“Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.” (1 Corinthians 10:14)

This imperative is the first verse in a passage of nine verses that speak of idols and idolatry, a subject which seems upon first thought to be completely out of place irrelevant to the church and most assuredly to the Lord’s Supper. And yet, it is given not to a group of unbelievers in some far distant third-world nation but to the church, and as seen in verse 16, within a context that is discussing the Lord’s Supper.

The subject of idols and idolatry is addressed more often to the church of Christ in Corinth than to any other congregation in the New Testament. Twelve times in this first epistle to the Corinthian church Paul speaks of idols and idolatry – more often than in any of the other twenty-two epistles of the New Testament. Obviously there was some problem concerning idols and idolatry within this congregation. And it needed to be addressed within the context of the Lord’s Supper.

The Corinthians’ spiritual forefathers had been idolaters according to verse 7. They had worshipped the golden calf. They had eaten and drunk in worship of that calf. They had risen up to play – no innocent, childish play, but indecent, immoral, irreverent play – in honor of that calf. And these Corinthians to whom Paul writes also had been idolaters prior to their conversion to Christ. Some of them had come to the cross from pagan idolatry. And now there was a need to remind them of the dangers of their associating once again either directly or indirectly with their former religion.

In addressing them Paul calls them “my dearly beloved,” a term of endearment. He wasn’t speaking as some detached, unfeeling judge but as one who had heartfelt concern for their spiritual welfare and development and for their acceptance in Christ. After all it was he who had “won” many of them to Christ. (Acts 18:8) Idolatry was evil and it was one cause for losing one’s salvation in Christ. It was so serious that he commanded them in no uncertain terms to “flee from idolatry!”

We come to the table where, according to 1 Corinthians 11:28, men and women are to examine themselves. So, let’s do that in light of Paul’s admonition. If Old Testament Israel were subject to idolatry, and if New Testament Israel, the church, in her early development were subject to idolatry, could not also the twenty-first century church? One does not have to bow down or offer sacrifices to objects made of rock or stone or clay to be an idolater. One does not have to be scantily clothed ranting and raving around some night fire in some jungle dancing and shouting strange words to some strange god to be an idolater. We can carry Bibles, be seated in fancy church buildings, dressed in our very Sunday-best, behave as proper as expected and be an idolater; for whatever it is or whoever it is that is
more important to us than is Christ is our idol. Whatever or whoever separates us from Christ is our idol. God’s prohibition against idolatry is as old as the Decalogue. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...” (Exodus 20:3 – 5)

Christians are not to worship idols but they are to worship God. One of the most meaningful, significant and important moments of true worship takes place when we come to the table of the Lord. It is here where we examine ourselves in light of His Word. It is here where we remember Him. It is here where we commune – have intimate fellowship – with Him. It is here when and where we remind ourselves that we have been told to “flee from idolatry” in whatever form we may practice it. So let us resolve here and now to “flee from idolatry” and run to Christ for He – not any idol – is our eternal hope.