

Two Tables

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

People in the ancient world worshipped all sorts of gods. You approached Poseidon for sea travel, Zeus for protection, Athena for wisdom, Aphrodite for love, Apollo for crops and herds, and Dionysus for a good party. Devotion to this polytheistic mass was divided and sporadic (cf. Acts 17:23), radically different from worshiping the one true God. Paul sets the table of the Lord and the table of demons against one another, two tables from which we still choose.

A Meal with Jesus

The Corinthians are beloved of God and Paul, which is why he is teaching them challenging things (v14; cf. Prov. 3:12, 24). God provides the way of escape from every temptation, but we must flirt with sin. Paul commands to flee idolatry in an ongoing way (cf. 6:18). The concept of fleeing is simple, but understanding these issues takes wisdom and judgment that the people of God must exercise (v15). The “cup of blessing which we bless” was the third cup of the Passover feast, probably the same one Jesus consecrated at the Last Supper. The church took communion at least weekly, and the cup along with the bread is communion of the blood and body of Jesus (v16). The word *koinovia* is translated communion, and means participation, sharing, partaking, and fellowship in the blood of Christ (v16). The table is not a reenactment of the crucifixion, which would be awful, but it’s fellowship with God that results from Jesus’ conquering death. The bread and wine represent the body and blood of the Lord in a powerful way; He is present to bless us as we eat and drink. This happens as we love, trust, thank, and rejoice together. Very little is said about the elements because the action is in the eating and drinking, much like the vows of a wedding make the marriage, not the material composition of the rings. The church is made up of many individuals, but we are one body in Jesus, one loaf, and therefore eat of one loaf (v17). All who are Christ’s eat and drink with Him; all who are bread get bread. Our unity brings us to the Lord’s Supper, and though we can’t be any more “in” Jesus, our love and understanding deepens over time through the Supper. Ministers feed God’s people this way. Paul emphasizes what God does at the Supper, and there’s nothing about what we think, feel, or experience. These come as our *response* to what God does every Lord’s day at His table.

Eating with Demons

All this is said as Paul exhorts the Corinthians to flee idolatry. Every Israelite who ate from the sacrifices partook of God’s holy altar (v18). Paul’s point is not that the statue is full of demonic power, or that the food set before it is polluted (v19). They are not. But the people who offer and eat the food in devotion to the idol are in fellowship with demons, and no Christian should be in that situation (v20). It doesn’t matter if a family has been devoted for generations to a false or if an idolatrous tradition is long established—all the more reason to break it. Paul’s approach is the opposite of modern demon chasers and exorcists. He isn’t fearful or needing to cite a specific source of the

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idol. If it's devotion to anyone or anything other than God, some demonic is pleased. If you don't worship and honor the Creator, the only thing left is the creation. Men think that they are serving themselves or just being reasonable when sacrificing to idols—reputation, money, sex, career, family—but in fact they are estranged from and insulting to the God of heaven. Paul alludes to the Song of Moses: “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked.... They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know” (Dt. 32:15, 17). When we pray to God, it's to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and not a generic deity or god of other religions. Who they don't know, we proclaim to them (Acts 17:23). We don't look to the horoscope or other means of divining wisdom or direction for the future. We don't find security for our health through the perfect diet or enlightened medical insight. We don't find emotional peace through self-focused meditation or yoga. We don't feel good about ourselves through the approval of our families or culture or Facebook feed, from friends or even ourselves thinking we're cool or fashionable. We don't measure success by reaching a financial or career goal, but rather by doing whatever we do heartily to the Lord (Col. 3:23). People are religious, whether organized or disorganized, and everything we do is devoted to someone or something. If it's not God, you're serving something that will never satisfy and will eventually devour you.

One or the Other

God's table and the table of demons are mutually exclusive. You can't have just a little idolatry on the side of your love for Christ because Jesus will not be one among many. He loves us with enduring faithfulness, and when faithfulness is cut, it bleeds jealousy. This is a holy jealousy that acts. It's not the demons Paul is concerned about, but what God will do. If there's anything you wouldn't walk away from for Him, mark that thing and turn from it now. He is provoked, and you're not stronger than He is (v22). Adam believed could overcome God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but He died just as God said. Jesus obeyed God by doing His will, even drinking His cup of wrath on the cross, knowing that blessing and honor and glory and power would be His as our savior forevermore. He was jealous for your salvation and invites you to His table.