



## 1 Corinthians 10:8 And Twenty-three Thousand Fell

March 9, 2014

### Text: 1 Corinthians 10:8

Still working through Paul's admonition against idolatry, we've learned a lot:

From 1 Cor 10:5-6, we learned:

- That with most of the generation that came out Egypt, "God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness." (Num 13:1-14:45)
- By referencing Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land (they listened to the bad report of 10 spies, put their fear above God and their desire for the comforts of slavery above divine command), Paul attempts to demonstrate to the Corinthians how seriously God takes idolatry. Remember, God punished that generation by allowing them to die in the wilderness.
- From this example, we learn that:
  1. Idolatry is a serious and deceitful sin. No physical idols were present; but a controlling fear and love of comfort were.
  2. God's commands are not burdensome! Had they listened, they would have inherited the promise!
  3. God is Merciful! If you remember, Moses interceded for the people and God listened (Num 14:11-20). Instead of giving them what they deserved for their idolatrous disobedience, killing them all quickly (Num 14:12), the Lord let them live (albeit in the wilderness), bear children, and another generation, led by Joshua, inherited the Promise.

From 1 Cor 10:7 we learned: (This is a reference to the sad history of Exodus 32)

- That waiting while worshipping will test our faith!
- That godly leadership is critical! Remember Aaron caved to people pressure and people died! "Aaron had let them break loose." (Ex 32:25)
- That the people knew the Ten Commandments WHEN they asked for a golden calf!

*Exo 24:3-7 ESV Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. **And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do."** (4) And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. (5) And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. (6) And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. **(7) Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."***

- That God hates idolatry and views it as corruption. It offends His holy character. Idolatry offends God in part (and in my opinion) because it gives what belongs to Him to another...worship, praise, credit, adoration, exaltation, honor. It is attributing to that which is dead and demonic that which belongs to Elohim and El Shaddai! It puts the wrong god on display in God's own creation!
- That being "stiff-necked" leaves us susceptible to this sin.
- That sin can have such terrible consequences. As the Levites went about the camp killing, imagine the lamentation. Then God sent a plague among the people. Sad and hard to read.

### **Verse 8 for Today:**

***(1Co 10:8 ESV) We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.***

### Thoughts:

- Just a general thought: all of these examples were meant to lovingly warn the Corinthian church about the seriousness of idolatry. Take heed that these Old Testament warnings were meant to inform and exhort a New Testament church! (v6,11) Again, this is especially relevant given how pagan Corinth was, and what we learned from Chapter 8.
- From The Webster 1828 Dictionary, Idolatry is:
  1. *The worship of idols, images, or any thing made by hands, or which is not God. Idolatry is of two kinds; the worship of images, statues, pictures, made by hands; and the worship of the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars, or of demons, angels, men and animals.*
  2. *Excessive attachment or veneration for anything, or that which borders on adoration.*
- This reference to twenty-three thousand falling is likely a reference to Numbers 25:1-9. After reading it, here are some takeaways we might do well to consider:
  1. The difference of 1,000 dead in the two accounts is either:
    - a. Paul or the Old Testament writer (Moses most likely) rounding up or down and/or using approximations.
    - b. Or Paul could be referring to Exodus 32 instead of Numbers 25, adding up those killed in the plague plus those the Levites killed. For our purposes, we think Numbers 25 fits the context of listing several examples of idolatry.
  2. Looking at Verse 1:
    - a. Note the language: “the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab.”
    - b. The use of the word “whore” to me is another indication of the **seriousness** of idolatry to God.
    - c. This is actually pretty common in the Old Testament...God revealing Himself as a “Husband” to a promiscuous, “loose” wife Israel (and Judah)...and He doesn’t tend to mince words:

*Jer 3:1-9 ESV "If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? declares the LORD. (2) Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see! Where have you not been ravished? By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your vile whoredom. (3) Therefore the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come; yet you have the forehead of a whore; you refuse to be ashamed. (4) Have you not just now called to me, 'My father, you are the friend of my youth-- (5) will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?' Behold, you have spoken, but you have done all the evil that you could." (6) The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? (7) And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. (8) She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. (9) Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing*

adultery with stone and tree.

- d. So, in Numbers 25, it would appear that there are two types of idolatry in play: **physical** immorality (the people of God joining with pagan women) and the subsequent **spiritual** idolatry, which is the primary point.
- e. Paul references “sexual immorality,” a real problem in Corinth. Apparently at Peor, some committed shameless acts with Moabite women which led to Baal worship.
- f. This was Balaam’s strategy (an interesting Old Testament figure we don’t have time to cover) for the Moabite King Balak according to Jesus, and it worked at Peor!

*Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.*

- g. So food, sex, and spiritual harlotry were all connected at Peor...and likely at Corinth too! Matthew Henry wrote:

*“...whoredom and idolatry went together. They first defiled and debauched their consciences, by committing lewdness with the women, and then were easily drawn, in complaisance to them, and in contempt of the God of Israel, to bow down to their idols. And they were more likely to do so if, as it is commonly supposed, and seems probable by the joining of them together, the uncleanness committed was a part of the worship and service performed to Baal-peor. Those that have broken the fences of modesty will never be held by the bonds of piety, and those that have dishonoured themselves by fleshly lusts will not scruple to dishonour God by idolatrous worships, and for this they are justly given up yet further to vile affections.”*

3. From Verse 2, the Moabite women “**invited**” Israel to sacrifice to Baal, and they did!
  - a. How many times has sexual immorality been the bridge to further idolatry?
  - b. Remember Solomon who “loved many foreign women?” 700 wives, 300 concubines, “*And his wives turned away his heart. (4) For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. (5) For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. (6) So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. (7) Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. (8) And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. (1 Kings 11:3-8)*
  - c. Whatever occurred at Peor, it was enough to make God’s people openly and without **shame** eat food offered to idols and “bow down” to other gods!
  - d. CRCC, **inspect** your “invitations!” ☺
4. From Verse 3, again note the imagery of the word used: “yoked.”
  - a. “Attached, cleaved to, joined.” An intimate term in this context. Again, think **marriage** from God’s perspective.

- b. Now, the word “Baal” (“lord” or “possessor”) was used by different nations for different gods. Baal Peor was likely a chief god among the Moabites, and his worship required eating sacrifices offered to the dead among other things....
  - c. *Psa 106:28* Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;
  - d. This is again another betrayal by Israel that angered the Lord.
5. Verses 4-5 are again, extremely tragic...
- a. Leaders hanged (v4) and other leaders commanded to kill their own men (v5).
  - b. At this point, can it be overstated how angry God was about idolatry? Do you think that is still the case...that our Lord isn't at all a fan of idol worship? Again, recall Jesus words to the Church in Pergamum: “I have a few things against you...” (Rev 2:14)
6. Finally, from Verses 6-9, although we might admire the zeal of Phinehas (God obviously did, vv 10-13), his actions are hard to read as is the resulting deaths of 23,000-24,000 people by the hand of God through plague.
- a. But his actions saved the people from more death.
  - b. May I add this thought? Sin makes you **stupid!**
  - c. What was Zimri, a leader's son thinking, boldly bringing a Midianite woman to his family in the midst of the people's mourning?
  - d. The Moabites and Midianites worked together to hire Balaam (Num 22:4-7)! People are dying everywhere and he just shows up with a Midianite? Huh?

#### **Final Thoughts:**

1. At Peor, God's people ate food offered to idols, committed sexual immorality with foreign women, and shamelessly bowed before Baal Peor.
2. Corinth was a city with a major temple to Aphrodite on its highest mountain with 1,000 temple prostitutes. Food offered to idols, physical immorality offered to idols, and worship offered to idols was common.
3. This church was being exhorted to learn from these OT examples to hold fast to Christ, who was their Rock (1 Cor 10:4) and surrender their so called rights before their arrogance caught them out.
4. Today, the church faces the exact same temptations:
  - a. To relax God's standards and fall into idol worship
  - b. To go soft on sexual immorality or see it as a viable, natural lifestyle
  - c. To forsake the singular Truth of Christ for a more “open” view of other gods (both idols and man himself in the form of humanism.)

#### **May we hold fast to Christ, fight against sin, and love others enough to tell them the truth of the Gospel...**

*“Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God the Son, came to this earth through the virgin Mary, revealed the truths of God, lived the perfect life in our place, died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin that we might be forgiven and brought into relationship with God, rose again on the third day, and gives eternal life to those He has called who believe in Him by His grace and through faith. Those who reject Him will spend eternity apart from Him in Hell. At a future date, He will return to complete the restoration of God's creation.”*

Amen.