

The Anatomy of an Idol

I Corinthians 10:1-11:1 | Week Seven

Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Where We Are Now

The previous time we met we talked about knowledge, idolatry, and surrender. Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 8-9 called us to avoid being puffed up about knowledge, avoid idolatry, and surrender ourselves. In addition, we should be mindful of how our actions impact others.

This Week

We've all heard of *American Idol*, but this lesson is all about the anatomy of an idol in a biblical sense—things that distract us from God, shift our attention from His glory, and move us in directions that aren't in line with how we should live as Christians. This week our reading of 1 Corinthians encourages us to learn lessons from Israel's past, flee idolatry (10:14), and instead live for God's glory (10:31).

The Big Idea

We need to be careful about how we live our lives. Even if we are wise enough to avoid idols or get involved in things that go against our Christian faith, we also need to be aware that our actions can cause other people to stumble—both Christians and non-Christians. A better way to live is to seek to glorify God in all that we do, being mindful of what we do and why we do it. Idols move us away from God.

Memory Verse | Cor. 10:31

Looking at the Text

Ask someone to read I Corinthians 10:1-13 - *For I do not want you to be unaware,*

- 1 | The Problem with Knowledge
- 2 | Wisdom of Man & Power of God
- 3 | Servanthood & Stewardship
- 4 | Sex, Holiness, & Worship
- 5 | Singleness, Marriage, & Calling
- 6 | Knowledge, Idolatry, & Surrender
- 7 | The Anatomy of an Idol
- 8 | All in the Family
- 9 | It's All About Love
- 10 | Spiritual Gifts & The Church
- 11 | The Resurrection & The End

Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

Don't Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, **3** and all ate the same spiritual food, **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. **5** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. **6** Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. **7** Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." **8** We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. **9** We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, **10** nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. **11** Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. **12** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. **13** No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

1. Paul begins this reading with the phrase, "For I do not want you to be unaware," used several times in his writings (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; and 1 Thes. 4:13). In other words, Paul doesn't want believers to be ignorant. Why is it important for Christians to seek true knowledge?

The Goal of the Christian life is to know Christ and His Truth about God's redemptive plan in history, His completed work, and the transformational Gospel that causes us to see ourselves in light of who He is. We need His grace daily to avoid the error of allowing idols to rob us of His power. This true knowledge applied will shape how we live, including the choices we make. Don't be ignorant of this.

2. The example of Israel is given as a warning about what could happen to those who seek idols over God. Why is it important that we understand the past?

By looking at the past we can better understand mistakes and poor decisions that were made and, hopefully, learn from them.

3. How should we view temptation when it comes into our lives v23?

God is aware of every possible distraction, idol, person or pressure that could derail us in our quest to be His disciples in the academy. Everyone struggles with the same issues! He has a way of escape for every trap or temptation. Be quick to recognize the evil that may be disguised as being driven, seeking worldly acclaim, or knowledge that puffs up, and surrender to His power and accept His escape.

Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 - Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? 19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that fan idol is anything? 20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22 Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Think About It

Illustrate It

Tim Keller calls the idols of our day "counterfeit gods," remarking: "When most people think of 'idols' they have in mind literal statues ... Yet while traditional idol worship still occurs in many places in the world, internal idol worship, within the heart, is universal" (*Counterfeit Gods*). What are some of the popular "idols" of our culture? Why do you think people seek to fill their lives with these idols? Share about the "idols" of our culture. How can you avoid getting caught up in the fascination with the idols of our day?

Illustrate It

Idols can seem real and fulfilling, but in reality they drive us away from God, distracting us and possibly even derailing our lives. "What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living." Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

Grads responded to the article on the Grad Resources site, *Understanding Graduate Students* with similar comments: "I thought I was alone in my struggle but now I see that I am one among many and every grad faces the same challenges." You are not alone! Be aware of the shared challenge and commit to getting help from the Christian peers who want to come alongside you in the battle. They are key to victory.

4. How do you think verse 21 applies to us today? Are there situations in your academic pursuits where this passage might apply?

We need to be careful and wise about how we live and the things that we do or don't do. If we try to live in two worlds we won't really be committed entirely to either one—our allegiances could be compromised. Our Christian life and witness to others could be compromised, too, by getting involved in questionable activities. Academically, we might be tempted to give in just to fit in or agree with everyone else on a point, even though we know better as Christians.

Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 - *“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? 31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. 11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

5. What is seen in v23 concerning our Christian freedom and the warning of abuse?

While Christ has made all things new and nothing that goes into us can defile us, we are warned not to let our freedom deter us from spiritual discipline. Potentially controlling things for grads may not be “questionable food” but rather the flex schedule that is devoted to research and study but ignores Christian devotions.

6. In verse 24, Paul calls believers to focus on others over themselves. Why do you think this is a helpful Christian principle to follow? What might this look like in your academic life?

This outlook helps us to have an outward focus instead of a self-centered focus. It also is in line with the teachings of Jesus that we are to love God and love others, expressing compassion and mercy to others. If we followed this advice in our academic lives, it should move us to willingly help others not only when it comes to academic pursuits, but also everyday issues that come up in life, too.

7. Why is it beneficial for us to imitate Christian role models and mentors (11:1)?

Sometimes it's helpful to have role models to imitate, especially if they are truly living out the Christian life the best they can. We can learn from Christian faculty mentors in ways they behave, what they do, how they have handled challenges they encountered. If we try to behave like they do in difficult situations, we can better shape our character in a way that displays a Christ follower in grad school and represents the Gospel well to others in the academy and the church.

Tips for a Better Discussion

Although studying the Bible is something we should take seriously, do what you can to cultivate an open, relaxed environment where people are comfortable and, as a result, more likely to participate and share in your discussion time.

Closing illustration: Mike is a Christian professor who spent 4 sessions mentoring a grad leader. They spoke of the importance of wrestling with integrating faith into academic study. They talked about challenges in the typical church that didn't understand their calling in the academy. Mike offered insights into family life and missional living. However, it was Mike who said, “I learned more

Wrapping Up

8. Verse 31 is foundational to what Paul is discussing. What distracts you from doing everything for God’s glory? How can you overcome those distractions?

The *ESV Study Bible* says about this passage, “Every aspect of every Christian’s life has the potential to honor God.” But if we don’t seek God’s glory, every aspect of our lives also has the potential to bring dishonor to God. With that said, all of the potential “idols” around us can distract us from living our lives in a way that seeks God’s glory—money, power, academic recognition, etc., can all become idols if we don’t approach them with the perspective of bringing glory to God. We can seek to overcome such distractions in our lives by actively seeking to serve and honor God on a daily basis in all we do.

from my mentee than I ever gave to him. One day I will say, ‘I contributed a small part into the person he will become.’ ” You never lose anything when you give of yourself to help develop another.