

1 Corinthians Session 7: The Trouble with Idolatry (1 Cor 10:1-11:1)

(Scripture references based on NIV)

1. Key Learning Objectives

Key pointers to keep in mind as you prepare and lead the session.

- Understand that idolatry is a sin because it means that something/someone other than God has taken first place in our hearts.
- Identify any idols we may have in our lives.
- Understand the sacrifices we are called to make to remove idolatry from our lives.

2. Warm-up activity / Starter Question

These questions are meant to establish a baseline level of understanding or tease the themes of today's passage. You may pick one of the three. There is no need to hear from everyone or correct any opinions here.

- What quality does teamwork require of each individual player?
- Do you remember a time when someone sacrificed something they really wanted for you? Why do you think this person did that? How did it make you feel?
- What's the most that you would do/give up for someone you love?

3. Opening Prayer

Thank God for bringing each member to church and to the small group today. Thank God for His valuable Word that contains great truths for us to live by. Ask Him for the desire to dig into God's Word, and that it will change our hearts and lives.

4. Context

This context links from the key topic from the previous study and addresses challenging portions of this week's text. Skim through this section and reference when needed.

Link to the previous study

- 1 Cor 8-10 deals with the topic of food offered to idols.
- In 1 Cor 8-9, Paul has:
 - Instructed the 'strong' Christians to consider the consciences of the 'weak', being careful not to stumble others (8:1-13).
 - Demonstrated how he, despite having every freedom and right, has given of himself sacrificially unto others to win them for the gospel (9:19-23).

- In summary, we learnt that exercising our christian freedom and rights must be grounded in our love for God and our love for others, and this may require sacrifice or lead to hardship.
- In 1 Cor 10, Paul concludes the discussion on the topic of consuming food offered to idols by adding a final refinement to how the Corinthians should think about it.

On idolatry

- Idolatry can be defined as anything that we place above God in our hearts.
- For the Israelites, idolatry often took the form of physical idols made of stone, wood, or precious metals.

Overview of today's passage (for leaders' reference)

- *V1-10: Warnings from Israel's sinful past*
- *v11-13: Exhortation regarding sin and temptation*
- *V14-22: The spiritual significance of consuming food offered to idols*
- *10:23-11:1: Concluding instructions regarding eating food offered to idols.*

5. Scripture Reading

Assign one or two youths to read the passage aloud.

6. Discussion Questions

Q1-2: Israel's sinful past (v1-14)

- 1) In these verses, Paul brings up some aspects of Israel's sinful past. To help us understand the history a bit better, refer to Num 14:1-4, 26-35 and Exod 32. In these two Old Testament accounts, what sin did the Israelites commit, and what were the consequences of their sin?**

You may consider splitting the group into two smaller groups to explore the two texts on their own respectively before coming back together to share their findings.

- Num 14
 - Sin:
 - The Israelites grumbled against God out of fear even after God had delivered them out of Egypt through Moses.
 - Consequence:
 - God promises that the Israelites who grumbled against him would not enter the promised land (v29-31) and die in the wilderness (v33).

- Exod. 32
 - Sin:
 - Whilst Moses was seeking God on Mount Sinai, Aaron led the people to make a golden calf as an idol worshipped it (v2-5).
 - They also engaged in drunkenness and sexual immorality (v6).
 - Consequence:
 - God sent a plague on the people (v35).

There are many other accounts of Israel grumbling against God and committing idolatry in their hearts by worshipping other gods throughout the Bible. These are just two examples!

2) Why does Paul think that it is important to remind the Corinthians of what happened to the Israelites in the past? What lessons should the Corinthians learn from these stories?

- The importance of the reminder
 - Paul wants the church to know that sin and idolatry have their consequences.
 - Paul uses Israel's history as an example to learn from and avoid (v6).
 - He wants the Corinthians to understand the gravity of idolatry and its consequences so that they would avoid falling into the same failures (v11-12).
- Lessons they should learn
 - To not be idolaters (v7).
 - To not indulge in sexual immorality (v8).
 - To not put Christ to the test (v9).
 - To not grumble against God (v10).

Q3-5: Back to "idol food" (v14-33)

3) If drinking from the cup and eating the bread at the Lord's Supper entails participation in the body of Christ (v15-16), what might eating food offered to idols entail? What does Paul not want for the Corinthians?

Supporting question: What does the word 'therefore' in v14 tell us about how the Corinthians' consumption of food offered to idols might relate to Israel's sinful history?

- Eating food offered to idols might entail participation in the altar of the idols (v18).
- Paul does not want the Corinthians to be participants at the table of demons (v20-21).

- Paul's usage of 'therefore' in v14 instructs the Corinthians to view such participation in altars of idols/demons as seriously as Israel's idolatry in the past.

4) Why do you think Paul describes God as “jealous” (v22)? What is God's main concern when His people participate in other altars?

- God is jealous in the sense that he wants us to love Him and be devoted to Him alone.
- Although Paul acknowledges that idols are nothing (v19), worshipping idols rouses God's jealousy as it means that His people are not fully devoted to Him.
- While jealousy often occurs to us as a sinful emotion, God is without sin. His jealousy is righteous and holy, which stems from His deep perfect love for us.

5) We can sum up the discussion about “idol food” from 10:23-33. What guiding principles does Paul offer regarding how to navigate such morally “grey” areas?

- Whether it is helpful and whether it builds up (v23).
 - When deciding to do something, consider whether:
 - i. It is beneficial for oneself and one's faith.
 - ii. What you are doing is helpful for others' faith.
- Whether it violates one's conscience or that of another (v27-29)
 - These verses suggest that both the consciences of both the self and of others around should be considered.
- Whether it glorifies God (v31)
 - To glorify God is to reveal and magnify any aspects of God's Perfect character through our thought, word, and deed.
 - Consider whether any action achieves that.
- *Additional thoughts:*
 - *When deciding your next course of action, consider these questions:*
 - i. *Does it affect your conscience? Is your heart at peace with God?*
 - ii. *If you don't think it is sin, will you cause your fellow brother or sister who views this action as sinful to stumble?*
 - iii. *Will it displease the Lord in any way? (e.g. provoke Him to jealousy, not glorify Him etc.)*

7. Main Discipleship Takeaway

Ask the youths how they would summarise everything that has been discussed today with one sentence.

Knowing the severe consequences of sin, we are called to flee from idolatry and live our lives fully devoted to God.

8. Application / Reflection

Split up into smaller groups to share. Leaders are encouraged to have prepared their own thoughts and sharings for the application questions.

- 1) Are there any “everyday decisions” that you make which may not necessarily be wrong/sinful, but might affect the conscience of others? How does today’s passage influence your attitude towards those decisions?
 - *Consider discussing this question around the topics of alcohol consumption (for groups >18 y/o), how we dress, how we speak about others etc.*
- 2) Considering the context of Singapore being a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, how does today’s passage guide our perspectives and approach towards rituals/practices of other religions?
 - *For example, consider ancestral altars, funeral rites, festivals etc.*
- 3) An idol is defined as anything that we place above God in our hearts. Would you say that there are any idols in your heart? What difficulties do you face in putting God first?
 - *For example, consider discussing studies and grades, being esteemed well by others, getting into a particular school / course of study, expectations of parents/friends/self etc.*
- 4) In 1 Cor 10:13, Paul assures us of God’s faithfulness and grace towards us in the face of temptation. Are there any temptations to sin in your life? How might today’s passage help us in fighting sin?
 - *Leaders, you may consider splitting the group based on gender should you choose to discuss this question. Encourage your members to share about how they have been successful in fighting temptation or how they can come alongside each other in prayer and accountability.*

9. Closing Prayer

Remain in your smaller groups and take turns to pray for each other. Where there is time, encourage members to share about specific areas for prayer in their lives.