

Prayers

To God

You, Lord God, created darkness and light. We do not understand the darkness and we love Your light, so why did You create both? Did you allow evil to enter this world to tempt us and take us off the pathway of life You intended? Far be it from us to question Your wisdom, Lord God, but help us to trust You enough to discern the difference between darkness and light. May we live according to the lightness of Your love and compassion, and turn away from the dark evils of this world which afflict us from time to time. We bless You Lord God: AMEN

For myself

Theme - 'standing tall'

Pray for the courage to organise your life in a manner that will give glory to God. Pray with fervour and do not give up.

For others

Pray for the refugees of this world. We certainly know about those from Syria and the huge humanitarian disaster unfolding there, but there are many others scattered throughout the world.

Meditation

When life seems hard and you struggle to find hope,
Look to the rock which is Jesus, and lean on Him.

When trouble is defeated and you begin to see the light,
Look to the truth which is Jesus, and receive Him.

When all is at peace and you are satisfied and content,
Look to the light which is Jesus, and believe Him.

When life's challenges await, and you need strength,
Look to the Spirit which is Jesus, and accept Him.

When victory over the enemy lies within your grasp,
Look to the hope which is Jesus, and trust Him.

Bible Passage

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

¹⁴ Consequently, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak to you as sensible people; judge for yourselves what I mean. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing of the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf of bread, though many people, we are one body, and so we all take our share of the one loaf of bread.

¹⁸ Consider the worldly people of Israel; do not those who eat the sacrifices take part in what has been done on the altar? ¹⁹ What therefore do I mean? That food sacrificed to an idol has some meaning, or that an idol has some meaning? ²⁰ On the contrary, what they sacrifice is offered to demons not to God, and I do not want you to have a share in demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, and you cannot share the Lord's meal and the meal of demons. ²² Or do we make the Lord jealous? Surely we are not stronger than he?

²³ 'Everything is allowed,' but not everything is helpful. 'Everything is allowed,' but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ Do not seek your own interests, but those of others. ²⁵ Eat anything sold in the market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.' ²⁷ If any unbeliever offers you an invitation and you want to accept, eat whatever is set before you without raising questions of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone tells you, 'This was offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, out of respect for the one who told you and conscience; ²⁹ I mean the other person's conscience, not your own.

Why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience ³⁰ if I share with goodwill? Why should I be slandered because of that for which I have given thanks? ³¹ So then, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. ³² Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God! ³³ For myself, I try to please everyone in everything I do, seeking not my own benefit but that of many, so that they may be saved.

Review

It is typical of speech in any style or language that people tend to repeat themselves, and in doing this, people tend to reveal more of their thoughts than previously, adding sometimes crucial additional information to what they previously said. This is clearly the case here, where Paul continues some of the themes of earlier in chapter 10 about having nothing to do with idolatry (10:14-17), and he then discusses again the issue of eating meat offered to idols (10:18-22, and 23-29), with the last paragraph encouraging God's people to do everything for God's glory and for the sake of the Gospel (10:29-33). Nevertheless, in covering this same ground again he delivers some interesting further points about Christian life and living; his comments about the 'Lord's Supper' (10:14-17), his rare comments about demons (10:18-22), matters of conscience (10:23-29) and working for the '*glory of God*' (10:29-33)

At this point in his letter, Paul is slowly beginning to change its emphasis from dealing with problems to offering solutions, and from confronting the problems of the church to advocating the truths of its teaching. Certainly, once we get past chapters 10 and 11, the remaining and substantial chapters of this famous letter contain some of its best known teachings about the nature of the church, its activities using the gifts of God's Spirit and supremely God's love, the worship life of the church and its hope in the glory of the resurrection. Before we get there, however, we must again chew over the problems Paul has identified in the church at Corinth and the guidance Paul gives for Christians seeking to live the Christian life in a pagan world.

From idolatry to the Lord's Supper (10:14-17)

By what train of thought does Paul move quickly from appealing to the Corinthians to '*flee from idolatry*' (10:14) to a discussion of the sacred truths of the '*Lord's Supper*' (10:16-17)? We can avoid the question simply by ignoring it, and focussing on the interesting fact that after introducing this important subject, Paul has much more to say about the Lord's Supper in the next chapter (11:20-34).

However, both Paul and those to whom he wrote were, I believe, well aware that there were difficulties at the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Corinth (see 11:20-22), and this was a 'hot potato' subject just bubbling under the surface of the letter. The fact that Paul allows it to raise its head here is like a warning shot across the bow of those to whom he was writing, warning them that this matter will soon receive his full attention! However, it also links with the idea of sacrificial offering, and thence to the matter of eating food sacrificed to idols, to which Paul now returns having spent most of chapter 8 on the subject. As we will soon discover (10:18-29), there are one or two more things Paul has to say about this and it relates specifically to the idea of sacrifice.

The Lord's Supper - a sacrifice that truly has spiritual meaning (10:16,17)

There is of course just one sacrifice with any meaning for a Christian. All other sacrificed flesh is mere provision of meat as earthly food, but the spiritual food of the soul is Christ, both human and divine, sacrificed on the Cross (2:2). So from his brief call to God's people to *'flee from idolatry'* (10:14), Paul calls the Corinthian Christians to be mature in faith (10:15) and consider basic Christian faith and doctrine. There are no gods except the One who suffered on the Cross and died for all, and the true blessing for all is not a religious system based on sentiments about meat sacrifice, but on the sharing of a different sacrifice, *'in the blood of Christ'* and *'in the body of Christ'* (10:16).

What Paul says next sounds very familiar because it is read in communion services, *'because there is one loaf of bread, though many people, we are one body, and so we all take our share in the one loaf ...'* (10:17). Clearly this calls on those who receive the meal of the Lord's Supper to accept that all those who take it are united in the One God and the Lord Jesus Christ whose death and resurrection is celebrated. But as we will see, this is a remarkably prophetic statement, coming just verses before Paul's famous description of the *'body of Christ'* and its many *'parts'* in chapter 12.

Old Testament sacrifices, demons and more ... (10:18-22)

This paragraph is interesting, because Paul starts by asking this, *'consider the worldly people of Israel'* (10:18). By this he means those Israelites for whom the true significance of Israel's God is irrelevant and they take part in its sacrificial worship for cultural reasons alone. How strange is this! But Paul's next point is all about what it means to *'take part'* in something. He has just asked God's people to recognise the full meaning of taking part in the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross (10:16,17), and he is dismissive of those who take part in the rituals of Judaism and because they are worldly, do not consider the full meaning of what they do (10:18).

As to what comes next, I believe Paul is dealing with something that is not obvious to us. There was in his mind a difference between people eating meals casually at someone's home where the meat happened to have been purchased at a local temple of the god Dionysius, for example, and taking part in a ritual meal with a friend in which the god Dionysius was invoked and honoured as a guest. In those days, either was possible. With this in mind, Paul is speaking here of meals at which gods such as these (who are in truth *'not gods'*) are honoured. This must be avoided, says Paul, because such is the hunting ground for demons, God's enemies. Demons are fallen heavenly beings whose work is to prize people away from their God and Saviour, and a good opportunity for them would be to get Christian people to become used to honouring Roman gods and succumbing to their rituals! Paul will have none of it; *'you cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons ...'* (10:21), and the strength of his feelings here can be gauged by the fact that he rarely speaks of demons (only in Romans 8:38, here, and 1 Timothy 4:1).

Matters of conscience (10:223-290)

All this is perhaps only of minor interest to us. Paul has previously called on mature Christians who have no qualms about eating meat slaughtered in honour of other gods (because they are *'no gods'* - 8:5, Acts 19:26) to magnanimously stand back from exercising their liberty for the sake of less mature Christians who still have issues over eating such meat (chapter 8). This is a good principle by which mature Christians withhold their feelings in favour of guiding younger Christians towards the truth. But what does our passage here teach us?

Paul comes up with a famous maxim, which is worth a great deal; *'everything is allowed, but not everything is helpful'* (10:23), and alongside this but not so well known, the phrase, *'do not seek you own interests but those of others'* (10:24). Having set this out clearly, Paul is content to offer his final advice on the eating of sacrificed meat, which pulls together all he has said; *'If any unbeliever offers you an invitation and you want to accept, eat whatever is set before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone tells you, 'This was offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, out of respect for the one who told you and conscience ...'* (10:27,28).

Do everything for the glory of God (10:29-33)

Paul is concerned that the whole difficult matter has grown out of proportion and he is as much tired of the matter as we who read his letter can be! He says, *'why should I be slandered because of that for which I have given thanks'* (10:30), in other words, his food set before him to eat! In his heart he is asking why people should see fit to question him and make these issues divisive and contentious, but he has a choice, as we all do, to turn to the positive instead of finishing on the negative. *'Do all'* he says, *'for the glory of God'* (10:31), and *'give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God!'* In all things, therefore, Paul says he attempts to please all people so that the Gospel may have an opportunity to have its effect, and people be *'saved'* (10:33).

Discipleship

Application

Common sense ...

In much of this passage, Paul is appealing to what we may best call common sense; except that for cultural reasons, it can be hard for us to spot this! I will therefore put it like this, and reflect here much of what Paul says here in this passage from a more modern perspective.

- If we share in communion and it truly means something to us, then we should have nothing to do with any other 'gods' of our age, whether 'yoga', alternative medicines or lifestyles, secularism and its reliance on Christian morality, and more.
- We should pay close attention to the religious practices and habits of our neighbours and while understanding them, stand back from entering into any of them so that we do not make a mockery of our God, which we love. For example, we can understand the Muslim festival or Ramadan without admiring the discipline of fasting it advocates.
- The Christian must exercise good conscience in everyday life at the boundaries of faith and work. If we stop using our conscience then we will lose our ability to safeguard the things of God within our own lives.
- God's people should always seek to be obedient to the disciplines of discipleship wherever possible, and keep at bay the devil's attempts to challenge us concerning what we do or do not do. In this passage, Paul appears tired of people's ability to constantly question his motives; he knows he is right before God and must stand firm in Christ.

Ideas for what to do

- *To what extent do you believe in the demonic, and what influence does the demonic have on your life or the life of anyone else? I ask you to consider this because it is important to work this out otherwise we tend to ignore what Scripture says about demons and the like.*
- *What issues involve the eating of food and touch on deeply spiritual issues today, starting for example, with the ethics of eating fish that is plucked from the ocean in ways that destroy fishing grounds and the health of the sea?*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. *What forms of idolatry afflict God's people today, and how can they be dealt with when they are found within the life of the church? What gods bedevil our attempts to be true to our Lord?*
2. *Can you think of any situations in the life of the church today which are prompted by Paul's discussion here in 1 Corinthians 10?*
3. *How easy is it to exercise our consciences when faced with difficult moral situations? Share examples of any such events that have troubled you*

Final Prayer

Dear Jesus, help us to be people who are ready to do all for the sake of the Gospel. Turn our lives around so that we are genuine servants of the Cross and witnesses to the miracle of the Resurrection, working power to achieve Your will. Lead us forward we pray, in spirit and in truth. **AMEN**