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Bible Sunday Sermon



1-18-26

**SERMON TITLE:**

**“THE GOSPEL IN A CORRUPT  
CULTURE: IDOLS, FREEDOM, AND  
HOLINESS”**

**1 Corinthians chapters 8–10**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

**Heavenly Father,  
We come before You humbly, asking for wisdom and understanding. Open our hearts to Your Word. Help us see Christ clearly, walk in holiness faithfully, and love one another sacrificially. Teach us what was written then, why it was written, and how it applies to us now. Above all, may Jesus be exalted. In His holy name we pray, Amen.**

## **INTRODUCTION: WHY CONTEXT MATTERS**

When we read the Bible, we must read it in context.

The Apostle Paul did not write his letters in a vacuum. He wrote to real churches, in real cities, facing real temptations,

surrounded by real pagan religions, sexual immorality, idol worship, and spiritual confusion.

The early church was not born in a moral paradise. It was born in the middle of spiritual darkness.

Paul's letters...especially 1 Corinthians...are pastoral letters meant to protect the purity of the gospel while helping believers live faithfully in hostile and immoral cultures.

## **BACKGROUND** To Biblical Definition of Paganism in (1 Corinthians 8–10)

Paganism, in the biblical sense addressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8–10, is:

The worship of false gods and participation in religious practices that credit spiritual power, allegiance, or identity to anything other than the one true God...often expressed through idols, sacrificial meals, temple rituals, and morally permissive lifestyles...thereby taking part with or corrupting devotion to Christ.

## Key Elements of Paganism in 1 Corinthians 8–10

### **1. Idol Worship (False Spiritual Allegiance)**

Paul acknowledges that idols have no real divine power, yet warns that behind idols are real spiritual forces.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 8:4...

## **1 Corinthians 8:4 NIV**

**So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one."**

Yet later he clarifies:

## **1 Corinthians 10:20 NIV**

**No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.**

### **Biblical definition here:**

Paganism is not merely believing in statues...it is giving spiritual allegiance to powers opposed to God, even if the object itself is lifeless.

## 2. Participation in Pagan Rituals and Temple Feasts

In Corinth, pagan worship was not private...it was social, economic, and religious. Meat sold in markets often came from idol sacrifices, and feasts were held in pagan temples.

### **1 Corinthians 10:19-20 NIV**

**Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? [20] No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.**

Paul's concern was not food itself, but participation in pagan worship environments that implied fellowship with false gods.

## **1 Corinthians 10:21 NIV**

**You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.**

### **Biblical definition here:**

Paganism involves sharing in rituals that symbolize spiritual communion with false gods, even if one claims no personal belief in them.

### **3. Morally Permissive Lifestyle Connected to Worship**

Pagan worship in Corinth was deeply tied to sexual immorality, drunkenness, and excess, often justified as religious expression.

Paul warns by recalling Israel's failure:

**1 Corinthians 10:8 NIV**

**We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did-and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.**



Reference: Exodus chapter 32: The Golden Calf...

**1 Corinthians 10:12 NIV**

**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**

Biblical definition here:

Paganism normalizes sin by blending immoral behavior with religious or cultural acceptance, weakening holiness and obedience to God.

## 4. Cultural Pressure Over Covenant Loyalty

Many Corinthians believed they could blend Christian faith with pagan culture without consequence.

Paul counters this mindset:

### **1 Corinthians 10:23 NIV**

**"I have the right to do anything," you say-but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"-but not everything is constructive.**

Paganism here includes allowing culture, tradition, or social pressure to dictate behavior rather than devotion to Christ.

## Summary: Biblical Definition (Teaching-Ready)

Paganism, according to 1 Corinthians 8–10, is the system of false worship and cultural practices that draw people into spiritual fellowship with powers opposed to God...through idols, rituals, moral compromise, and divided loyalty...ultimately competing with exclusive devotion to Jesus Christ.

## Why This Mattered Then...and Now

Paul's warning was not about stone statues alone, but about anything that replaces Christ as the source of identity, security, pleasure, or meaning.

## **1 Corinthians 10:14 NIV**

**Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.**

### **PART 1: CORINTH AND EPHEBUS ...TWO VERY SIMILAR CITIES**

Although 1 Corinthians was written to the church in Corinth, much of the cultural influence came from Ephesus, where Paul ministered for nearly three years (Acts 19).

#### Corinth

- .Major port city
- .Wealthy, cosmopolitan, morally corrupt
- .Famous for sexual immorality
- .The phrase “to Corinthianize” meant to live immorally

#### Ephesus

- .One of the greatest cities of the Roman world

- .Home of the Temple of Artemis (Diana)
- .Center of idol worship, magic, witchcraft, and sexual ritual

### **Acts 19:19 NIV**

**A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.**

These cities shared the same spiritual poison.

### **Note:**



1. Ancient Greek Drachmas (the Biblical context)

(from Acts 19:19) refers to ancient Greek silver drachmas — the money used in the classical Greek world. That system predates modern currencies and isn't directly convertible to modern USD because the economies and costs of goods were completely different. Historians use rough analogies like daily wages or purchasing-power comparisons to estimate modern value.

A widely referenced estimate is:

- 1 ancient drachma  $\approx$  the daily wage of a skilled worker in ancient Athens.
- In modern terms, commentators often equate that to roughly \$30–\$50 per drachma (very rough estimate) if you consider what a day's labor might cost today.

So:

50,000 drachmas × ~\$30–\$50 ≈ \$1.5 million – \$2.5 million USD (2026 equivalence)

This isn't a precise exchange rate — it's a purchasing-power estimate comparing labor value then vs. now, often how historians approach ancient money.

## **PART 2: THE CULT OF ARTEMIS (DIANA)**

The cult of Artemis (**Greek**) or Diana(**Roman**) was one of the most powerful pagan religions of the ancient world.

## Who Was **Artemis**?

- .Goddess of fertility, sexuality, and power
- .Her temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
- .Worship involved:
  - - Sexual rituals
    - Temple prostitution
    - Fertility rites
    - Magical practices

### **Acts 19:27 NIV**

***There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.***

This cult:

- .Elevated female religious authority
- .Promoted sexual freedom
- .Mixed spirituality with immorality
- .Blurred moral boundaries

Many new Christians were coming out of this background.

## **PART 3: WHY IDOLS MATTER — 1 CORINTHIANS 8–10**

### **1 Corinthians 8:1 NIV**

**Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.**

Paul addresses meat sacrificed to idols.

## THE ISSUE

- .Meat sold in markets had often been offered to idols
- .Some believers said: “An idol is nothing”
- .Paul agrees—the idol is nothing
- .But the spiritual impact is real

### **1 Corinthians 8:7 NIV**

**But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.**

Paul teaches a critical principle:



Christian **freedom** must never destroy  
Christian **love**

## **PART 4: DEMONIC REALITY BEHIND IDOLS**

Paul goes deeper in chapter 10.

### **1 Corinthians 10:19-20 NIV**

**Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? [20] No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.**

This is key.

- .Idols are not real gods
- .But demonic powers operate behind false worship
- .The danger is spiritual compromise

### **1 Corinthians 10:21 NIV**

**You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.**

Paul is protecting believers from spiritual adultery.

## **PART 5: SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND SPIRITUAL MIXING**

## **1 Corinthians 10:8 NIV**

**We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did-and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.**



Reference: Exodus chapter 32: The Golden Calf...

Sexual immorality was not just personal sin...it was connected to idol worship.

Many converts:

- .Had lived sexually promiscuous lives
- .Were used in and to temple prostitution
- .Still socialized with pagan friends
- .Some were sleeping with unbelievers who practiced idol worship

This damaged their walk with Christ.

Paul repeatedly warns:

- .Your body belongs to Christ
- .Your worship must be pure
- .You cannot mix Christ with pagan spirituality

## **PART 6: WOMEN, AUTHORITY, AND PAUL'S INSTRUCTIONS**

Now we must address a “sensitive” and often “misunderstood” issue.

### **1 Corinthians 14:34-35 NIV**

**Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. [35] If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.**

## **1 Timothy 2:12 NIV**

**I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.**

“IMPORTANT CONTEXT”

Paul:

- .Affirmed women in ministry (Romans 16)
- .Taught women publicly (Acts 18)
- .Allowed women to pray and prophesy (1 Corinthians 11)

So what was the issue?

Paul is not issuing a universal ban on women speaking or leading in the church,

but addressing specific cultural and situational problems in first-century congregations. In Corinth, worship gatherings were disorderly, and some women, who were often less formally educated in that culture, were interrupting the service with questions or challenges, which brought social shame and disrupted teaching; Paul's instruction for silence there is about order, not value or gifting. Similarly, in Ephesus (1 Timothy), false teaching was spreading, and Paul temporarily restricted certain women from teaching or exercising authority because they were being influenced by error, not because of their gender. This fits with the wider biblical witness where Paul affirms women as co-workers, teachers, prophets, and leaders, showing that his concern was correcting cultural disorder and protecting sound doctrine, not establishing a worldwide, timeless rule that silences women in the church.

# THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

## In Ephesus, the Artemis cult:

- .Promoted dominant female religious authority
- .Trained women as priestesses
- .Encouraged disruptive teaching
- .Mixed pagan theology with Christian gatherings

## Many women:

- .Were newly converted
- .Had no biblical grounding
- .Were bringing pagan ideas into church
- .Were publicly challenging apostolic teaching

## Paul's instruction was:

- .Corrective
- .Protective
- .Cultural



This was not a universal silencing of women



It was a blocking against pagan-influenced teaching and disorder

So how to defeat or change or even live in a culture that is so diabolical different to God's word?



We must daily renew our mind.

**THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND:**

## **Romans 12:2 NIV**

**Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

Biblical Definition of Renewing the Mind:

Renewing the mind is the ongoing, Spirit-empowered transformation of a believer's thinking, values, view points, and worldview so that they increasingly align with the truth of God's Word and the character of Christ.

It is "not" merely positive thinking or self-improvement, but a deep inner reformation that occurs as the Holy Spirit uses Scripture, God's Word to replace worldly,

sinful, and flesh-driven patterns of thought with godly, Christ-centered truth.

## Key Foundational Scripture

### **Romans 12:2 NIV**

**Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

This verse shows:

- .The problem: The world pressures us to think its way
- .The process: Renewal of the mind
- .The result: Transformation and discernment of God's will

The word transformed (**Greek metamorphoo**) speaks of an inner change that produces outward fruit.

What Renewing the Mind IS:

## 1. A Work of the Holy Spirit

Renewal is started and sustained by God, not human effort alone.

### **Titus 3:5 NIV**

**he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,**

The Spirit enlightens, convicts, teaches, and reshapes how we think.

## 2. Rooted in God's Word

Scripture is the primary instrument God uses to renew the mind.

**Psalm 119:105 NIV**

**Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.**

**John 17:17 NIV**

**Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.**

Is As the Word is read, believed, and obeyed, false thinking is replaced with truth.

### 3. This is a Process, Not an Instant Event

Though salvation is immediate, renewal is progressive.

#### **2 Corinthians 4:16 NIV**

**Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.**

This renewal continues throughout the believer's lifetime on earth.

### 4. Replacing Old Thought Patterns

Renewing the mind involves putting off the old and putting on the new.

## **Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV**

**You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24] and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

This includes:

- .Lies → Truth
- .Fear → Faith
- .Pride → Humility
- .Lust → Purity
- .Self-reliance → Dependence on Christ

## **5. Leading to Obedience and Christlikeness**

A renewed mind results in changed behavior and spiritual fruit.

**Colossians 3:10 NIV**

**and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.**

Renewal shapes how we:

- .Make decisions
- .Respond to trials
- .Treat others
- .Worship God
- .Resist sin

## What Renewing the Mind Is NOT

- .  Not psychology without Christ
- .  Not denying reality or hardship
- .  Not mere behavior modification
- .  Not legalism or self-effort
- .  Not instant perfection

True renewal flows from grace, “not” performance.

### **Simple One-Sentence Definition**

Renewing the mind is the daily, Spirit-led process by which God reshapes a

believer's thinking through His Word, replacing worldly and sinful patterns with Christ-centered truth, resulting in a transformed life that pleases God.

## **PART 7: DOES THIS APPLY TO US TODAY?**

UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES THAT APPLY:



Holiness matters



Idolatry is dangerous



Sexual immorality damages faith



Spiritual compromise weakens the church



Love limits freedom

## CULTURE-CERTAIN APPLICATIONS:

- .Artemis worship no longer dominates
- .Temple prostitution is not a civic religion
- .Women today are biblically educated
- .Church order must match context

## THE ETERNAL TRUTH

The gospel does not change, but methods and safeguards may.

## **PART 8: MODERN IDOLS AND MODERN PARALLELS**

Today's idols:

- .Sexual freedom without boundaries
- .Self-expression over Scripture
- .Spirituality without repentance
- .Mixing Christ with worldly ideologies

Paul's message still speaks:

**1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV**

**So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**

## **CONCLUSION: A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS**

Paul was not trying to control people.  
He was trying to save souls.

He knew:

- .Compromise weakens testimony
- .Holiness strengthens witness
- .Love protects the weak
- .Truth preserves the church

**1 Corinthians 10:12 NIV**

**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Lord Jesus,  
We thank You for Your Word, written for our instruction and protection. Guard us from idols...ancient and modern. Teach us to walk in love, holiness, and humility. Strengthen Your church to shine brightly in a dark world. We submit our lives to You alone. In Your precious name “JESUS”, Amen and Amen!

