

Depravity: Idolatry, part1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 January 2025

Preacher: Brady Owens

[0 : 00] Let's just step back a little bit, think about 1 Corinthians as a whole, just to kind of get our minds back to where we were here.

Paul had done ministry in the town of Corinth, and there probably were a couple of letters that Paul wrote. We may have all of them. We may not have all of them.

We don't know. We just have 1 and 2 Corinthians. But there seems to be indication of he'll say some things every now and then, you know, my previous letter or something like that.

And he's had a lot of interaction with them because they are a messed up church. And the problem is mixing the gospel with the Gnosticism and the Greek philosophy and the eloquence and all those kinds of things.

Because that has impacts. When you don't keep the doctrine right on, that has impacts in things. And the first thing was all the division, right?

[1 : 04] That's what we talked about in chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 is the division that was in the church and how they were completely divided from one another. Then the second problem is depravity.

That is sin, sinful things that creep out of the life because of the way you're believing. That's chapters 5 through 10. And you'll remember chapter 5, there was a guy having an affair with his stepmom.

Chapter 6 was taking one another to the court, plus guys who were visiting temple prostitutes.

Chapter 7 was all kinds of issues related to marriage and divorce and sex and singleness.

And so they just got a lot of issues. We come to chapter 8, and chapter 8, 9, and 10 make up a section. And really the section is about idolatry.

All right? So 8, 9, and 10 is really about idolatry. And in particular, it's about trying to help other people avoid idolatry and how the Corinthians were failing at that massively.

[2 : 10] And what you get is we'll understand the problem tonight and kind of what's going on. And the argument from chapter 8 is Paul is going to say, you need to help them because you need to love them.

Chapter 9, he's basically going to say, you need to help them because I'm telling you to. And I am the authority, right? And we're going to talk about all kinds of authority. But then in chapter 10, he's going to lay out some theological things.

Things that they're not understanding and believing theologically or things that they need to think theologically that will help undergird this whole work of this idea of food sacrifice to idols.

Okay? Food sacrifice to idols. And so I think probably the best approach would be for us to just go ahead and read chapter 8.

It's just 13 verses. And I'll probably read back through it as we go. But here's what it says. It says,

[4 : 41] And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Okay. Let's see if we can lay out the problem.

And you'll remember that Corinth has about 26 different temples. These temples all are to different gods. And in these different temples, they have different worship practices.

But many of them have a worship practice in which they're bringing animals into the temple. They're sacrificing animals in the temple. They would do these sacrifices in order to appease the gods, in order to, you know, let their crops grow, make sure that they are fertile, can have children.

I mean, it's their beseeching of this God of theirs through the sacrifice of these animals. Well, it was a big deal. It was a big deal for the whole city.

[5 : 55] Because when they did it, they did it upright. I mean, you've got a lot of animals coming in. And many of the magistrates in the city would then call for this to be a festival.

So I want you to think about that for a second. A festival. It's not just this church over here. I'm going to use the word church. It's not just church over here having a worship service.

It's this church over here, their worship turning into a festival for the city. So we came from Port Lavaca, and they had the flip-flop festival every September.

And when they would have this festival, the whole Bayfront Peninsula area was cordoned off. The street in front of our church, because we were a storefront on Main Street, it was cordoned off.

And so, like, you couldn't really go anywhere in Port Lavaca without being a part of the flip-flop festival. So this is what you've got to imagine in your head, is that in Corinth, when that temple over there was having a worship feast sacrifice time, they would sacrifice the animals and then throw it on the grill.

[7 : 05] And they would have a huge festival, a huge celebration, which is why I call it a barbecue to Zeus. Because that's what it was. You know, I'm not saying that Zeus was one of the temples, but I'm just using that as a placeholder, because you've just got to imagine that it's not just somebody handing out a bunch of food.

This was a part of their worship, and it was what they had just sacrificed to their God. And so that's what was going on in the city, and that was the problem.

Well, the Christians in Corinth, what you have is you have that many of them who were hearing the gospel preached were coming out of those temples.

And they were coming to the church, and they were listening to what was being preached. But then they would begin to walk through the city one day on a festival day that they didn't go to the festival, and they happened to see brother so-and-so, leader of their church, sitting in the veranda, eating on a chicken leg from the barbecue to Zeus.

And they're going, what? Or as my grandson says, what the world? What the world? And so they're looking at this, and what you have is you have this convert who may go one way or the other.

[8 : 30] They might look at that and be like, that guy's a hypocrite. I don't have anything to do with him. Or he might say, oh, well, this must be okay. And so they would go back to the temple from whence they came and get locked into it all over again.

It empowered and encouraged them to violate their conscience. So, they've already had a discussion about this, Paul and the Corinthians.

And so now they have written him, and he's going back at them. So let's just walk through it. Verse 1, he says, now concerning, and I don't know if you remember me saying this, but I'll just repeat it. If you look at 1 Corinthians, the idea of now concerning, or the word now, in many places, it is a key place that says this is a new topic.

He's moved on to a new thing, right? Or it's at least a specific question or item that they wrote to him about. So they've written to him, and they disagree with him.

[9 : 42] Of course, they think that they're super spiritual, right? They think that they're the most spiritual people in the world. And so they think Paul is not a good apostle. They don't need to listen to him. And so they have written to him and saying, listen, there's nothing wrong with eating the barbecue to Zeus.

I'm going to have brisket when I want to have brisket, okay? I love burnt ends, so we're just going to eat it. And so they've written these arguments, and you can see the arguments in three places.

There's three of them. In verse 1, it says, we know that all of us possess knowledge. That's the first part of it. This knowledge puffs up, Paul says, but love builds up.

And so that's the argument, and that's Paul's answer. The argument is we all possess knowledge. And what they're meaning by that is that because of the leaders that they're following, and because of their wisdom and the Gnostic knowledge that they have, and the mixing of that with the gospel, they believe that they have such great knowledge that they understand the truth of things, and therefore they can go to the temple and eat the barbecue to Zeus if they want to.

In other words, it's a little bit like saying, I know something that probably you don't know, and I get to do this. An outside revelation, if you will. Well, Paul's response is that this knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

[11 : 08] In other words, what he's saying is that your knowledge is counteracting love. You're not having both, and you should, because that's what verse 2 and 3 are about.

He says, if anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know, but if anyone loves God, he is known by God. Now, that's a very, I don't even like that translation, but the concept of verse 2 and 3 is that you can't separate love and knowledge.

That if you have knowledge, you will have love, right? Because the whole reason that we study to know God is to love God. The whole reason that we go through that is to know him, to love him. And so this idea that we have this knowledge, and therefore we get to eat the barbecue to Zeus, he says, no, no, not on that. That is not a good argument.

That's null and void. Then the second argument, and it's in verse 4, and it's got two pieces to it. It says, therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that an idol has no real existence, and that there's no God but one.

[12:19] Now, that's their argument. And those two statements, let me just ask you, do those two statements sound pretty reasonable? An idol has no real existence, and there is no God but one.

Well, yeah. That sounds pretty reasonable, doesn't it? It does. Because an idol doesn't have an existence. Now, what does it mean that an idol has no real existence?

The first commandment is only one God. Okay. Right. The idea is that there is one God and only one God, and therefore an idol is not a god.

It has no God that stands behind it, right? Now, we're going to find in chapter 10 that the idea that there's nothing behind an idol is not the case. It is that there's no God behind the idol.

Because in chapter 10, he's going to tell us that really what's behind that idol is demonic. Okay. But the point is, is that here you are as a Christian, and you know there's one God, and you see that little statue of Zeus, and you're, that's not really, there's no God there.

[13:34] It's like, you bunch of pagans, just give me your food, because y'all cook good. Like, I don't care that it was, I mean, you just, you waved it in front of a little statue. That's okay. Nobody cares. That's, that's sort of the mentality and the attitude.

It's like, you know, what difference does it make? You know, even in the Old Testament, there's this idea that the, the idols that were there are just a figment of the imagination of the people.

Right? So Paul responds, verse 5 and 6, he says, For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords in the minds of people, that's the way to understand that, yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

So 5 and 6, it's like he says, you're right, and he lays out this idea of there being one God in a really nice form. Like, verse 5 and 6 is worthy to come back and study, you know, and just sort of take in the fact that it says one God and one Lord, and it calls the one God Father and the one Lord Jesus Christ, and it gives creation powers to both, and it gives existence powers to both.

You know what I'm saying? And so, so you get a lot of Trinity doctrine. There's just a lot of doctrine there, right? And I'm not going to go into that, but I just, just point that out one day, just spend about three hours just reading those two verses.

[15:02] It'll be good for you. But then he goes on to say in verse 7, he says, however, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through formal association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled.

So what he's saying is that there are some of these young people who've come out of, these young converts, who've come out of the temple of Zeus, come out of the temple of Aphrodite, come out of the temple of Apollo, and they think that what's happening in there, when that sacrifice is made to that idol, that it's really going to something.

And they believe that that's so wrong for a Christian to take and hold to Christ and that, to worship Christ and that, because they think there's really something there.

They don't have the knowledge that these Corinthians have, which is correct, but they're using their knowledge in a bad way. Remember, he says, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

That's what they're not doing. They're not loving these young converts, and even though their theology seems to be sort of right, it's not met with any kind of love for their fellow believers.

[16:16] In other words, because they believe what's right, they don't really care how their behavior affects anybody else. They don't care. They want to do what they want to do.

But these young converts, they're weak. They don't know any better. They haven't learned everything. They know that they've trusted in Christ, and that's what they know.

Well, when you get to verse 8, I think this is a third argument here, and a lot of scholars agree with me. It's not in quotations like some of the others, but it really sounds like a lot of the other arguments, and it says this, food will not condemn us to God.

We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do eat. In other words, God doesn't care what you eat. God doesn't care if you bought your groceries at Walmart, H-E-B, or Zeus' temple.

It's okay. You can buy your food anywhere. He does not care. We are no better off. Well, Paul's answer in verse 9 starts this way.

[17:17] He says, but take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. So it's almost like he's saying, okay, I'll give you your argument.

I'll give you your argument. God doesn't care what we eat. That's fine. And that means to you that you can eat anything you want to, anywhere you want to at any time. Fine, I'll agree with that.

The one thing I am going to say is this, is that just because that, that you have the right for that doesn't mean that you get to use that right as a stumbling block for somebody else.

Well, now, what is a stumbling block? That's the question. Stumbling block is when our actions encourage and embolden people to take a sinful course of action.

He says this in verse 10.

[18:29] He says, for if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged or fortified if his conscience is weak to eat food offered to idols?

If he sees you doing that, won't he just join you because his conscience is weak? That's, that's, that's really the, the point here is that being a stumbling block, let me, let me, let me see if I can frame it this way.

Sometimes people think that being a stumbling block means that I'm offended with your actions and you don't need to do anything to offend me. Right?

So, an offense is when you don't like my actions, you might think my actions are sinful, but you are not at all encouraged and emboldened to do what I'm doing.

You know, if, if I think it's fine and dandy to, watch a TV show and you think that it's of the devil to own a TV, and you look at me and you're, you're like not emboldened to take and watch that TV, but you look at me and it's like, oh, I cannot believe you.

[19:51] That is not a stumbling block. A stumbling block is when you see me do something that you think is sinful and you go like, okay, well, maybe I should do this same thing.

And you violate your conscience. You violate your conscience. So, so I want to, I want you to write down Romans 14. Romans 14 and verse 13 through 23, Paul deals with this same topic in Romans 14.

And I won't read the whole thing to you, but he, he starts that section by saying, therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another brother.

And he begins to talk about eating food again. And he says in verse 20, he says, do not for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.

Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is not, it is not, it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

[21:04] The fate, we were, I was watching a TV show last night. And I just thought about this.

Have you ever seen the TV show called Elementary? It's a modern day take on Sherlock Holmes. It's kind of a modern thing. So if you haven't been watching TV in a while. Yeah, it's really weird.

I don't recommend it. That's not what I'm saying. But there was this, he had a drug problem and he was trying to get off it. And we're in season four or five. And there's this guy who had been a friend of his at some point.

And the whole episode, which was a really dumb episode, by the way, was this friend trying to trap Sherlock into a place where Sherlock would go back and take the heroin again. Because he was a heroin addict and he wanted Sherlock to be his friend again in heroin.

And so like he, he had the whole case and everything ready for him to, to use. And he was doing everything he could to get him to fall off the wagon. That's the concept of the stumbling block.

[22:10] Right? And what happens is that that can be, that doesn't have to be drugs or anything like that. But, but I can have and believe in my mind and my heart that this thing is wrong and sinful.

And if it is sinful, even if the Bible doesn't say it is, but I think it's sinful, then for me to violate my conscience about it, I can't do it from faith.

Because listen to what he says. He says, he says in verse 22, the faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats. Whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats.

Here's that young convert. And he sees brother so-and-so eating the chicken leg.

And if he were to grab that up and he would be like, I'm eating to Zeus. And he ate. That would be sin for him. Because he's violating his conscience. Right?

[23 : 10] Oh, I'm going to read one more thing. Paul goes on to say, and this is the key. He says, You see, when we eat the things in this world, and we take advantage of the gifts that God has given us in this world, and we use them, we have to use them from a place of believing and faith in God.

That this is something God has provided. We take it with thanksgiving. We know this is something from him. And so we take it. But not everybody understands that about everything. And so their conscience sometimes gets violated.

We may know that about them. And if we know that, but we knowingly just sort of flaunt it out in front of them, well, we've just done what Paul is telling us not to do.

Yes, sir. Well, yeah, nobody brought their own meat.

Because all the meat came from the temple. So if you're going to participate in the festival, because these were all sacrificed to the idols there. Yeah.

[24 : 22] Now you're thinking, you're thinking the Jews, this is all Greek pagan stuff. This is all Greek pagan stuff. So does it mean we should live at the level of a religious brother?

Like the instance of the TV. So another brother of Christ says, you know, TV's of the devil. So should we not have a TV to not be a stumbling block?

Or, you know, or just do these things where they can't watch TV, where he doesn't know who wants to be? You know, let me, let me use another example because this is a, I think this is a good example because, because this is all kind of the whole church and like, but the whole church needs to have this mind and attitude.

there are many churches who are in their Lord's supper, will use wine, real wine in their Lord's supper.

And the, the choice to do that is really interesting because one of the things you have is you have people who have been alcoholics and now are recovering and seeking to walk away from that.

[25 : 42] And, and I, there was a guy in our last church and, and he and I, we had this conversation. And if, if we had offered wine at the Lord's supper, he would not have been able to participate.

He had a strong conscience and he wouldn't have done it for his own sake because of his own, his own, his own person. But what if he hadn't? And he would have thought that if he took that, he'd be sinning against God. So, so it's like, no, we will not be having wine at the Lord's supper.

We're going to, we're going to have fruit of the vine, which is what it says. It just says fruit of the vine, because there are some that have a different conscience about that. And there's no reason.

That's right.

I think it would be a stumbling block. So, but does that mean then that in your own home, if you wanted to, to drink a glass of wine, you can't now? No, I think that you, you and your home, that is, that is your domain.

You do that. But I think that you don't invite them over for it. You don't invite them to watch TV with you. Yeah. If you buy them over for NING, why is that NING? Well, that's what, Yeah.

[26 : 53] I think that's... So I'm going to pull a Paul Harvey and tell you the rest of the story.

Paul is going to come back and say, don't go to temples. Stop it. Don't eat that meat. The only meat related to the temple you can eat is if you've bought it at the marketplace afterwards.

But if as you're buying it, somebody says, hey, you know, that was sacrificed in the temple. You go, oh, okay, I won't buy that. I'm going to go to HGV. You know what I'm saying? So he does eventually say, don't do that.

And I think that's specific for that particular issue, right? Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Right. That's the problem.

[28 : 15] Exactly. That's exactly right. That's exactly right. Yeah. Yeah. What'd you say?

What'd you say? Take it to go. Take it to go. You know, well, do I have time? Okay. Look, I have a little time for this. So every year in Port of Taka, the Catholic Church does a take-home fried catfish dinner that you can just drive through and pick up and take home.

And every year I thought, I'm supporting. But now, I never bought my tickets. I always got free tickets. But I was like, should I do this?

Is anybody seeing me? I'm taking the go. Anyway. Wow. A couple more verses here, and it kind of wraps it all up.

He says in verse 11. It was Romans 14. So 13 through 23. And 23 was the last one that I read that really talked about that anything that's not of faith is sin.

[29 : 28] But back in 1 Corinthians 8, verse 11, 12, and 13, our last three verses, it says, And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died, thus sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

So here's the thing. There's a difference between I've done something, and I didn't know that it was going to mess with their conscience because I don't know that information.

That's a whole different ballgame compared to you've had a conversation, you know it, but you just do it anyway. That's just like not loving at all.

And Paul says it's sin. It's sin when we do that. And then he goes on and he says, so this is my conclusion. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, and then this next phrase is super emphatic, I will not know ever, ever, even once, touch and eat meat.

I mean, like there's so many Greek words there, it's just crazy. Lest I make my brother stumble. I'm just not going to do it. I don't want to make them stumble. And so where I come to on this and trying to think about, like, how can we draw some lessons from this and think about this?

[30 : 48] Because, you know, we could take a million things and put in the place of food sacrifice to idols and try to ask the question, well, is this something like that? Or is this something like that?

But I think a far better thing is just to back up and get the big picture that Paul's after here, right?

What Paul is after is for these Corinthians to understand that Christians have a responsibility to encourage and empower one another to avoid and flee idolatry.

Christians have a responsibility to encourage and to empower one another to avoid and to flee from idolatry.

In other words, instead of living my life however I want to, and if you happen to fall into idolatry, I don't care, I should have a proactive attitude that says, I want to help you avoid any kind of idolatry whatsoever.

And so how do we do that? And I just have two things. One, I've got to avoid idolatry myself, right? Which means I've got to know when I have idols.

[32 : 04] I've got to know when I have idols. And I think of two things particularly that might help with this. Number one, anytime I sin to get something I want, that's probably an idol.

Anytime I sin to get something I want, that's probably an idol. Right? I mean, you can just start laying out the Ten Commandments, you know, somebody steals something.

That's a sin to steal. But they wanted something. Whether it's the thing, or whether it's the money from the thing, or whether it's the money, or the thing that the money buys.

I mean, you can go down several lines here. But the point is, is to look at your life and say, you know, think about when you've sinned, when you've gotten angry, when you've taken something, when you've coveted something.

Right there tells you this is something that is in the land of idolatry. The second thing I would say is, anything that I feel like I must have to be okay.

[33 : 19] Anything that I feel like I must have to be okay. That's a pretty broad thing, and so let's talk about that. I mean, I know I've got to have rest. I know I've got to have food.

But can that become an idol? Yeah, it can come to a place where even that can become an idol. If the New City Catechism answers this question this way, that an idol is anything that I look to, to bring me security and satisfaction, hope and happiness.

To bring me security and satisfaction and hope and happiness. I will not be happy unless I can have this.

I have no hope in my life unless I can get this. I have no security, no satisfaction in life unless I can get this. You can think about the husband who's worked all day long, and the one thing he feels like

that he needs in order to be okay is peace and quiet.

And he comes home to a house that is chaos, you know, because kids are screaming and wife is screaming? I don't know. Maybe. Anyway, so nobody is helping him get what he wants.

[34 : 37] So he begins to, he could yell. He could get angry. He could start sinning. Or he may just sit there with it's like, I'm not going to be okay. I'm not going to be okay.

You can see it in the teenager who wants to hang out with their friends so much that they sneak out of the house. Right? So we've got to know when we have idols.

When we have idols, then we have to repent of those idols. To repent is to change our minds. So if that teenager believes that sneaking out of their house to be with their friends, sneaking out is worth it because I've got to have my friends, then to repent of that is for that teenager to recognize, actually, I need Christ more than I need my friends.

My friends aren't going to give me the hope and happiness that I really need and crave. They're not going to give me the, they're good. It's good to have friends. That's a good want, to want to have friends.

But you just can't want it so much and want it in a way that you should be wanting Christ. All right? So we have to repent of our sins and change our mind about those things.

[35 : 52] And then we need to run to Christ. Which means we've got to be reminded of how great he is. I think, I think we've got to become really good at being able to describe Christ compared to whatever idol it is.

You know, you need your friends. Did you not know that Christ is a friend that sticks closer than a brother? You know, your friends might betray you. Your friends might talk about you behind your back.

Your friends might not actually like you. Christ, though, is better by far. And as we run to Christ and being reminded of that, then we need to seek forgiveness.

We need to seek the cleansing that is there in his death. So we need to know that and that sort of lesson in order to do the second part. And that is to help others to avoid idolatry.

And if we're going to help other people avoid idolatry, we need to first have a relationship with them. We need to know them. You can't help somebody fight their idolatry if you've just met them or you don't spend any time with them.

[37 : 01] Because you don't really know. So think about this. If a person breaks into a store and steals a TV, then they sell the TV.

Then they use the money to buy, let's just say it because it's just easy, to buy drugs, to take the drugs, to feel something, to forget something, to have a party, to be part of the crowd.

Like, do we know what that idol is for that kid? Not without sitting down and talking for a good length of time because the idol could have been the fun of stealing the TV and everything else is just byproduct.

You never really care about any of that, you know, and just going along to get along at that point. But it could be all the way at the end of the line. You don't know unless you've spent time with somebody and you can ask them questions to know why.

What is behind all this? So you have to have that personal relationship with them. Secondly, you've got to be like Nathan. You've got to be like Nathan. Nathan the prophet with David.

[38 : 16] The story is King David has this affair with Bathsheba, calls the husband home, trying to cover it up, can't cover it up, sends the husband back to the front line to die.

So David thinks he's gotten off scot-free with having an affair and killing the husband. I don't know. This is like Jerry Springer, you know, like this is terrible. And so what happens is, what happens is, is God tells Nathan to go confront David.

And so how does Nathan confront David? Does he go to David and say, you have committed adultery and murder? He gave an analogy.

He told a story to try to help David see the effects of that kind of a sin. And it wasn't the same kind of thing. It was stealing somebody's sheep.

It wasn't adultery or murder. It was stealing. But it was the effect of that stealing on the family that lost everything. Right?

[39 : 19] And that's how Nathan connected that. My point is, is that sometimes we've got to be very careful with how we approach someone, giving a story, having good crafted questions.

And I was going to try to bring some questions tonight, and I failed. I'll try to bring them next week. There's a lot of great questions you can ask people that will help begin to reveal if they've got an idol in their heart.

And so asking those questions, because once we do that, then we can do what we've already done with ourselves. And so, from there, it's just a matter of being sure that we love one another enough to constantly be praying for one another and praying that we avoid the idols.

We all have them. We all have them. You don't have to know what my idols are to pray for me that I would avoid my idols. I just need it, and so do you.