

Worship of the Past

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[0 : 00] Chapter 18, and we read there from verses 1 to 11. Chapter 18, and we read there from verses 1 to 11.

He came from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome, and he went to see them. Because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tent makers.

And he argued in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your heads, I am innocent.

From now I will go to the Gentiles. And he left there and went to the house of a man called Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.

[1 : 43] His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with all his household.

And many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not be silent.

For I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you. For I have many people in this city. And he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God to them.

Then a short reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and the first three verses only. Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols. However, you may have been moved. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus be cursed.

[3 : 14] And no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. Amen. May the Lord bless to us that reading may be to his praise and to his glory.

Before we come round God's word, we sing again. The first three verses of 1 Corinthians 12. Now I know that you had three months of this during September, October, November.

And you might have thought, I hope you didn't, but you might have thought, can't this fellow think about anything else? Over the next two weeks, we're looking at a small series on the theme of worship.

And it just so happens that this particular passage from 1 Corinthians 12 fits into this. So let me ask you a question.

Do you think today, in the 21st century, it's an easy job to build a church? No.

[4 : 24] Well, how about this? Paul in Corinth. Corinth was a seaport. And it attracted all the ills that seaports attract.

The sins of the day. Had it been today, we would have said drugs. Undoubtedly, it was the same then of whatever that would have been.

It certainly was the sins of prostitution and drunkenness. If that wasn't enough, he had the entire hatred of the Jewish synagogue towards the message that Jesus is the Messiah.

We'll see with that shortly. And that hatred was deepened when the first convert was Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue.

He came over to the Christian message and many followed him. He was replaced by somebody called Sosthenes.

[5 : 36] And when Paul writes to the Corinthians, he writes, Paul, an apostle by the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother.

So the replacement became a Christian convert. The intense hatred from the Jewish synagogue. In addition to which, Corinth had a great temple to the Greek god Apollo.

So it was a center for pagan or heathen worship. It's that situation that he now addresses in these three words.

Think, first of all, the spiritual nature of Christian worship. Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols. However, you may have been moved. Now the interesting thing about this particular first part of the verse, which is translated in all the English versions as spiritual gifts, is that the word gift isn't there in the original.

[6 : 55] So what it actually says is, now concerning the spirituals. Spiritual, pertaining to the spirit, spiritual person.

This is what the word means. Spiritual thing, spiritual gift. Supernatural or spiritual. Used 14 times in the New Testament.

Twelve of which belong to the Apostle Paul. And what it actually refers to is the spiritual person who possesses the gifts that God gives by his Holy Spirit.

When we did look at 1 Corinthians in the first three chapters, we came across this word spiritual in this quotation in chapter 2, verse 13.

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit, or interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual persons.

[8 : 12] Then again, in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 15. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

So the spiritual man or woman is that woman who has been so blessed by the Spirit of God that he's able to understand the things of God.

And the reason that the Apostle uses it here is because he wants to assert that Christian worship is spiritual. Contrary to that, not only do we have it detailed in these chapters about who or what the spiritual person is, we also have it detailed as to what the unspiritual person is in verse 14 of chapter 2.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

That word means unspiritual, not possessing the Spirit of God, non-spiritual or physical. So, the person who is outside of the gospel, who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ through grace, cannot appreciate the things of God, and cannot, by the same thing, engage in what we are doing now, the worship of Almighty God.

[10 : 11] And if we want to know how it comes about that that was the case, we read in Romans 5 and verse 12 that sin was introduced into the world by one man because he had sinned.

And so death has passed to all men and women in that all have sinned. All of us, apart from grace, outside the remit of the gospel message.

And it is the Spirit of God coming through his word that enlivens us to the things of God. Jesus said to the disciples, the words I speak to you, they are spirit.

They are life. And when you read God's word, this book becomes a new book. It becomes alive because the Spirit of God breathes in it and through it.

Now, next week, we're going to look at John 4. Here's a verse from John 4 now, verses 23 and 24, where Jesus is addressing the Samaritan woman.

[11 : 39] And he says, The hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For such, the Father seeks to worship him.

God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The whole idea of Christian worship is that it has to be blessed, led, directed by the Spirit of God.

And the Spirit of God is here to direct your attention and mine to the living presence of Jesus.

And so, Paul writes in this opening verse, I don't want you to be ignorant concerning this matter.

This is a typical Pauline phrase that he uses again and again in his teaching. And so, in 1 Thessalonians, he uses it in the earliest epistle he wrote, He would not have you ignorant brothers and sisters concerning those who are asleep that you may not grieve as others who have no hope.

[13 : 07] A lot of issues are addressed by the apostle because he wants his people to be informed. And God wants us to be informed as to the nature of spiritual worship.

Concerning spiritual gifts, I do not want you to be ignorant. The worship of God is spiritual. Go on to the second point, which comes in verse 2, which I've outlined as the fraudulent nature of heathen worship.

You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved. So, what was this worship like in the pagan temple?

We get a clue from what he says in 1 Corinthians 13, verse 1. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Now, the reference that he's making there might be lost to us, but to the Corinthians, who were aware of what was going on in pagan temples, they were completely aware of what that reference was.

[14 : 38] I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. The first of these terms refers to a gong which was made of bronze or copper, and it's qualified by another adjective which means it's capable of noise or sound.

So the whole instrument that's being talked about there is something that makes a lot of din. It's backed up by the next statement which he calls a clanging cymbal.

So what he's talking about with these two references is the instruments that were normally used in pagan worship. And you had to use these instruments in pagan worship.

Because after all Apollo was a busy chap. He was worn out. He'd gone to sleep. So you had to wake him up. You also at the same time with all this noise going on you were driving away demons perhaps.

And it also had the effect of exciting the worshippers. This is what is going on in pagan worship. And what he's saying in 1 Corinthians 13 1 that if he has the ability to use certain of God's gifts and they are not promoted by the command to love he has become like a pagan in his worship.

[16 : 18] This is the reason I chose this particular passage passage because in the letters of Paul it's unique. There are many statements in the letters of Paul that talk about the corruption of Christian worship.

You'll find one in Colossians 2 verses 16 to 18. But this is the only reference that he makes to the worship practices of a people prior to their conversion to the Christian faith.

So this particular verse has much to tell us about this prior practice of the Corinthians in the temple of Apollo.

You know that when you were pagans the word is *ethnos* we get ethnicity from it meaning nation or people non Jews Gentiles pagans heathen or unbelievers.

Now the fact is that the coming to Christ of the Corinthians doesn't affect their status of being Gentiles. They're still Gentiles but they're now living in a new and a different way.

[17 : 42] Here is what he says about what they were doing. You were led astray to dumb idols however you may have been moved.

Now in that sentence there are two verbs that are different but they are very similar meanings. The first one you see in the phrase you were led astray.

The second one in however you may have been moved. And so this second verb is the most important because what it means is you were being led by force.

Now here is the distinctive difference between Christian worship and the worship of Apollo. You go into that temple and you can partake in the worship but what you're being influenced by is demons.

And demons don't lead you to do things, they force you to do things. Christian worship entirely unlike that.

[19 : 00] The Spirit of God leads you in worship, leads you to give glory and praise to the one that you love, the one who died for you, the one of whom God so loved the world.

So this is the difference that is being pointed out here. And indeed you find it in chapter 10. I imply that what pagans sacrifice, this is verses 20-21 chapter 10, they offer to demons and not to God.

You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. So what Paul is actually saying now to the Corinthians is this.

Yes, you know about pagan worship, but Christian worship has nothing to do with it. It's an entirely different business.

And the worship that you have in the church at Corinth has got to be in the same way. It's true. But in these pagan temples, they would experience some form of ecstasy which would have prompted them to give unintelligible statements.

[20 : 30] What Paul is saying in this letter to the Corinthians is, when you come to Christian worship, it has to be intelligible and understandable by all.

So this is the fraudulent nature of demonic worship, pagan worship, the worship of Apollo. It's a lie. Why is it a lie?

Because Jesus said in John 8 concerning Satan, he is the father of lies. God's and when he says something, you can be sure that the truth is completely different to what he said.

Go back to Genesis chapter 3. What does he say to Eve? He says this, you shall not die, you shall be as gods.

the truth of the matter is, no, they didn't die physically at that point. But at that moment, the whole of creation collapsed.

[21 : 40] They died spiritually. And there is a very practical lesson here, because we're capable of listening sometimes to what the devil suggests to us.

And if you listen to it and follow it, the result is death spiritually. So we go on.

The epitome of Christian worship. I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus be accursed, and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus be accursed. So here we are. No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, Jesus be accursed.

How could anyone suppose that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to make such a cry? And the answer you can come to, and it's the nearest you can get, is that such a cry might have been heard in the Jewish synagogue.

[22 : 56] What do we read in 1 Corinthians, in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 18? We read this. When they opposed and reviled Paul, he shook his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your heads, I am innocent, from now I will go to the Gentiles.

There are two verbs in that chapter, in that verse. The first one is to oppose or resist. But the second one, which in my translation is translated as reviled, actually means to blaspheme, to slander, or to insult.

So this is what was going on down the road in the Jewish synagogue. They were saying, Jesus is not the Messiah. They were pronouncing a curse on his testimony, on his life, on what he had achieved.

That is why this is coming. That's why he's saying, no one can say, by the Spirit of God, Jesus is accursed.

But he now goes on to say the reverse. No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. And we, this morning, we can make that acclamation.

[24 : 29] An acclamation that comes from the heart. It is the high point of Christian worship. Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It's the high point. In 1 John 4, verses 1 to 3, he's talking about this. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God.

For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this, you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not of God. These epistles, 1 John 2, 3 John, were all written somewhere about 95 AD.

John the apostle then living in Ephesus. But at that time there was a heresy going around which denied the incarnation of Jesus.

[25 : 44] So John now says, here is the truth. every spirit, every person possessed with the spirit that says, Jesus is Lord, is of God.

Here is the one thing that's different from all this noise and jamboree that's going on in the temple of Apollo. It is a confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So what he says to the Corinthians is this, forget the past, forget the ecstasy, the noise of all that that was going on.

You can still hear it down the road. Instead, come into the hallowed presence of the living God, where you will be led by the Holy Spirit.

You will be led to glorify Jesus the Messiah, his death on the cross, his resurrection, and the fact that one day he will come again.

[27 : 01] And this is something he writes himself. But he quotes, possibly a Christian hymn in Philippians 2, 10 to 11. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So these three verses, they have something to say to us about the situation in which the Corinthians found themselves.

But it's not a history lesson. It speaks to the now. Now we don't have the temple of Apollo in our midst anymore, thank God.

But we do have other voices that want to be heard, which decry the beauty and the grace of the Christian confession.

so we learn from this. We are not to be ignorant of what's going on. It's of Satan. But what's of God is that which will last.

[28 : 25] And what will last is the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Amen. May the Lord bless these remarks. May they be to his praise and to his glory. In life and glory. In life and glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.