

Whom Do You Worship – November 8 2020

Introduction — it looked like it had been transplanted from Germany, brick by brick. It was two stories tall, dark brown, with small, square windows. And, in big letters that could be read a half-mile away, was the name— the Brathaus.

I often went there with friends at nine or ten p.m. For a late night sandwich — a bratwurst sandwich, kind of a huge hot dog. Put a lot of mustard on it — ummm, good !! Add a coke — when i dedicated my life to Christ in the fall of 1974, i swore off beer — add a coke, and that would hold me over — ‘til breakfast !!!

Boy, was i surprised one Friday evening to see Dan at the brathaus — one of the guys from my campus fellowship group — i thought he was a sincere, dedicated Christian\— yet there he was, drinking a beer with some “unsaved” friends!! Drinking 2 Beers while I was there!! I was really surprised and disappointed in him— a Christian shouldn’t do that, should he (or her) ??? He might have gotten drunk!!! What kind of a witness for Christ would that have been to his non-Christian friends???

What should dan have done, when some of his non-Christian friends asked him to go to the brathaus for a beer?? Turned them down?? Or gone along, but just have gotten Coca-Cola??? What is more important here?? That’s not as easy a question to answer as you might think— there might be as many answers as there are people here today There are some things in life that we can all agree on as wrong for Christians to do (murder, assault, robbery, rape, incest) — and there are some things that we could agree on are always right for Christians to do. But what about those “gray areas” of life?? And what effect will our actions in those “gray areas” have on the lives of young Christians whom we might influence by our very actions???

The question “what is most important to you?” Is another way of asking “whom (or what) do you worship?”

Those are the very issues that Paul the apostle is dealing with here in chapter 8 of i Corinthians. What was he talking about?? To understand that, let’s look at:

I. Idol worship in Corinth

A. To eat, or not to eat — in the ancient Greek culture,

1. The pagan Gods were “satisfied” and Forgave people their “sins” or infractions against the Gods by animal sacrifice to the Gods. pigs, sheep, birds— any sacrifices.

2. Did you ever wonder what became of these dead animals after the sacrifice??

Well, the religious priests could either eat the meat themselves, or sell the meat to the market, where it would be dressed and sold to the general public.

3. Some Christians looked at where this meat came from— sacrificed to a false God On a pagan altar— and thought that Christians should not eat meat that had been used in that way. (v. 7) it was the same (to them) as “worshiping” the false, pagan God !!!

4. But mature Christians knew better— (v. 4) — that “an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.” Eating the meat sacrificed on pagan altars won’t hurt your relationship with God! Those pagan Gods don’t even exist !! Paul taught that mature Christians need not worry.

B. Yet— do have respect for other believers !!

1. Yet— Paul said— (v. 10) — “if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating ‘in an idol’s temple’, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols??”

2. In other words, “will what you do cause any other Christians to ‘lose their faith’ in Christ???” If the answer to that is yes, then you had better not do whatever “it” is!! Paul said there should be —

C. Concern about causing some believers to fall from faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Eating meat sacrificed to pagan idols may not be a problem today, but this kind of problem— Christians doing certain things that they do not feel are bad or hurtful to their own faith, but that may cause other Christians to stumble — is something for which we all need to “watch out”! For instance—

2. Tom for years had been a very successful dealer at the blackjack table at one of the casinos in Las Vegas. Then he was converted to Christ, and, familiar with the corruption and immorality in the gambling industry, he got out of it. He was attending a Billy Graham crusade “school of evangelism” there in Vegas, when, on the third day, he pulled one of the pastor / professors aside during a break, and said, “during the recreation time yesterday, I came upon two of the couples attending this conference who were sitting at a table, playing cards. So mu of my life has been involved in playing cards as a part of the gambling industry that i couldn’t bring myself to play; i wonder if it’s wise for any serious Christian to play cards.”

3. If what we’re doing causes another Christian to question his or her faith in Christ, or tempt them to sin— then we need to stop it, whatever “it” is— whether it is playing cards, rr drinking a beer or two, or going to the dance hall, or whatever!!!

4. “be careful . . . That the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” (v. 8) you may not see anything wrong for you having a beer, or whatever! But be careful that it does not adversely affect other Christians that might know what you’re doing!

5. We need to think about the Cross & Flame symbol that we use in the United Methodist Church— I have loved the symbol for years, to remind us of the empty cross of Jesus, and the flame of the holy spirit of Pentecost. But — a few months ago, I heard that some Christians, some Methodist Christians, view the cross & flame as too connected to the racist burning of crosses in days past, and rarely, even today.

That leads us to — is there any: “idol worship” — today! ? !

1. Be aware of “new” religions — may “masquerade” as “pseudo-Christian,” but watch out they’re not !!

2. Old paganism — is making a comeback. The “spirit of the earth,” Gaia— is the ancient greek “Goddess of the earth.” She is where we get the phrase about “mother nature.” There is something about “Gaia” in some kids’ shows! Not that you shouldn’t let your kids watch these shows— but be aware of what subtle messages they may give to kids— they need to know that it is just fiction— that God created the Earth, and all life, including us!!

3. Witchcraft — I knew a Roman Catholic priest some years ago who taught a class in the U.T. School of nursing, on “spirituality and the health care professional.” As an adjunct faculty member at u.t., Bernie had to be “neutral” about opinions about different religions— the first amendment of the constitution guarantees that in all government supported schools, of which U.T. is one !! One semester he had a student in his class who was a white witch— a member of Wicca, the white witch association, and she was active in a local coven. Bernie just bit his tongue as she talked! as a course in a state school, they had to be “open” to “all forms of spirituality.”

4. And, of course, there are the “cults” or “alternate religions” that have been around for a while, such as:

5. Jehovah’s Witnesses — who deny the deity of Christ, and used to set dates every few years as to the return of Christ — they stopped doing that, because they kept being wrong !! Still, most of us will not be introduced to these false “idols.” Are there any “false idols” for us to be concerned about???

lii. Non-religious “idols” ?? Things that demand our attention and devotion — things that might compete with our devotion to God.

- A. Politics ?? — who are you for in the next presidential race??
- B. Job ?? — does your job consume most of your time, every day??
- C. What else???? — a sport, or a hobby??

Whatever consumes you, whatever you spend a lot of on— that “thing” is in danger of becoming your “God.”

D. Staying true to Jesus Christ — means putting Jesus Christ first in your life each & every day, probably first thing in the morning.

E. And then— watch how you act, & what you do, & the priorities you set before younger, spiritually less mature Christians. Set a good example ! ! !

Conclusion — it was another Friday evening, and I was walking to the brathaus again, about 9:00 p.m., with a friend, to get a brat and a coke. Tim was my buddy who was with me that night, and, as we talked, he became intensely interested in asking me about my new—found faith in Jesus Christ. I told him— honestly— why i had decided to dedicate my life to Christ, and that i still planned on going to law school. At the brathaus, as we squirted some more mustard on our brats, and i drank my coke and tim drank his beer, he said, “I guess, if i trust Christ as my savior like you did, I’ll need to quit drinking beer!!” I said, “Til, the bible never says ‘never drink any alcohol’ — although it does say that drunkenness is wrong. But the important thing for every person is — will you believe in Jesus Christ, and receive him into your heart? Will you follow him every day?” Tim finished his beer, and said, “pray for me — I think I prefer Jesus over beer!” The ext evening, Tim gave his life to Christ.