

Chapter 10

Live for the Glory of God

Introduction

The Corinthians were misusing their new-found freedom in Christ, too. They had a problem with overconfidence, arrogance, and pride. It led to dividing into competing groups, to exceed what was written in Scripture, to tolerate immorality, and to take believers to court. Unfortunately, there is a vivid example of this they are confronted with. Israel was reckless and unrestrained after her physical and spiritual freedom from bondage of Egypt. As a result, God disciplined them, by cutting short the lives of most of Israelites. They were disqualified for service for God, in spite of their advantages.

Be Careful with Your Spiritual Privilege (10:1-13)

Don't Think that Spiritual Privilege Insulates from God's Discipline

Verse 1—Paul wanted to make a case to warn the Corinthians of the possibility of being disqualified before God due to sin and then have to be disciplined. *For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren.*

- He began the argument by illustrating advantages the nation of Israel had from God when they were leaving Egyptian bondage.
- This was true for *all* (repeated five times) of the people.
- **(1)** They enjoyed **supernatural guidance**, *that our fathers were all under the cloud*. During the Exodus when the cloud moved they moved.
 - God's presence in the cloud provided security for all the people.
 - This cloud was the pillar of smoke that preceded Israel, to guide her in her travels.
 - It was a unique blessing that other nations never had.
 - This was true from the very beginning.
- **(2)** They experienced **miraculous deliverance**. *All passed through the sea*.
 - The Israelites had been boxed in and, from their perspective, death was certain.
 - God made a way for them to escape Egypt with their lives, families, and possessions.
 - Israel passed through the Red Sea, but the Egyptians drowned in the same sea.
 - God divided the sea for Israel but drowned the Egyptians by closing the divided sea.
 - This was an act of the omnipotent power of God.

Verse 2—**(3)** They were associated with **spiritual leadership** *all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea*.

- The word “baptized” metaphorically signifies “identification.”
- By their obedience to Moses' commands, and belief in what God was doing, they became identified with the leadership of Moses, united as the people of God under Moses, God's spokesman.
- Moses was called by the Lord to lead Israel. By following his leadership through the Red Sea, they were separating from Egypt and uniting under Moses.
- They were compelled to follow Moses who was following God.

Verse 3—**(4)** They were sustained by **divine nourishment** *all ate the same spiritual food*.

- The food was spiritual in the sense that bread and drink was not provided by natural means, but supernatural.
- God provided physical food through spiritual means and did so every day for forty years.
- They ate supernatural food and received supernatural sustenance.

Verse 4—(5) They were supplied with **spiritual refreshment**. *All drank the same spiritual drink.*

- The Israelites were *drinking from a spiritual rock* (πέτρα bedrock, rocky ground) *which followed them* or accompanied them on their journey.
- They drank from the rock at the beginning (Exodus 17:1-7) and at the end of it (Numbers 20:2-13), namely, throughout their wilderness experience.
- The Rock which gave water spoke of Christ *and the rock was Christ* who, as the pre-incarnate Christ, actually followed them, sustaining and meeting their needs in the wilderness, day after day.
- The access to divine provision was always there for the Israelites.

Verse 5—In a strong contrast, *nevertheless*, this proximity to God and His obvious favor did not automatically produce success for Israel. *With most of them God was not well-pleased.*

- In spite of their advantages the Israelites had received, all but two were disciplined, disqualified, and died in desert, *for they were laid low* (κατεστρώθησαν to be made prostrate) *in the wilderness*, spread over like corpses literally strewn all over the desert.
- They were a forty-year heartache to God.
- Spiritual privilege is no guarantee against spiritual failure.

Application

God is watching and aware of the quality of our walk with Him. He will never be our debtor. The danger is that we can drift or coast spiritually, in spite of all the privileges we have in Christ and life.

The Outcome of Abusing One's Spiritual Privilege Is Judgment

Here is how the majority of Israelites displeased God, lost their privileges, and were judged by God.

Verse 6—The experiences of the Israelites provided a lesson. *Now these things happened as examples* (τύποι an image formed by a blow or impression) *for us.*

- God intended what happened to Israel to be a type of how God disciplines His people today.
- Paralleling the **five privileges** Israel were given by God were **five failures** the Israelites experienced in the desert that we, too, must avoid.
- **(1)** *that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.* The idea seems to be keeping your desire intensely fixed on something with connotations of lusting.
 - In the Israelites' case, that craving was for *evil things* and that included longing to return to Egypt, idolatry, and immorality.
 - They craved or lusted for pleasures of Egypt while going in the opposite direction.

Verse 7—(2) *Do not be idolaters, as some of them were.*

- Like the Israelites, the Corinthians were fraternizing with pagan practices in the pagan temples, thinking they could take part in idolatry without inviting discipline from God.
- Hardly out of Egypt, the Israelites had made a golden calf and paid for it with their lives (Exodus 32).
- God calls idolatry *a great sin* (Exodus 32:21).
- *As it is written* indicates that Scripture stands as written for all time.
- The quote *the people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play* (Exodus 32:6) revealed that the Israelites were possibly engaged in sexual immorality and merry-making in feasts to fake foreign gods.

Verse 8—(3) *Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did.*

- While pursuing women of a foreign land, the Israelites had also assumed the worship of these foreign women's gods *and twenty-three thousand fell in one day* because of the idols and the sexual immorality (Numbers 25).
- A man named Zimri brazenly *brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting* (verse 6) to defy the judgment of God.
- With equal resolve, but for the judgment of God, *Phinehas...the priest, saw it, [and] he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through* (verse 8) to take a stand for the judgment of God.
- Because of this, God stopped the plague. But 24,000 had already died.
- This is referenced in Deuteronomy 4:3-4; Psalm 106:26-29; Hosea 9:10; and 1 Corinthians 10:8, where 23,000 probably does not include those who died of the wounds over the following days leaving a total dead of 24,000. Both numbers are approximate numbers.

Verse 9—(4) *Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did.*

- The Israelites tested God in the wilderness.
- Some presumed to question God's plan and purpose on the way to Canaan—as that very plan was unfolding. They were not satisfied with it and wanted a different plan and so *were destroyed by the serpents* (Numbers 21).
- Then the people said, *we have sinned*, and they asked Moses to *intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents*.
- Instead of removing the serpents, God told Moses to make a golden serpent *that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live*.
- Interestingly, God did not *remove the serpents* as he did not remove the curse of Genesis 3 or the curse of Noah's flood, or the curse that scattered Israel.
- Repentance did not erase the curse, but God did supply salvation in the midst of it. The golden serpent is a type of Christ *as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life* (John 3:14-15).

Verse 10—(5) *Nor grumble* (γογγύζετε to murmur or complain), *as some of them did* rebelling against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron.

- On at least ten occasions between Exodus and Numbers, Moses recorded the Israelites grumbling and complaining *and were destroyed by the destroyer*.
- God executed His wrath by using an angel, possibly similar to the angel who executed the firstborn of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:23).
- The emphasis switches from the examples that disqualified the Israelites which brought God's judgment upon them, to the lessons the Corinthians themselves must learn from the Israelite examples.

Verse 11—Learn from bad examples—don't repeat them.

- *Now these things happened to them as an example* to remind the Corinthians, and us, not to overlook the lessons of history as we live in our own time.
- Additionally, *they were written for our instruction* (νουθεσίαν exhortation or warning) to persuade us now in our own day to change our behavior in light of the judgment it warns us about *upon whom the ends of the ages have come*.
- Though we are living in a different age, we, too, can fail through disobedience, pride, and sin to disqualify ourselves.
- These are examples for every generation of believers.

Verse 12—Don't allow your freedom in Christ make you overconfident about how useful you are to God.

- *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*
- By going to the feasts in Corinth, some Corinthian Christians, who saw themselves as mature, might yield to temptations in the temple.
- When we feel most secure in ourselves—when we think our spiritual life is strongest—we should be most on guard.
- One's Christian freedom can extend into sinful expression, if not careful.

Verse 13—Spiritual failure is not inevitable.

- *No temptation (πειρασμός testing or trying) has overtaken you but such as is common to man.*
- God tests.
- Satan tempts.
- God never tempts anyone. *Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone* (James 1:13).
- The word for *temptation* is also the word for *test*.
- Paul is saying we are not *tested beyond what we are able*.
- The testing the Corinthians experienced were not unique.
- *God is faithful* shows that all testings are under God's purview.
- God guards us against any trial we could not handle, *who will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able*.
- *But* in strong contrast, instead of becoming a victim of testing, *God with the testing will provide the way of escape also*. The use of the definite article *the* with both *temptation* and *way of escape* points to a particular way of escape that is available in each temptation.

That way of escape *so that you will be able to endure it* (ὁπνευγκεῖν to bear up or patiently) shows it is not removal from temptation that is the solution, but the ability to bear up under it or the capacity to manage it without sinning.

- God is committed to our endurance, growth, and maturity.
- The way out is the ability one has to handle the testing. It seems that the idea is not that there is a way to escape sin, but that there is a way to endure the trials that life brings our way.
- In the context of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is saying our life-tests do not have to lead to sin and rebellion, as they did with the Israelites in the wilderness, because God *will provide the way* to endure those trials.
- In the notes of his Study Bible, Ryrie says, "*the way of escape*" (Lit., the way out) is not necessarily relief but power to be able to bear the testing." David K. Lowery in the "Bible knowledge Commentary" says, "The temptations that seized the Corinthians were like those people had always faced. They could be met...looking for **a way out** by endurance."

Application

We have many bad examples of unfaithful believers and those should motivate us to strengthen our own walk. We can never conclude that it is just impossible to be faithful because life is hard. Those are moments of testing to establish our faith, and strengthen our commitment to walk worthy.

Honor God with Your Christian Freedom (10:14-33)

Idolatry was a special category of sin for the Old Testament people of God. Israel had been special recipients of the revelation of God. But when they could not persuade God to do what they wanted they forsook God to do what they wanted—they abandoned God for pagan gods. Behind idolatry is not only the desperate attempt to establish our autonomy, but also a spiritual force that encourages that autonomy.

Christianity Is Incompatible with Idolatry

Verse 14—Here we return to the conclusion of the argument about eating meat offered to idols.

- *Therefore*, indicates that, in light of warning about being disqualified from service, here is something further for the Corinthians to consider.
- What is that? *My beloved, flee* (φεύγετε to seek safety by flight) *from idolatry*.
- Previously, he exhorted the Corinthians to flee sexual immorality (6:18).
- In both testaments, the worst sin was idolatry. The Bible has constant, consistent, repeated, warnings about idolatry, calling it not just a sin but a **great sin** (2 Kings 17:21).

Verse 15—Paul believed the Corinthians could make correct judgments about what they should do.

- *I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say*.
- He expected that the rhetorical questions which followed would lead sensible people to agree.
- The reason for this statement is because he is preparing them to accept some premises they cannot deny.
- They should be able to make their own decision based on their own conscience as result.

Verse 16—First, *is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?* Yes, as believers we give thanks to God for the cup, because of what it symbolizes about the blood of Christ.

- Second, *is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?* Yes, as believers we share in the symbol of breaking bread which represents the slain body of Christ for our sins.
- However, the reality must precede the symbol for it all to work.

Verse 17—It seems believers ate from one loaf at the communal meal, *since there is one bread*, symbolic of the physical body of Christ.

- This one loaf eaten by the many symbolized their solidarity *we who are many are one body* as we all share a common salvation.
- This is the point of eating the one loaf *for we all partake of the one bread*.
- Believers are united in solidarity that forbids any other unions.

Verse 18—Even in the worship of Israel, each participant identified with what was sacrificed in the altar in Jerusalem in solidarity with one another.

- *Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar*. The Israelites were united in solidarity through the sacred rituals at the altar as they identified with those sacrifices.

Verse 19—Now Paul proceeded to clarify the point of his argument.

- *What do I mean then?*
- He was not saying *that a thing sacrificed to idols is anything*. That is, sacrifices to idols were not in themselves sinful.
- He was also not saying *that an idol is anything*. That is, idols were not genuine entities. Idols were only pieces of wood or stone, and represented figments of people's imaginations.

Verse 20—However, the actual reality *behind the things which the Gentiles sacrifice* was demonic. *They sacrifice to demons and not to God*.

- Consequently, people who sacrificed to idols expressed solidarity with those demonic powers.
- This was incompatible with the Christian faith, *and I do not want you to become sharers* (κοινωνοὺς a companion or comrade) *in demons*, since believers are already in solidarity with Christ and one another.

- It's unthinkable that a believer would partner with demons in fellowship with them. That is an alliance between the pagan worship and the activity of demons.

Verse 21—Since pagan sacrifices are offered to demons, the Corinthians *cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons*.

- It is inconsistent for a believer to participate in both rituals.
- What the Lord promotes and what the demons promote are opposites so that *you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons*.
- It is both incompatible and inconsistent to assume union with Christ and union with demons.
- The acronym COEXIST sanctions idolatry and the worship of false gods. A believer should not promote or be sympathetic to such an idea.

Verse 22—This kind of behavior displeased the Lord *or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy* just as the Israelites had done by dividing their loyalty between God and the fake gods of their neighbors.

- It's foolish to provoke God if *we are not stronger than He* is, since God will not put up with rivals to His glory.
- You can count on God's judgment for sure. That is not something one is going to get away with.

Eating Sacrificed Meat Is Acceptable Unless the Issue of Idol Relationship Is Raised

Verse 23—Anything that the Scripture does not explicitly state as sinful is *lawful*.

- However, *not all things are profitable* (συμφέρει to bring together).
- The use of our freedom has to be, in its outcome, profitable.
- Again, Paul states *all things are lawful* if God has not restricted it, *but not all things edify* (οικοδομῆ build up or establish).
- The use of our Christian freedom must be regulated by what is profitable and edifying for other believers.

Verse 24—It's the well-being of another that regulates our freedom.

- *Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor* is most likely fellow believers.
- The Corinthians viewed their freedom as an opportunity to pursue their own interests.
- Paul viewed it as an opportunity to benefit and build up another person.

Here are three rules of behavior when exercising your freedom to eat meat offered to idols:

Verse 25—(1) *Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience's sake*.

- For a believer who bought meat at a market with the intent of eating it at home, he could do so without reservation. The sacrifices lost their religious character when sold in the meat market, so it was permitted to eat meat that may have been sacrificed to an idol at a private table.

Verse 26—*For the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains* is a quote from Psalm 24:1 and highlights that all things are the Lord's and do not belong to demons or the idols of man's creation. So there is no inherent ownership that might regulate what food is acceptable to God or not.

Verse 27: (2) *If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience's sake*.

- We can socialize with unbelievers, that is, eat meat with them, without asking if the meat has been sacrificed to idols.

- Those who were knowledgeable and mature could freely eat from all of the fare available to enjoy.

Verse 28—(3) *But if anyone says to you, “this is meat sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience's sake.*

- If a pagan or an immature weaker believer made an issue out of eating meat offered to idols, a knowledgeable mature believer should not eat the meat so as not to give an offense *for the sake of the one who informed you.*
- The reason was either not violating the pagan’s understanding of what Christians should or should not do or not violating a weaker brother’s conscience, causing him to sin by participating in something he believed to be wrong.

Verse 29—Paul clarified that it was not the conscience of the knowledgeable believer that was his concern.

- *I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's,* that is, the one who brought the meat offered to idols to his attention.
- It is not that the mature believer must alter his convictions to match that of the pagan or weaker brother, but that he needed to alter his behavior in their presence, *for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?*
- The mature believer is free to eat, but the conscience of the weaker is more important to consider than the knowledgeable believer’s liberty.

So what can we do with this meat?

Verse 30—(1) **The Christian can give thanks to God for whatever he or she eats.** However, we must limit our own liberty out of consideration for what other people think is proper *if I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?*

Verse 31—(2) **The Christian must do all to the glory of God.** This should be done *whether... you eat or drink, or whatever you do.*

- God provides a check on our sanctification freedom by obligating us to consider the path we choose, based upon an understanding of the glory of God applied to that situation. “What glorifies God?”
- Consideration for the consciences of other people and promotion of their wellbeing does. This contrasts with the observance of distinctions between foods, the satisfaction of one’s personal preferences, and insistence on one’s own rights.
- What glorifies God is what puts **His preferences, plans, and program first.**

Verse 32—(3) **Don’t do anything that will cause anyone to stumble give no offense (ἀπόσκοποι not causing to stumble) either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.**

- There are three groups of people we are not to offend: Jews, Gentiles, and Church of God.
- We have a responsibility to those outside of and inside of the church.
- Each group may require custom-designed treatment.
- That responsibility includes putting no obstacle in the path that might hinder spiritual growth and maturity.

Verse 33—(4) **Do what you can to benefit others spiritually.** Paul did not allow any of his own attitudes or activities in amoral areas to create barriers between himself and those he sought to help spiritually, *just as I also please all men in all things.*

- He put the welfare of others *first, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many* which should always be our approach to ministry.

- The reason for this is *so that they may be saved* in the sense of delivered from anything that keeps someone from advancing spiritually.

Application

Believers must make God's glory of paramount importance in their sanctification. While awaiting the ultimate display of God's glory in His plan for the ages, believers should determine to apply the intrinsic value of God within their daily-life situations. One day, all of creation will acknowledge the supremacy of Jesus Christ, *to the glory of God the Father*. Believers can do this now, as they faithfully glorify God in all that they do, everywhere they do it, and with whomever it is done, *for you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body*.