

Title: Run for your Life!

Text: 1 Corinthians 10.14-22

Theme: Living between two worlds

Series: 1 Corinthians #40

Prop Stmt. You cannot live with two different sets of rules.

I hope that you were able to get to bed at a decent time last night, because this message this morning is going to demand that you actively engage your brain. Genuine Christianity is the thinking person's religion. You are never called to mindlessly follow what you are told to do. In fact, you see that very point brought out in v.15, where Paul says in essence, "I appeal to your common sense."<sup>1</sup> I am asking you to connect the dots here and make sense of this. That is what God does. God makes sense. We don't.

For example, we often just want to be left alone, don't we? In school, you want the teachers to leave you alone, you want your parents to leave you alone, you want your boss to leave you alone, you want other people to leave you alone. Some people come to church, but they want to be left alone. Some think, can I live anonymously and privately? Can I just do what I want, when I want, and how I want? But, think of it. I mean, I am speaking to sensible people here, let's connect the dots for a second. What if you got your wish? What if the people in your world, really left you alone? What if, when you went to a restaurant, you were left alone? What if when you went into a store, you were completely ignored? What if when you went home, no one in your family even looked at you? What if your parents did not even give you a name? What if the teacher at school never even acknowledged that you were sitting in class, or when you turned in a project to be graded, everyone else received theirs' back except you?

Your life affects others. And others affect you. The fact is, others have affected you so profoundly, that some of you have tried to pull back into a shell and hide. It does not work. If you are a follower of Christ, you are called to follow Christ with the followers of Christ. The call to Christ carries with it, the call to a community of believers. It is a package deal because you were never designed to live this life all by yourself. "Can't I just have a private religion?" Sure! But don't call it Christianity. "Well, the church has let me down." "I love Christ; it's just the church that I struggle with." But the struggle is part of the process that Christ uses to help you in your maturity process. Life as a believer has enormous implications. Your status in Christ changes your eternal destiny. That is a wondrously huge matter! But, your status in Christ is not a simple death benefit that kicks in when you die, your status in Christ changes who you are and how you think how you respond, how you live, how you relate and how you deal with issues right now!

We have seen that very point made over and over in our study of 1 Corinthians. The letter of 1 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul to a group of believers in the city of Corinth, Greece about 20 years or so after the life of Christ. The church was in serious trouble. There were all sorts of problems that were ripping this fellowship apart. At the heart of this were people who were living as if they or their group did not need each other. One of those groups (the uptown crowd) thought they were a few notches above

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<sup>1</sup> Thiselton's translation found in his commentary on 1 Corinthians (NIGTC) Eerdmans p. 750.

the others. Corinth was a city that hosted large festivals to the many gods and goddesses that were worshipped there. These festivals were a very social and communal thing to do. The who's who of the city, the hoity-toity came out and exchanged business cards and e-mail addresses. Anybody who was somebody showed up, but there was a little problem. These events involved the worshiping of an idol and eating meals that were designed as celebrations of these idols. The uptown group in the church was claiming that this was really not a problem because after all, what is an idol anyway? It is only a hunk of wood or stone. It may bother you. It may bother the Bronx crowd in the church, but we are above it. We can handle it. This text connects the dots for those who are blind to the reality of where they are going. In other words, if you don't want to go to Milwaukee, don't get on the bus.

So, you think you are tough. You think you can handle sin? You think that you can play with demons and not get burned? You think you can fool God by playing the game, looking like you are obeying the rules? Hey wait!? What on earth do you think this thing called church is all about anyway? Right out of the gate, Paul is laying his heart out for the entire church to see. My very, dear friends, what are you doing? Don't play games with this stuff. Run for your life!! Flee from idolatry. Think about it! Connect the dots with me and see for yourself if what I am saying doesn't make sense, and if what you are doing is not absolutely crazy?

Run for your life from idolatry because:

**1. You are Part of Christ and His Church (14-17)**

This text gives 4 reasons why you need to run for your life from idolatry. The first one is an appeal to your heart. The next three are 2x 4's to your head. First the heart appeal...

You remember the title that J.R. Tolkien gave to the book that became movie. It was called, The Fellowship of the Ring. Let me ask you something. Is it a fellowship because of their mutual connection and responsibility to the ring or is it a fellowship because their time, experiences, and relationships bind them together with such strong personal cords that they are willing to die for each other? The answer is, it is both. The title reflects the thing that is shared – the ring and it reflects the experience(s) that result from sharing the responsibility for the ring. Now, hang in there with me. What does the Bible mean by the fellowship of Christ? It is a fellowship because of our mutual connection and responsibility to Christ and it is a fellowship because of our connection to each other. The call to Christ is the call to a community of believers.

What is it that binds us together? It is the life and death of Christ in our place. When you come to faith in Christ, you are placed into the body of Christ (see 12.13). When we eat and drink together (communion) this is no ordinary, meal, this is a re-enactment of the event that is the very foundation of our life with Christ and each other. Do you get the picture now? These people were acting as if their participation in the idol festivals was no big deal, because they were treating the community of believers and the observance of

communion as no big deal. If you do not have a high view of God, you will not have a serious view of sin and neither will you have a high view of His church.

Do you know why some of you do not have a serious view of sin? You do not care about Christ and you don't care about me, or the kids in this church, or the family sitting in front of you. They don't matter to you as much as your sin matters to you. If you are a follower of Christ you are part of the stuff and what you do affects me and it affects this church at it affects our witness to this world and it affects the reputation of God. If you are in Christ, you are participating in the community life of Christians. Therefore, what you do affects the rest of us. When you go to the bar and bow before the idol of drunkenness, you are taking us with you. When you go to the strip club and bow before the idol of lust, you are taking us with you. When you go to the casino and participate in the worship of the goddess of chance and luck and jackpots, you are taking us with you. When you bow before the goddess of immorality or the gods of materialism you are taking us with you. What if we all joined hands in prayer, as we do sometimes and one person reached out and stuck his fingers in an electrical outlet. Would that affect us? Sure, some of you would think that was the anointing! We are only affected if we are connected. Guess what? If you are in Christ – you are connected to Christ and His church. Therefore, you are called to be completely true to Christ and true to us. You are true to the community of believers, our church, as you are true to Christ.

The appeal in verses 16 and 17 to communion carries enormous weight. Verse 16 is comprised of two questions and v. 17 is the answer. Paul is asking questions, because he is seeking to engage your mind to think consistently with him on this. What are we doing when we all share in the cup at communion? What are we doing when we all participate in the eating of the bread at communion? We are re-enacting the death of Christ and we are reminding ourselves that we have been called to live a crucified life! My life, your life, our life together has to be lived with Christ at the center. Christ lived for us. Christ died for us. We live for Christ as we live for each other. Therefore, because my life is part of the loaf, the body, because I really am a part of the stuff, I have the happy and heavy responsibility to live as I am, and to live as we are, and to live as He is! (v.17)

Now, parents, think of this for a minute. Do you see how this truth ought to be the foundational way we help our children develop a God-centered decision making grid? It is easy and short-sighted to say to someone, “You should not do this bad thing because, “People won't like you or People won't trust you or Bad things will happen to you, or you will make Jesus sad.” No! No! It is so much deeper than that. Why should we be careful about what we do? Because of who we are and who we are connected to – that's why!

That point should be enough. That truth should so thoroughly convince every single person in this room to run for your life from sin and to stop playing games and acting as if it does not bother you. But in case it does not. Paul gives three more reasons why you need to run for your life from participating in sin. As I read this, it seems to me that he is saying, if you don't get the nice appeal, then maybe a 2x4 will get your attention.

## 2. **Behind every idol is a demon.** (18-20)

### A. **You are affected by what you participate in.** (18)

How many times do you see the word participation or a related word in this text? It is all over it. This is a huge issue. When a person (or a family) in Israel was grateful for something and wanted to give thanks to God, one of the ways they could do this, was to go to the tabernacle or temple and give a sacrificial offering of food. Part of the food was offered on the altar and part of the food was eaten. You ate it, right there at the tabernacle or later at the temple. Paul is pointing out the obvious. The people who were eating the offering were part of the ceremony. They were participating in it.

The person eating at a festival meal for an idol was participating in the worship of that idol. This text absolutely nails the issue right on the bull's-eye. When these sorts of issues come up, it seems that everyone turns into a Philadelphia lawyer. A person may say, "It is only a piece of stone" "It's only a carving of wood." "Look, I am just eating food, that's all that I am doing. There is no way, that this piece of stone (idol) has any affect on this piece of blueberry pie."

Paul anticipates that and repeats a point that he made earlier. (v.19) He concedes that it is not the actual physical item (stone) or the food that is the issue. But there is more to this than what you can see.

### B. **You are affected by what you can't see.** (20)

The eating of the food at these events involved an offering that was made to the idols and if you were there, you participated in that. But, idols are the manifestation of the activity of demons who because of their hatred for and rebellion against God, exist for the sole purpose of turning people away from trusting in Him, the one and only true God.

The physical is not the issue, it is the metaphysical. It isn't the food and the carvings, it is the demons. When you bow before the idols of this world, you are participating in and cooperating with the program of demons that have a sworn allegiance to Satan, who is the hater of your soul, the thief of your joy, and the archenemy of God Himself. And when you participate with them, you are taking Christ with you. Do you see the problem with that? That's verse 21.

## 3. **You cannot worship Christ and demons.** (21)

Christ loves you too much to settle for anything less than your complete and happy submission to Him. Christ will not cooperate with His competition. Satan and his demons have such an incredibly intense hatred for God and His creation (you) that they will not settle for anything less than complete domination and destruction of your life. What is that? That is called war! What if next Sunday when we gather and together are prepared to participate in communion, there is an area of the platform dedicated to Satan and some people after taking the bread and the cup, go over to that area and offer

themselves to Satan? Paul is not over-stating the issue here. It is that strong. When you offer yourself as an important of the evil one, you are inviting upon yourself a power that you cannot control.

Part of the strategy of Satan is to convince you that you do not have to take this seriously and that you can coast. This verse is shocking. How can a person who eats and drinks at the Lord's Table eat and drink at the table of demons? You absolutely cannot do that.

#### 4. **You are no match for the righteous jealousy of God.** (22)

Do the affections of God's people matter to Him? Do the actions of God's people matter to Him? You cannot handle sin, because you cannot handle your own heart, you are no match for demons, and you are no match to go up against the righteous jealousy of God. Deliberate and repeated sinning is the throwing down of a gauntlet at the foot of God and daring Him to do what He said He would. The wheels of God's justice may grind slowly, but they grind finely. Never misinterpret patience for apathy.

So, what do we do with this text? On the one hand, I could argue, as I have attempted to imply throughout the sermon that while idols are not as prominent in our culture as they were in Corinth, they are nonetheless present because we can make an idol out of anything. Too much work produces workaholics. Too much drink produces alcoholics. Too much sports produces sportsaholics and the list goes on. And obviously, Satan does not care what idol you serve as long as it is not the One True God.

But, if you think that in our enlightened and modern culture, that science has freed us from the ignorance that fueled the worship of idols, you are very naïve. Reuters carried a headline on Thursday of this week, Spiritist religion spread from Brazil to America. The article that followed documented a rising tide of spiritism in this country.

For the past several years, we have watched a rising tide of animism from the emphasis on Native American religion, goddess worship, earth worship, white witchcraft and many other venues. While this sort of stuff may not appeal to the mainstream of our culture yet, its influence is growing. Whether subtle or overt I beg of you by the mercies of God to give careful oversight of you're your life. If you have come to faith in Christ, you are part of Christ and part of us. Behind every idol is a demon and you can't have it both ways, it will destroy you. Besides, God is an infinite God. He will either pour out upon you His infinite grace or His infinite wrath. So, if you don't want to go to Milwaukee, don't get on the bus.