him to please put on his seatbelt. His response was, "Superman doesn't need a seatbelt." The flight attendant replied, "Superman doesn't need a plane." Supermen tend to forget about kryptonite and for a Christian, idolatry is spiritual kryptonite. So rather than being a license to party with Aphrodite, Paul gives the command, *Flee from idolatry!*

The Greek tense is imperative. Flee! It's a command. This is not a gray area; not an area of Christian liberty. We probably don't need a word study on fleeing, do we? To flee means you don't hang around. You don't linger. You don't flirt. You don't see how close you can get. It means run! The idols of Western culture are not carved images but are idols all the same. An idol is anything or anyone that we trust in, obey, desire, crave, or look to for what only God can provide. Flee anything that seeks to set itself up as supreme in our hearts. This might be God's Word for you today. You have an open door to party with a counterfeit god and you are considering it or in bondage to it. You may already be partying with Aphrodite and spiritual warning lights are going off. What should you do? Flee! Get away from it. This

means get radical with it if necessary. Throw it away. Get rid of the corrupting friendship. Do what it takes; your spiritual life is worth it.

Paul could hear the Corinthian protests. What? The feasts are no big deal! It's part of our culture! You told us that idols weren't anything anyway. Paul gives three additional reasons why fleeing is the Christian response to idolatry:

The Lord's Supper is Spiritual Fellowship With Christ (10:16-17)

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?

In chapter 11 (which we will get to), Paul takes the Corinthians to task for degrading the Lord's Supper. They clearly didn't get what the whole thing means. Perhaps we don't either. The cup of blessing mentioned here was the third cup in the Passover celebration. This is the cup that Jesus used when He instituted the Lord's Supper with His disciples in the Upper Room. It was a cup of blessing or thanksgiving because a prayer of thanksgiving was offered in the taking of it: *Blessed art thou O Lord our God, Who givest us the fruit of the vine*. The cup of blessing is the cup we partake in every time we have the Lord's Supper.

Is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The Greek word for participation is the familiar *koinonia*, meaning fellowship (found 4 times in this passage). Jesus said about this cup, *This cup is the new covenant of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me*. When we take the cup, we spiritually fellowship with Christ and identify ourselves with the covenantal blessings His blood represents. The drinking of it is a physical representation of a spiritual reality – Christ and the benefits of His cross are mine. It is a simple but powerful parable and spiritually it is a real spiritual communion with Christ. That is why the Lord's Supper is also called communion.

Similarly the bread is a fellowshiping with the body that was broken for us. *The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?* (Verse 16) It's a physical symbol of a spiritual reality but a real reality all the same. I am in fellowship with the body of Christ. Our mutual fellowship with Christ also unites us together. *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread*. (Verse 17)

I will wait until chapter 11 to really get into a theology of the Lord's Supper. Here's the thing to know now, it is more and less than it appears. (For seed thoughts on this, see John Piper's sermon on this passage at www.desiringgod.org)

It is less – It is less than what some want to make it; a quick fix to whatever spiritually ails you. How many people today across the spiritual spectrum are going to church, taking communion, and walking out thinking that they are okay with God because they partook in communion? This is Paul's argument in the beginning of the chapter. The Israelites had their own sacraments that they ate and drank and look what happened to them. Just because you eat the Lord's Supper doesn't mean you are free to do whatever you please; especially to be joined to evil by participating in idol worship.

It is more – To take the Lord's Supper is so spiritually significant that in a chapter Paul is going to say that taking it wrongly has led to illness and even death. We may not take the Lord's Supper seriously but God does. It is more than a ritual. It is more than a symbol. It is a spiritual communion with Christ and with fellow Christians who are also communing with Him. These are profound unities, more than we begin to realize. The Lord's Supper is a profound unity with profound implications for our day-to-day lifestyle. Our fellowship with

Christ means that whatever else we fellowship with, we are bringing that fellowship into fellowship with Jesus. So what about these parties for Aphrodite? What about idol feasts?

The Idol Feast is Participation With Demons (10:19-21)

What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 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. 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.

Paul repeats what he said in 8:4 that an idol itself isn't anything; it certainly isn't a god, and meat offered to it isn't tainted by it. There is something much more sinister about idols than what can be seen on the surface. When a human being creates an idol, physical or not, what lies behind that desire is evil and the steward of that evil is the devil and his demons. This doesn't sit well with the contemporary mind. Yet the Bible says that there is a spiritual realm inhabited by spiritual beings that we cannot see.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

An idol is nothing but a piece of wood but the spiritual reality behind the idol is very real and demonic. Demons are fallen angels who followed Satan in his rebellion and now do all that they can to destroy every reflection of God's good character in the world. They hate God. What better way to wage war against God than to persuade God's image bearers that they themselves can be gods or to get them to worship something other than the one true God? Satan uses our own sinful desires for his purposes. He did this with Eve: *But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 3:4-5) You could say that Eve worshipped the apple but what she was really worshipping was herself and behind that self-made god was a demon manipulating Eve's selfish desires.

In the East, man-made gods are everywhere – the Buddhas and the 300 million gods of Hinduism. In the West, the gods are less tangible but no less real; money, sex, power, fame, appearance, security, entertainment, technology, and any good thing pursued as an ultimate thing. Behind every counterfeit god are evil spirits manipulating us, using our pride and selfish desires to destroy us.

So here is what Paul says, eating at the Lord's Table is a real fellowshiping with Christ. Eating at Aphrodite's table at an idolatrous feast is spiritual fellowship as well. To be present is to participate and affirm implicitly the values of Aphrodite. It is to commune with the spiritual reality of Aphrodite, which is evil and demonic. These two realities have nothing in common and are utterly opposed to one another. A Christian that eats the Lord's Supper and Aphrodite's supper is bringing Christ and Aphrodite into a spiritual unity that is blasphemous. *What fellowship has light with darkness?* (2 Corinthians 6:14). Jesus and a demon should not and must not be brought together. *I do not want you to be participants with demons. 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.* (Verses 20-21)

God is Jealous for the Supremacy of His Glory and the Affections of His People (10:22)

Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Paul grounds what he is saying in the character of God. This not a matter of opinion or Christian liberty or simply something good people can disagree on. This has everything to do with the kind of God He is. He is a jealous God. *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God.* (Exodus 20:5) He is jealous for the fame of His name. Jealous for the splendor of His holiness. Jealous for the purity of His holiness. He does not look kindly on anyone that sullies His reputation or treats Him like something else is more glorious or desirable than Him. Zeal for God's glory means that I will never allow anything to fellowship or be united to Him that isn't worthy of Him. The more zealous I am for Him, the more zealous I am for His glory.

[At this point Pastor Steve turns around, puts on a Cubs/White Sox shirt and turns back around.] What do you think of my shirt? These are hard to come by. I was looking online for one and read that it was not advisable to wear one in Chicago because you would be beat up by both Sox and Cubs fans. Why? If you are Cubs fan, this shirt bothers you because there is a Sox symbol on it. If you are a Sox fan you want to burn it because there is a Cubs symbol on it. The Cubs and the Sox are rivals. Their fans are passionate for their team. If you love the one, you will likely hate the other. Love and jealousy go together. If you love something or someone, you are jealous for them.

That's what we do to God when we fellowship with Him in prayer, worship and the Lord's table and then we get in our cars we love and go to the houses we love and watch the sports we love and talk about anything but God the rest of the day and offer ourselves the rest of the week to the gods of money, sex, power, achievement, or whatever the rest of the week only to come back and fellowship with Christ again. This is a warning from Paul, *Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?* (Verse 22)

God is jealous for His glory and jealous for the affections of His people. When we share His passion for His glory, then we too will hate the idols of this world. We won't play with them. Flirt with them. See how close we can get to them. We will run from them. Flee. Why? Because God's glory is at stake.

Only God knows hearts here today. Only He knows who's partying with Aphrodite. Today's message is a warning to any who are fellowshipping with the idols of our day; God is jealous for His glory and our hearts. He hates idolatry. No idolaters will be allowed into heaven. *Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.* (Revelation 22:15) John ends his letter we call 1 John with, *Keep yourselves from idols* (1 John 5:21)

Paul tells us why NOT to party with Aphrodite or any other idol for that matter. We experience sweet spiritual communion with Christ. Idolatry is really dining with the devil. God is jealous for His glory and our hearts. Therefore, what should we do when we get the invitation to Aphrodite's party? Run. Not just away from idols but toward the one true God who is beautiful, glorious, and the lover of our souls.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address (www.bethelweb.org) on the copied resource.