

1 Corinthians 10:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

Analysis

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils—Paul draws the stark conclusion: dual participation is impossible. The verb *ou dynasthe* (οὐ δύνασθε, "ye cannot/are not able") indicates not just prohibition but impossibility. This isn't "you shouldn't" but "you cannot"—it's spiritually, logically, and covenantally incoherent to claim fellowship with both Christ and demons.

The cup of the Lord versus **the cup of devils**; **the Lord's table** versus **the table of devils** creates direct antithesis. These are mutually exclusive covenants. Just as a wife cannot be simultaneously faithful to her husband and committing adultery, Christians cannot maintain covenant loyalty to Christ while participating in demon-worship. The parallelism emphasizes totality—not just avoiding the cup or the table, but both.

The word *trapezēs* (τραπέζης, "table") evokes covenant meals that establish binding relationships. Ancient treaties were sealed with shared meals. To eat at someone's table meant entering their protection, loyalty, and fellowship. Christians eat at the Lord's table, establishing covenant bond with Him. To then eat at demons' table commits covenant treason—spiritual adultery that provokes divine jealousy (v. 22).

Historical Context

Ancient Mediterranean culture understood table fellowship as creating binding social and spiritual obligations. To share a meal was to enter mutual commitment. Corinthian Christians who attended temple banquets (for business, social, or family reasons) while also taking communion thought they could compartmentalize these spheres. Paul insists covenant fellowship is indivisible—Christ demands exclusive loyalty, making dual participation impossible without spiritual catastrophe.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What dual allegiances in your life might seem compatible but actually constitute spiritual adultery against Christ?
2. How does the image of Christ's "table" versus demons' "table" clarify the stakes of seemingly minor compromises?
3. In what areas are you tempted to compartmentalize life into "spiritual" and "secular" zones rather than offering Christ comprehensive lordship?

Interlinear Text

οὐ	δύνασθε	ποτήριον	κυρίου	πίνειν	καὶ	ποτήριον
Ye cannot	G1410	the cup	of the Lord	drink	and	the cup
G3756		G4221	G2962	G4095	G2532	G4221
δαιμονίων	οὐ	δύνασθε	τραπέζης	κυρίου	μετέχειν	
of devils	Ye cannot	G1410	of the table	of the Lord	be partakers	
G1140	G3756		G5132	G2962	G3348	
καὶ	τραπέζης	δαιμονίων				
and	of the table	of devils				
G2532	G5132	G1140				

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 6:24 (Parallel theme): No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

1 Kings 18:21 (References Lord): And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Isaiah 65:11 (References Lord): But ye are they that forsake the LORD, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number.

1 Corinthians 10:16 (Parallel theme): The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 8:10 (Parallel theme): For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;