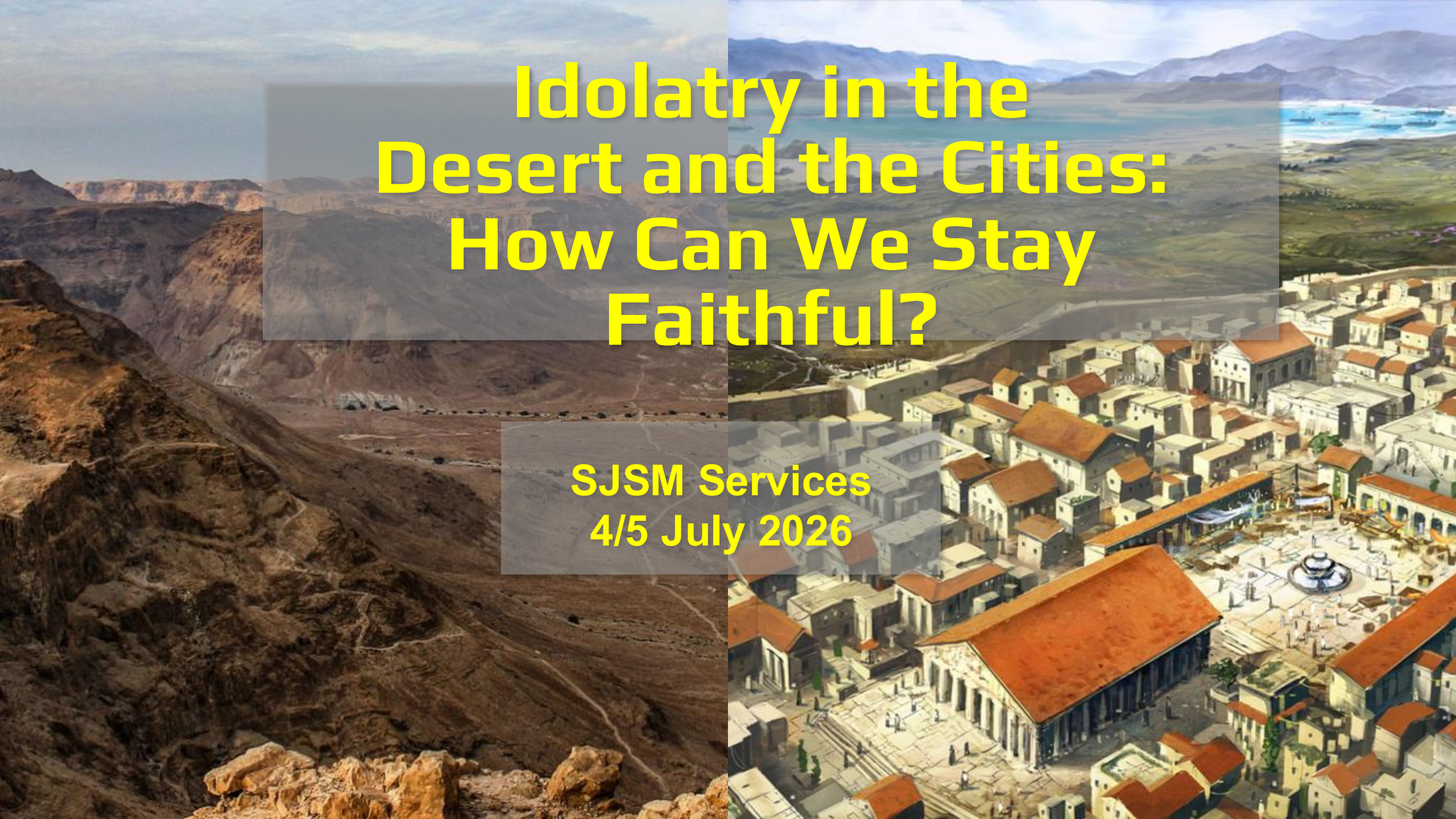




Idolatry in the Desert and the Cities: How Can We Stay Faithful?

SJSM Services
4/5 July 2026

Introduction: A Brief Recap

The Corinthian Church was:

- Fractious
 - Liberal
 - Individualistic
- + Due to many successes
- They thought highly of their own spiritual knowledge
 - Needed some deflating!
- ❖ To do this, Paul recounted Israel's exodus journey to warn about idolatry



5 'All's to no Avail : Don't Respond to Grace with **Complacency**

10 *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were **all** under the cloud, and **all** passed through the sea, ² and **all** were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and **all** ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and **all** drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ **Nevertheless**, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*



5 'All's to no Avail : Don't Respond to Grace with **Complacency**

10 *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were **all under the cloud**, and **all passed through the sea**,² and **all were baptized into Moses** in the cloud and in the sea,³ and **all ate the same spiritual food**,⁴ and **all drank the same spiritual drink**. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.⁵ **Nevertheless**, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

5 'Alls's:

- **Guided by God in a cloud**
- **Crossed the Red Sea on dry ground**
- **Led by the great Moses**
- **Partook spiritual food**
- **Drank spiritual water**

But their behaviour did not please God!

5 'All's to no Avail : Don't Respond to Grace with **Complacency**

- Like Israel, Corinthians saw themselves as special
 - Founded by Paul
 - Equipped by leading teachers
 - Blessed with resources & talents
- + But they should not become complacent because of this!



5 'All's to no Avail :

Don't Respond to Grace with **Complacency**

- Like Israel, Corinthians saw themselves as special
 - Founded by Paul
 - Equipped by leading teachers
 - Blessed with resources & talents
- + But they should not become complacent because of this!
- Jesus also warned against complacency (Luke 13)
 - He advised the crowd to repent, lest the same fate befell them

13 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Luke 13:1-3

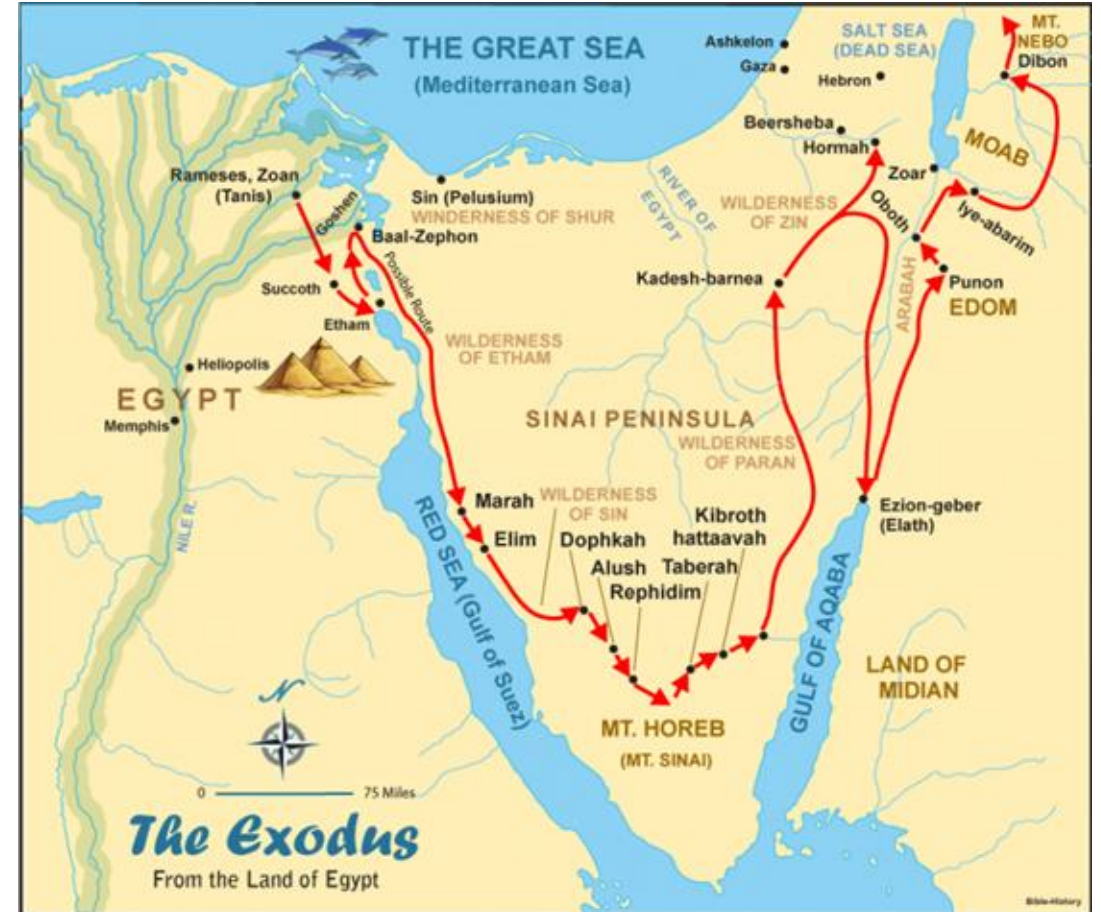
5 'All's to no Avail : Don't Respond to Grace with **Complacency**

- * In SG, we also need to guard against complacency
 - # “Crazy Rich Asians” portrayal of Bible study group
 - The church is not a social club, but an army of disciples
 - ❖ Need for us to respond to God's grace with faithful obedience



4 'Not's to Negate: Avoid **Compromise** because of Our Desires

⁷ Do **not** be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must **not** indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must **not** put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ **nor** grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.



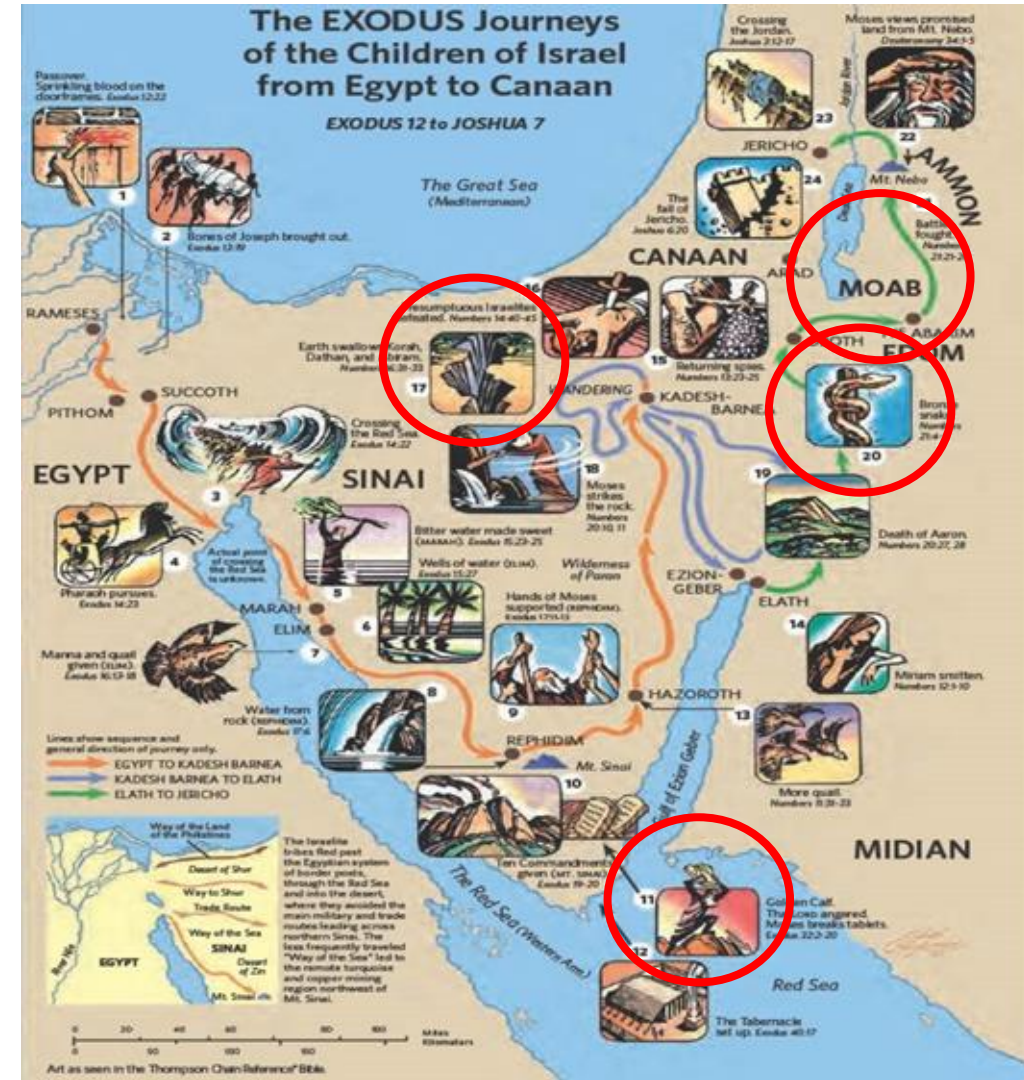
4 'Not's to Negate: Avoid **Compromise** because of Our Desires

Israel's repeated idolatrous behaviour:

- Worship of God as golden calf (Ex 32)
- Spiritual adultery with Baal (Num 25)
- Rebellion against continuing the journey (Num 21)
- Grumbling against God's anointed (Num 16)

* Compromise is not outright rejection of God but having other idols alongside!

- John Calvin: "The heart of man is an idol factory"
- E.g. person, emotion, ego-booster



4 'Not's to Negate: Avoid **Compromise** because of Our Desires

Anna

- Need to avoid any good gift taking the place of the Giver
 - Can fixate so much on our precious gifts that we compromise our faith
- ❖ God is the only One who can truly give us what we really need

“As many have learned and later taught, you don’t realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.”

Tim Keller
Counterfeit Gods

3 'But's to Buttress: Imbibe the Right **Culture** from Society

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

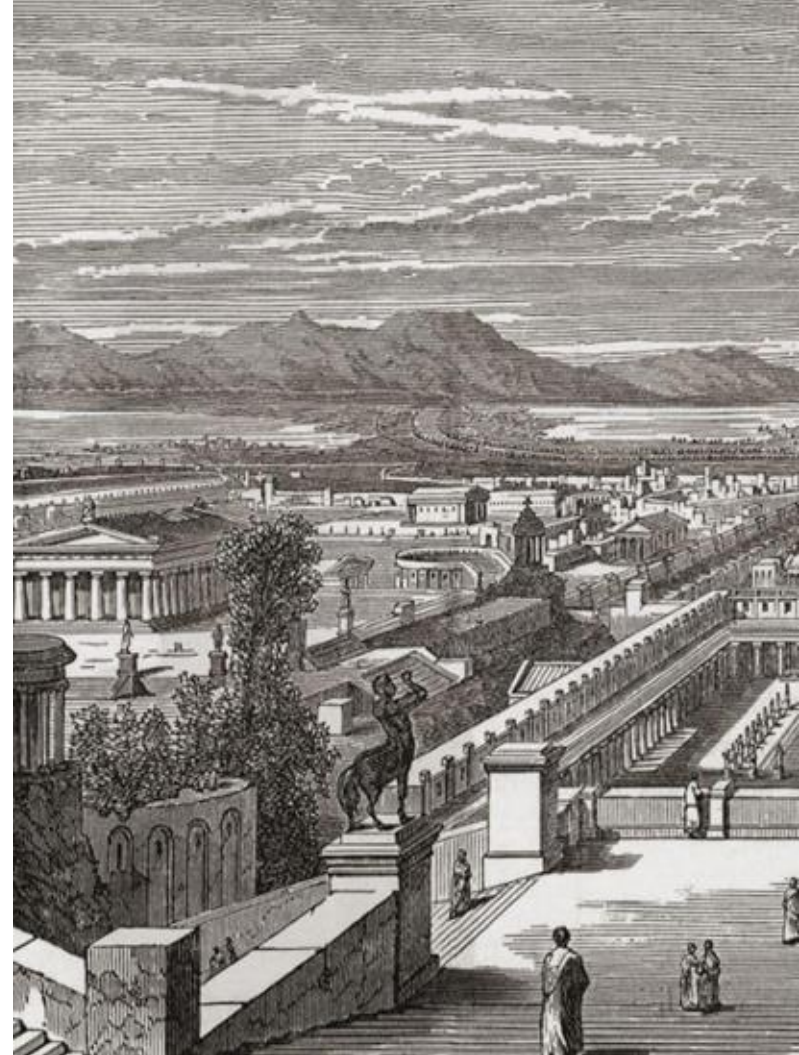
²³ "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour.

3 'But's to Buttress: Imbibe the Right **Culture** from Society

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

V11 => Lesson of Israel is also for the Corinthians and others

- Corinthians Christians had rejected physical external idols of their city
- But still harboured hidden idols from the patterns of life in their culture



3 'But's to Buttress: Imbibe the Right **Culture** from Society

¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

²³ "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour.

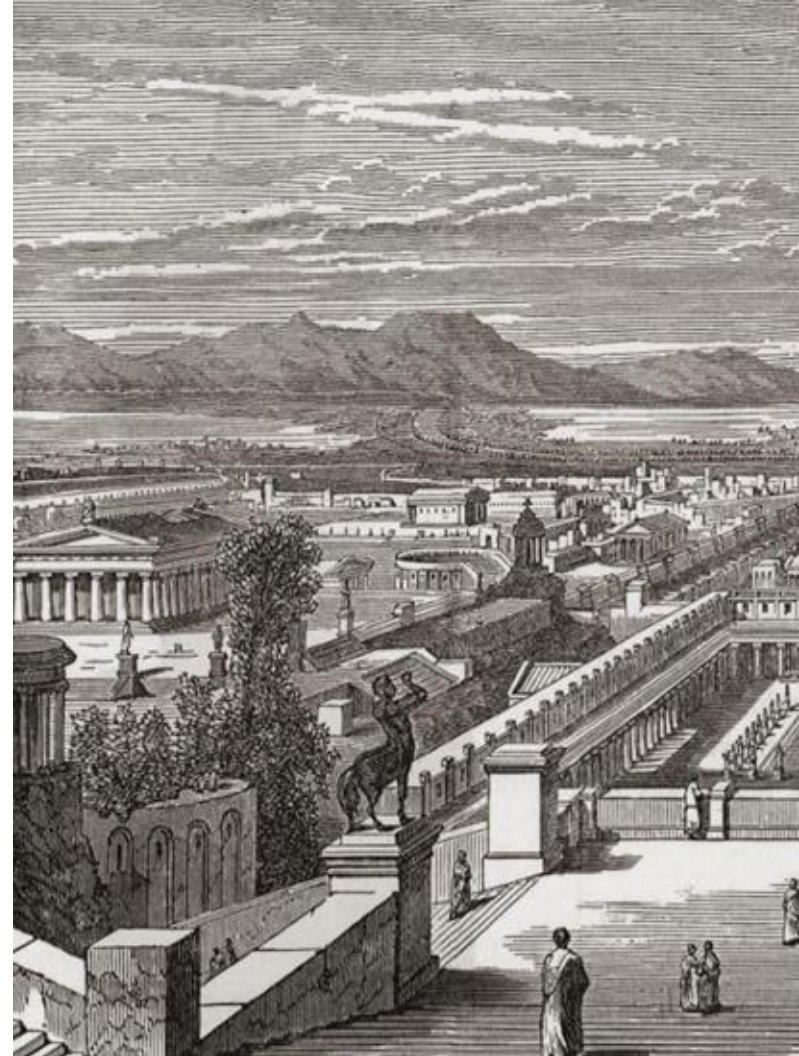
The foremost Corinthian Idols:

1. **Self sufficiency & pride**

- V12 => Need to remain humble

2. **Libertarianism**

- V23 => Features their favourite slogan "All things are lawful" & adds rebuttals
- Together, 3 'but's: Practice of love > freedom



Conclusion: How Do We Stay Faithful?

Paul's message also for us:
What are the hidden idols in
SG?

1. **Pride**

- Do we criticise without seeking to understand?

2. **Achievement**

- Does success elate us & failure devastate us?



Conclusion: How Do We Stay Faithful?

Paul's message also for us:
What are the hidden idols in SG?

1. **Pride**

- Do we criticise without understanding?

2. **Achievement**

- Does success elate us & failure devastate us?

3. **Greed**

- Are we comparing with the wrong people?

“Why can't anyone in the grip of greed see it? The counterfeit god of money uses powerful sociological and psychological dynamics. ... Once you are able to afford to live in a particular neighbourhood, ... you will find yourself surrounded by ... people who have more money than you. You don't compare yourself to the rest of the world, you compare yourself to those in your bracket.”

Tim Keller
Counterfeit Gods

Conclusion: How Do We Stay Faithful?

Paul's message also for us:
What are the hidden idols in
SG?

1. **Pride**

- Do we criticise without understanding?

2. **Achievement**

- Does success elate us & failure devastate us?

3. **Greed**

- Are we comparing with the wrong people?

❖ We need to truly worship God as
the greatest & most important
thing in our lives!



The End