

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 – “Lessons Learned”

Once again, we’re following along with this thought that Paul had begun back in Chapter 8 – eating meat sacrificed to idols (was it good or bad?). He built on this in Chapter 9 when he addressed laying down your rights for the sake of others. And at the end of Chapter 9 Paul concluded by saying he does not want to be over confident in these things but desired to discipline himself so that he might not be disqualified in his ministry.

So, this is where Chapter 10 plays in. It would seem that some of the Corinthians might have begun to feel pretty overconfident in their spirituality. They could look at their exercise of the gifts, the fact they were baptized and regularly partook in the Lord’s Supper. But Paul’s point in this chapter is that experience does not always equate to effectiveness. So, he looks to Israel as case and point to show the many blessings they’ve been able to enjoy. They saw miracle after miracle, they experienced the direct intervention of God many times, yet it didn’t make them more Godly.

So, Paul takes us down memory lane to reveal lessons learned through Israel. These are examples meant to help the church (and us) to be disciplined so that we may not become disqualified.

It’s been said that those who don’t study history are doomed to repeat it’s errors. It’s also been said those who do study history find other ways to err. Let’s be sure this word will bring much help in bringing us to a place where we won’t walk in error and thus be potentially disqualified.

1. The Advantages Enjoyed by Israel – 10:1-4

10:1-2 - *Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,*

Paul doesn’t want these Corinthian believers being ignorant of what has taken place before them. Others have run this race and been tripped up before.

- It’s like every new generation that comes along will think they have a better way of doing things. Yet they fail to see it’s often been tried and tested before. Paul says ***I do not want you to be unaware*** (ignorant) of the things that have been put to the test before us.

We're going to embark on an Israel tour in this passage – the first Israel tour that took place as the children of Israel were being led out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

First of all, they were all **under the cloud**. Sounds like a day in Vancouver. But this was no ordinary cloud. This was the very presence of God that was guiding the Israelites in their journey out of Egypt and to the Promised Land.

- **Exodus 13:21–22**, *"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. ²² He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people."*
- Why a cloud? Sounds so boring. But remember, they're out in the heat of the desert. When you're out in the brutal, blazing heat of the sun, what do you look for? Shade! God provided for Israel just what they needed, and He guided them along by this visible presence of God. Amazing!

all passed through the sea... Now what was interesting was that God, through the cloud, directed them right to the banks of the Red Sea. The Israelites had the Sea (and it was a sea, not a marsh or pond) in front of them, they had mountains on either side of them and Pharaoh's army approaching behind them. It seemed as though they were boxed in. But God had a great plan in this:

- **Exodus 14:17–18**, *"And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸ Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."*
- There's an important lesson for us in this: there are times God might lead you to a place of uncertainty or uncomfortableness, where you won't know what to do. But it's where God can work to show Himself strong and bring honor to Him. **Exodus 14:13a**, *"And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today.'"*

all were baptized into Moses... All the people passed through the sea and in so doing were giving a picture of baptism. Paul even says they were baptized into Moses; they were linked to their leader Moses. Just as when we go through the waters of baptism we are being linked to our Lord Jesus Christ. We're aligning

ourselves under His rule, just as the people of Israel were placing themselves under the leadership of Moses.

in the cloud and in the sea. All the people followed the cloud and enjoyed its shade. They were placing themselves in God. And to pass through the sea meant they were separating themselves from that which was behind them – Egypt!

- It's the same in our baptism, as we declare that we're linked to Jesus and we've left the former things behind us for new life in Him.

10:3-4 - *all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*

All of Israel enjoyed the same spiritual food and drink. This was literal food and drink, but it was spiritual because it was sent from God supernaturally, and these held wonderful spiritual significance for us.

While traveling through the wilderness God was faithful to miraculously rain down manna each day to feed them (**Exodus 16**). Six days of the week they would have fresh manna. But on the seventh day there would be none. They were to pick double on the sixth day and it would miraculously last for the seventh day. If they picked more than they needed it would go bad. If they tried to preserve some of it, it would go bad. It needed to be eaten that day.

- In the same way, we need to have fresh devotion, fresh times in God's Word. Don't try to sustain yourself off of last week's study, or yesterday's devotion. Receive a fresh portion each day. We don't live off bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- Jesus would also link Himself to this manna (**John 6:30-35**). He is the bread of life!

God also provided water from the rock for them (**Exodus 17**). Moses was told to strike the rock and water would come forth. When the Israelites complained again down the road of thirst, God told Moses to speak to the rock (**Numbers 20:8**). But he yelled at the people saying, '*Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?*' (**Numbers 20:10**). And then he struck the rock twice. And in so doing he ruined a wonderful type foreshadowing the work of the Lord (which is why Paul said, ***that Rock was Christ***). Moses paid a hefty price for that blunder – not being allowed entrance to the Promised Land. A high cost for not representing the Lord properly.

- Rabbinical tradition says that this rock actually followed them through the wilderness. This is not what Paul was referencing. Rather the provisions and care of God was with them wherever they went. Just as Christ continues to pour into us and sustain us with all we need.

We've seen Paul repeat a certain reference in these opening verses – **all**. His point is that all of Israel experienced these blessings and privileges from God. Yet...

2. The Apostasy Committed by Israel – 10:5-10

10:5 - *But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*

With *most of them* is maybe the understatement of the Bible. It's believed about 3 million Israelites came out of Egypt, and out of those 20 years and older, only 2 of them entered into the Promised Land – Joshua and Caleb.

And this journey from Egypt to Canaan should only have taken a month. But it took them 40 years! Why? Because of their unbelief! They didn't trust God but rather complained constantly. And this complaining led to correction.

The majority of them missed out on the greater blessing God had for them because they didn't trust God. How tragic.

This is why they spent 40 years wandering around in the wilderness. God waited until that generation of unbelief died out.

- And here's the thing that Paul is building on: these Israelites had glorious experiences, special privileges, yet it didn't keep them from becoming disqualified. They were not safe from temptation.
- If it could happen to them, could it not happen with the Corinthians? Is it not something for you and me to be on guard from?

10:6 - *Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.*

So Paul is using these things as examples to the Corinthian church (and it certainly applies to us). The word **examples** is *typos*. These are pictures, illustrations for us to learn from. The Old Testament is rich with examples and lessons for our lives today. Those that say the O.T. is inapplicable and irrelevant for us are missing out on some wonderful spiritual treasures.

Now here's what got the Israelites into trouble: they began to lust. They were traveling through the wilderness and they began to have an unhealthy desire for things. God was feeding them and sustaining them, but their lustful appetite began to get the better of them. **Numbers 11** tells us how they began to long for the 'good old days' back in Egypt when they enjoyed such wonderful food. Gimme a break! They were in bondage in Egypt, they hated being slaves.

- This is exactly what our enemy loves to do. He desires to get you to think more fondly of things that are to your detriment. He will distort the past, and deceive you of present consequences. His goal is to entice you with a lustful appetite that will drag you into sin.

Now here's the thing, we will all most likely struggle with lust. Lust is that desire for things that are apart from God's will. Desire is a natural human emotion, but desire for the wrong things is what brings danger. Listen to what James writes: **James 1:14-15**, *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

- Again, this is all written for our examples. Look at where this lusting got the Israelites. Understand that lust is that which pulls us away from God. It takes us down a path that ends in death. Don't entertain lust. It's what Satan uses to engage us in sin, which brings separation from God, and if unrepented of, will bring death.

10:7 - *And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."*

The Israelites were miraculously brought out of Egypt; they saw the wonders of God, yet it didn't take them long before they created a new god for themselves. This is referencing the golden calf debacle. They even had the audacity to say, *"this is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt"* (**Exodus 32:4**).

- Now we may not start having a big party and dance around a gold calf claiming it to be god, but are there areas of idolatry in your life? Idolatry is simply that thing that takes the place of God in your life. God is to be your top passion and priority, and if something becomes more dominant than Him, then you have an idol. It could be sports, a car, your job, a boyfriend/girlfriend. But if it becomes more of a priority than your walk with God and your relationship with Him – you have an idol.

- Now some of these Corinthians may have thought, *we're safe, we're not going to follow after other things in place of God*. Maybe you feel that way too. But if Israel fell into this, then you better be careful too.

10:8 - *Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;*

This is in reference to when the sons of Israel took wives from the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25). This of course was Balaam's instruction to Balak of how to bring Israel down. Because of Israel's immorality, a plague was sent and 23,000 died in that day.

- Now many critics of the Bible love to see that Numbers 25:9 says that 24,000 died in the plague. And there really isn't a contradiction here as much as there's a different timing of the count. The 23,000 is counting the one day, whereas the Numbers account is a total number dead after the whole incident was done.

This area of sexual immorality was a real problem to some in the Corinthian church. We already saw it in Chapter 5 and 6. It was all around the city. It's an area that Satan knows can bring a great downfall. It's sadly such a prevalent sin not only in the culture today but right in the church as well. Don't let the enemy entice and lure you into this temptation. It may feel normalized, but it's wrong in God's eyes.

10:9-10 - *nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰ nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*

How did they tempt Christ? They complained against the Lord when they got tired of the manna and not having enough food and water (Numbers 21:5). Now again, God has been so good and faithful to Israel. But they wanted things done on their terms. They tested the Lord and so God sent serpents, and many died. Israel should be realizing by now that their role is not to complain, but to praise. Again, there might be times we don't feel like praising Him, you may be going through some hard times, but by faith, begin to look to Him with praise simply for Who He is and all He's done.

Interestingly in this account, the remedy for those who were bitten, was to look at a snake that Moses was instructed to place on a pole.

Why a serpent, the very thing that got them into this mess to begin with?

- The serpent was a symbol of sin or evil in the Bible. And the people needed to look at and realize what was causing their pain and suffering. The Israelites may have thought, *“I don’t want to look at that, it freaks me out, I’m scared of that. I’ll be okay, I’ll get over this.”* But they needed to deal with the problem and not try to cover it up.
- Similarly, we need to confront the issue of sin in our lives. Sin brings death (Romans 6:23). We tend to try and hide sin, and pretend we’re all good. But people are only going to be saved when they take a real look at sin and understand they are sinners and it is sin which has brought this poison leading to death in our lives.
- But the wonderful thing is that sin has been judged. Why was it to be a bronze serpent? Because bronze represents judgment in the Bible. In other words, this poisonous serpent was judged. It no longer had an effect on you if you just looked toward it in faith. That’s it! You didn’t need to touch it, put it around your neck, or get on the pole with it. You just needed to look to it and believe it would save you.

Jesus used this account to drive home an important parallel with Nicodemus. *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:14-15).* A man can only be saved by looking unto Jesus. Because it was there on the cross that Jesus took our sins, and it was there on the cross that our sin (past, present and future) was judged. He took God’s wrath and judgment for sin so that we would not have to. And now when we look to Jesus in faith, believing that we are saved through Him - our sin is dealt with, taken care of, it’s judged.

Verse 10 most likely refers to when Korah (and Dathan and Abiram) rebelled against God’s appointed leaders (Numbers 16). Again, complaining simply reveals your lack of trust in the Lord. Complaining doesn’t add anything to you or others. In fact, it’s only going to rob you of God’s best.

3. The Appeal Made for Us – 10:11-13

10:11 - *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*

All these things that we’ve been looking at have been written to be an example to us. They are **written for our admonition** (instruction). We are to learn from these things.

What are we to learn? One thing, as Paul will address in the next verse, is not to be overconfident that we're immune from sin.

Upon whom the ends of the ages have come. We're living in a time where time is short. We're the people (N.T. saints) that have seen the coming of the Promised One – Jesus, and we're awaiting His return. We're living at this end of age time. No sense wasting it on stuff that is only going to destroy us. No sense wasting it on complaining or idolatry or immorality. Jesus is coming soon! Stop living for self and start living for Him! That's the blessed life!

10:12 - *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

I'm sure the Israelites may have thought, *we're the apple of God's eye, we're His chosen people, nothing bad can happen to us!* Yet, if the Israelites were capable of falling, how much more did the Corinthians (and us) need to take heed and see how vulnerable they were?

- Every person has the propensity to sin, which is why we must stay in close proximity to Jesus. The moment you think you can move away from His ways and indulge your own desires is the moment you open yourself to a great fall. Just ask Israel.
- Interestingly, the place you often feel most strong, is often the very point by which you succumb to sin. Our reliance can never be in our strength, but solely in the Lord.
- **Proverbs 7:24–27**, *"Now therefore, listen to me, my children; Pay attention to the words of my mouth: ²⁵ Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths; ²⁶ For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men. ²⁷ Her house is the way to hell, Descending to the chambers of death."*

So having the right perspective of our nature and need for the Lord's strength is key. But having the right perspective of temptation is also key.

10:13 - *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

It's easy to think that the temptation we face is unusual or unique; that nobody else has ever had to face the kind of struggles we do. But notice this, nothing has

hit you **except such as is common to man**. Others have had to fight through the same things you've had to fight through.

There's really no excuse for giving in. We try to excuse it and think it was too great for us to resist. But the Word says **God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**... And it says **God is faithful**. He's not going to abandon you or allow you to be hurt. Lean on Him in times of temptation, He's got you!

Lastly, we see that we have opportunity to flee: **will also make the way of escape**... We don't need to stick around and see how this temptation is going to play out. We need to make every effort to get away from the temptation.

- "Part of the Corinthian problem, of course, was that some in the face of temptation were not looking for **a way out** by endurance, but a way in for indulgence." ¹
- "One of the reasons we yield to temptation is that we are like the little boy in the pantry. His mother heard a noise because he had taken down the cookie jar. She said, "Willie, where are you?" He answered that he was in the pantry. "What are you doing there?" He said, "I'm fighting temptation." My friend, that is not the place to fight temptation! That is the place to start running." ²

There will always be that escape door if we are willing to look for it. The stairs that led David up on the roof where he caught sight of bathing Bathsheba, was the same stairs that would have led him down and away from the temptation. Are you willing to run to that escape?

Learn the lessons today. Israel had great privileges, but they weren't enough to keep them from sin and destruction. We are a blessed bunch today. Children of God, heirs of the promises of Christ. But don't let anything disqualify you from experiencing the fullness of blessing that God has for you today.

¹ Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 527). Victor Books.

² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 46). Thomas Nelson.