

XVI. The Way of Escape

April 30/May 2, 2013

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Aim: To learn from the Old Testament example of the Israelites that God will judge our sin; we cannot presume upon God's grace and lead careless lives, but must dedicate ourselves to running the 'Christian race.'

Paul knew his principle of giving up personal liberty to avoid causing another brother to stumble would solve the problem in Corinth if the so-called strong Christians would only adhere to it. But there was a rub! The principle required a certain disposition of mind – a disposition these Christians gave no evidence of possessing. The principle required diligence and drive, determination and discipline, but these words weren't even in the vocabulary of these strong Christians. Their favorite words were desire, privilege, gratification, and enjoyment. Paul knew, therefore, that just laying this principle on the table wasn't sufficient. He had to supply some motivation if he were to expect these strong Christians to pick up this principle and put it into practice. Paul decided to rely on a couple of examples. The first was positive in nature. Paul showed how he had gone above and beyond the call of duty in practicing this principle himself and how he had been blessed in the process (9:1-27).

In 10:1-13 Paul uses a negative example, the example of Israel under Moses. Here was a group of people where were extremely free with the same words as the Corinthians, and they lost everything! The bridge between Paul's positive example and Israel's negative example is the metaphor of the runner preparing for a race (9:24-27). The Israelites of old also had a race set before them. They had been called to show to others the glory and knowledge of God. It was certainly a great privilege, but they somehow got so occupied with the privilege that they forgot the responsibility. They took their calling to mean they had already won the race and didn't apply themselves to it, and God cast them away! They were disqualified from the race. If the Corinthians were to avoid being disqualified from the race, they had to pay careful heed to the examples of the Israelites.

One of the biggest threats to perseverance than any Christian will face is presumption. It is that mentality that imagines that we shall all muddle through in the end, because we have always done so throughout life. Paul asserts that if we are going to be people who persevere, it will only be because we are people who are not presumptuous. Merely external identification with God's work and purposes will never be enough. Paul refers to the people of Israel in the old covenant, and shows how their deficiencies should act as a warning to his readers about the perils of presumption. Misuse of liberty can disqualify us from effective service to Christ.

A. The Old Testament Example (1 Cor. 10:1-10)

1. God's Blessings in the Exodus (10:1-4)

The Corinthians needed to reflect on the similarity between their privileges and those enjoyed by Israel. Hadn't they been gloriously saved? Hadn't God delivered them from the kingdom of sin and darkness? And hadn't they been publicly identified with Christ through baptism? And weren't they regularly coming to the Lord's Table to enjoy fellowship with Him and with other believers? The Israelites, Paul points out, also had a remarkable deliverance to look back on. God had miraculously delivered them from their bondage in Egypt and from the tyranny of

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Pharaoh. The experience of people becoming Christian believers was prefigured by the experience of Israel in her exodus from Egypt and her wanderings in the wilderness towards the Promised Land.

It seems that the Corinthians were saying, ‘We don’t need to worry about pagan festivals; we are safe because we are Christians. We know that idolatry is empty and meaningless and because we’ve been baptized and are regularly eating at the Lord’s Supper, nothing can injure us. We can go to pagan temples and eat whatever we like – it won’t have any effect upon us.’ They have their twenty-first-century descendants who hold exactly the same view. There are people who rely on their baptism, or who think that their involvement in Christian activity, in Christian meetings, in listening to the Word of God preached, or in being at the Lord’s Table, must guarantee that they will be acceptable to God in the end. They believe that these activities act as an ‘immunization’ against God’s judgment. What Paul is demonstrating is that this is not the case. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are signposts to Christ, but they are never vehicles to take us to the journey’s end. In verses 1-2 he is concerned with baptism, and in verses 3-4 his reference is to feeding on Christ, which is what is symbolized by the communion service.

In verses 1-4, Paul emphasizes the oneness of Israel as a corporate community and the commonness of their experiences under Moses’ leadership. ‘All’ is used five times in these four verses to indicate the oneness in experience and blessing.

a) Baptism (10:1-2)

¹ *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...*

‘For’ refers back to the disqualification for service of which Paul had just spoken (9:27) and introduces the examples that follow. When introducing a matter of importance, Paul sometimes warms to his subject by telling his readers that he does not wish them ‘to be ignorant.’ Paul’s introductory words indicate a new teaching for their benefit, but it is not altogether a new topic. Rather he continues, but so as to tease out further what he has just said about himself and the need to avoid disqualification from the race (cp. 9:27). The burden of this passage is that they be not disqualified.

The community of faith under the Old Testament flows uninterrupted into the community of faith of the New. Paul tells the predominantly *Gentile* church of Corinth that those who came out of Egypt were ‘our fathers,’ Israelites though they were. Those Hebrews were ‘our’ spiritual ancestors to whom we belong as the one family of God, separated only by the intervening years. This remains true to this day for those of us who are Gentile Christians.

‘Under the cloud’ means that the children of Israel, the ‘fathers’ of both Paul and the Corinthians, were guided by the pillars of cloud and of fire (cp. Ps. 105:39). This cloud was the Shekinah cloud of God’s presence, which at night turned into a pillar of fire, not a cloud of water. The Red Sea was parted so that the people could walk through on dry land (Ex. 14:16). So the reference to baptism in the exodus is not primarily a reference to being sprinkled by rain from the cloud or immersed while passing through the sea.

The basic Christian significance for baptism is identification with Christ. As Paul explains later in Romans 6:1-10, water baptism is an outward sign of spiritual union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Water baptism symbolizes the baptism believers have already experienced.

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When we trust in Jesus we are baptized into Him, identified with Him, made one with Him (cp. Gal. 3:27). It is that idea of spiritual identification, rather than the physical ceremony, that Paul has in mind. The Israelites were ‘baptized into Moses’ in the sense that they identified with him as the Lord’s appointed leader over them.

Like the Corinthians, the Israelites had a kind of baptism. Believers are baptized by water into Jesus the Christ; the Israelites were ‘baptized’ into Moses in the cloud and in the Red Sea. The cloud under which they walked out of Egypt and that sea through which they had passed effectively separated them from their old life and identified them with a new leader, Moses, and a new life. This action typifies the Corinthians’ situation because the church has been baptized into the name of Christ (1:13). By being baptized the people of each covenant were joined in turn to their deliverers, Moses and Christ.

The analogy of baptism here is primarily not about getting wet. It is about taking on a new identity, sharing the destiny of the common leader. When they were baptized into Moses, they became people led by Moses, as God’s agent. Through that experience of crossing the sea, they were initiated into their new life as God’s covenant people. Similarly, baptism in the Christians’ life experience stands at the beginning of spiritual life, as an initiation. We only experience it once. It does not make anybody a Christian. It is not a vehicle to heaven, but a signpost, a symbol of having left the kingdom of darkness and entered the kingdom of light.

b) Communion (10:3-4)

³...and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

The Israelites even had their own kind of communion. Their equivalent to the bread of communion was the manna God showered upon them in the wilderness. And their equivalent to the wine was the water which God supernaturally provided from a rock. Like the bread and wine of the Lord’s table, the nourishment granted to baptized Israel was ‘spiritual’ in that it emanated from the Spirit

Following the great deliverance from Egypt, God’s people were miraculously sustained by Him throughout their journey. Verses 3 and 4 speak of the ‘spiritual food’ and ‘spiritual drink’ that came in the form of the daily provision of manna and water from the rock. This provision for their physical life has its parallel in the Lord’s Supper, which reminds us of the broken body and poured out blood of the Lord Jesus and which encourages us to feed on Christ in our hearts, by faith, with thanksgiving.

In each covenant the people eat ‘spiritual food’ and drink ‘spiritual drink.’ Christians eat from the loaf and drink from the cup in the Meal commemorating Christ’s death. The Israelites ate manna and drank water from the rock, food and drink that signified beforehand the loaf and cup of the Eucharist. The elements in the former covenant are called ‘types’ which are fulfilled and surpassed by the elements in the latter covenant (‘antitypes’).

The fact that ‘all’ the Israelites ate the same spiritual food indicates that Paul is not speaking of God’s working in the spirits of individual Israelites. He could not do that because many of them did not believe in Him. Paul is speaking of the source, not the type, of sustenance. God provided physical food and drink through spiritual means, for all of Israel, believers and unbelievers alike. The Lord miraculously provided manna for food (Ex. 16:15) and water for drink (Ex. 17:6).

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Paul says that the ‘rock that followed them ... was Christ.’ The verb ‘was’ strongly suggests that ‘the Christ’ existed prior to His historic incarnation and was the source of life for the people then.

The Greek word employed here for ‘rock’ is *petra* (a massive rock cliff), not *petros*, the latter being a relatively small boulder (cp. Mt. 16:18). God used a boulder to provide water for Israel on one occasion. But ‘the spiritual rock which followed them’ throughout their journeys was not that small boulder but the great rock of Christ. That supernatural rock protected and sustained His people and would not allow them to perish.

Paul adds ‘the rock was Christ,’ indicating that the presence of the Lord was with Israel then just as it remains with the Corinthians. It is likely that he identified the ‘rock,’ Christ, with the ‘Angel of the LORD,’ the messenger who was always in attendance upon the people of Israel (Ex. 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2). The principle is that the Israelites drank from the source from which the Corinthians also obtain their blessings: Christ, the divine rock or solid base of Israel. In the song that he issued before his death, Moses refers often to Yahweh as the ‘rock’ of Israel (Dt. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31), and the theme pervades the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms (Ps. 18:2; 31:3; 42:9; 71:3; 95:1).

Paul sees the rock as a type of Christ, who was continually present with them. Just as Christ was present with the Corinthians to sustain and nurture them, so He was present with the Israelites throughout their wilderness journeying. In this way, the Israelites were learning that God Himself was the only resource for all their needs, physical and spiritual, and that He was committed by covenant promises to them as His people.

2. God’s Judgment in the Exodus (10:5-6)

a) Overthrown (10:5)

⁵*Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

What was Paul’s point in discussing the privileges of the Israelites. Why was he so intent on likening the Corinthians and their privileges to the Israelites and their privileges? Paul lets the other food drop in verse 5. Yes, the Israelites enjoyed great privileges, but they still came under severe judgment. Paul uses a most dramatic contrast. First, he interjects the very strong Greek word *alla* whose force our little English word ‘but’ scarcely conveys. Second, having said no less than five times that ‘all our fathers’ were blessed by God in the exodus and the food and drink of the early days of their journey, He then drops his bombshell, ‘with *most of them* God was not well pleased.’ *All* came out of Egypt, but only *two* – Joshua and Caleb – entered Canaan. The rest perished in the wilderness, their whitened bones scattered along the way.

‘Majority’ is an immense understatement in that those with whom the Lord was pleased were only two: Joshua and Caleb. Even Moses and Aaron were disqualified from entering because the rock at Meribah was struck with Moses’ rod rather than spoken to as God had commanded (Num. 20:8-12, 24). The rest ‘were laid low in the wilderness’ over a period of thirty-eight years, their graves littering the route to Canaan. ‘Laid low’ (*katastrōnnumi*) means literally ‘to strew or spread over.’ The corpses of those whom God was not pleased were strewn all over the wilderness. It seems clear that Paul had Numbers 14:16 hovering before his mind when he wrote the epistle.

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Many of the disqualified Israelites were believers who became unfit for God's service. Those who 'were laid low in the wilderness' had not brought their bodies under control as Paul had done with his (9:27) but had indulged their every desire, lust, and craving. A controlled body is useful to the Lord; an indulged one is not.

Nevertheless, their great privileges did not guarantee security. That is what Paul wants his readers to understand. We can go through all the rites and privileges of God's grace and yet in the end still be under God's displeasure. If baptized and communicant Israel was not spared divine judgment, those Corinthians who blithely visit pagan temples should not imagine that they are immune to God's wrath. We can be greatly favored by His grace, but then become so presumptuous about it, so easy or careless in the way we respond to Him that God is not pleased with us and has to stretch out His chastening hand upon us. Although they received huge privileges, they succumbed to the perils of presumption.

b) Examples (10:6)

⁶Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

'These things were types for us.' 'Patterns' translates *typoi*, meaning types, visible impressions, or even models. By 'types', he means the events mentioned above – the exodus from Egypt, being 'baptized' into a deliverer (Moses), and the manna and water prefiguring the loaf and cup of the Lord's Table.

The Corinthians must not think that the benefits of Christian baptism and the Supper of the Lord will help them if they plunge headlong into paths of disobedience against the revealed will of God. The Corinthians who worship the gods and fornicate may 'think that they stand' on account of the sacraments of the gospel, but the reality is they will fall, as the Israelites did.

For us, as well as them, the warning is very clear. It is a great thing to start to run the Christian race, to be brought out of Egypt by the blood of our Passover Lamb (5:7-8). But membership of God's covenant people carries obligations with its massive privileges. To start well is good, but to finish well is even more important. For Christians to drift away from the reality of fellowship, through careless presumption, would be an even greater tragedy than Israel's. That is why the discipline of consistent daily running, with its prize in view, is so essential to every believer's well-being.

The Israelites 'craved evil things.' Paul's word for 'craved' means 'lust' or 'hot sexual passion.' The Israelites, though rescued by their holy God and though having subscribed to His righteous covenant at Mt. Sinai based on the 'ten words,' could not wait to sin. Paul probably had in mind the time, described in Numbers 11 (cp. Num. 11:4, 34), when the people were yearning for the foods they had enjoyed in Egypt. So great was this yearning that God had to send a great plague upon them to bring them out of it. Many perished in that plague.

3. Israel's Sins in the Exodus (10:6-10)

Now follow four prohibitions: against idolatry, fornication, testing Christ, and grumbling. In each case there is a repeating pattern of words. First, Paul begins, 'Neither be..., ' then mentions the specific sin. Second, mention of the specific sin is followed by 'even as *some* of them [sinned].' Third, Paul mentions what happens to those sinning Israelites so that they perished in the wilderness (except for the first example).

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a) Idolatry (10:7)

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.”*

Paul cites the time they built the golden calf which the Israelites worshiped at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 32). The apostle points to Exodus 32:6. In Moses’ absence, Aaron made out that the golden image had saved Israel from Egypt (Ex. 32:4), the accepted wisdom being that the people could worship any object of their choice in the manner they desired. Paul indicates that their idolatrous act was none other than a form of worship. They ate the food sacrificed to the young bull, then they rose up and engaged in cultic dancing to this effigy. Ancient Jewish commentators believed that this was wild orgiastic ‘worship’ which led to sexual acts among the people, ‘play’ being a euphemism for sexual relations. Unlike the ‘types’ following, Paul fails to mention the punishment of God. He may have felt this was unnecessary since Exodus 32:27-28 narrates how the Levites slew three thousand of their fellow-Israelites that day.

The incident of the golden calf stands in biblical history as one of the most horrifying warnings of the fickle, unstable, treacherous nature of the sinful human heart. The example was well chosen because of the issues of idol worship with which the Corinthian church is grappling. Corinth was a seat of the cult of Aphrodite: by taking their places within temple precincts to eat meat sacrificed to the gods, and possibly being enticed by other activities (cp. 5:2, 11; 6:9-10; 15, 18; 15:33), not a few were replicating the follies of Israel at Sinai, thereby endangering themselves.

Idols were more than familiar to the Corinthians, because their entire society was built around them. No religious, social, political, or business function was conducted without some involvement with idol worship or recognition. Many of the Corinthian Christians, overconfident in their own moral and spiritual strength, had become careless about their participation in activities where false gods were worshiped, consulted, or appealed to. They believed they could be associated with such pagan activities without being spiritually harmed. Some of the believers, or professed believers, in Corinth had slipped back into actual idolatry (5:11). Others were in danger of doing the same thing.

When Christians worship anyone or anything besides God, that is idolatry. Worshiping the virgin Mary, saints, icons, or angels is idolatry. No matter how sincerely they are meant to honor God, such practices are false worship and are strictly forbidden in Scripture. All idols, of course, are not physical. Any concept of God that is not biblical is false, and if believed and followed it becomes an idol. Churches and philosophies have developed that virtually make gods of success, love, social service, self-image, or simply mankind. Anything that takes our first loyalty and allegiance is an idol.

b) Sexual Immorality (10:8)

⁸*We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.*

Sexual immorality – the second great snare – always seems to follow on the heels of idolatry in Scripture. This sin, which was alluded to in verse 7 is now treated explicitly in verse 8. Paul refers to one specific episode in the life of Israel, recorded in the book of Numbers; the text there establishes the link of immorality with idolatry very specifically. The men of Israel indulged in

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sexual immorality with Moabite women, who ‘invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods’ (Num. 25:1-2).

Idolatry and sexual immorality were closely associated in virtually all ancient religions. They were especially associated in Corinth, whose temple to Aphrodite had a thousand ritual prostitutes. As in the first example, we see an interplay between idolatry and fornication. Paul has devoted chapters 5-7 to the problem fornication in Corinth presented for believers.

The logic is that if we will not worship God as our creator, we shall in the end worship ourselves, the creatures. Paul uses the same argument in Romans 1:18-32, where the same sequence of God-rejecting idolatry leading to immorality is exposed. Self-worship is the root of all immoral sexual behavior, since its basic motivation is self-gratification and sexual pleasure. But God’s opposition to such behavior and His designation of it as ‘evil’ is grounded in His own character of unchanging faithfulness, revealed in His covenant commitment to Israel. The appalling judgment suffered by thousands in the resulting plague, brought about by the Lord’s anger (Num. 25:11), indicates how seriously God views such complacent indulgence.

Numbers 25:9 gives the total as twenty-four thousand. The difference between that value and the twenty-three thousand cited by Paul is probably best explained by taking 23,000 to mean those killed during one day and 24,000 to include others who died later due to the plague.

c) Testing God (10:9)

⁹ *We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents...*

The third prohibition is against trying the patience of the Lord. This sin amounts to pushing God to the limit by seeing how much we can get away with. The Israelites did this in Numbers 21:4-9. Fired by impatience at the length of the wilderness journeying and their boredom with the manna, graciously provided on a daily basis by the Lord to sustain them, ‘the people spoke out against God and against Moses’ because of the lack of bread and water (Num. 21:5). God had provided manna to eat and water to drink, but the people were not satisfied. They wanted more variety and more spice. They complained and complained, questioning God’s goodness and trying His patience. They had no concern for pleasing God, only for His pleasing themselves. They did not use their new freedom to serve Him better but to demand that He serve them better. Paul claims that the Israelites ‘experimented’ (*epeirasan*, ‘tempted’ or ‘tested’), challenging Yahweh to improve their lot as a precondition for allegiance, and insists that his readers must never do this.

Basically they were rebelling against the circumstances and conditions God had decreed for them. As a consequence, they had to learn how far they could go in challenging God’s goodness, and the plague of snakes was the resulting judgment. This is why the only remedy for them involved an act of faith and dependence on the part of each individual towards God. Such an act counteracted their previous faithless provocation and testing of the covenant Lord. When Moses was commanded to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole, so that anyone who looked to it would live, this means of salvation was clearly designed to teach God’s people the lesson of their total dependence on Him for life itself.

Evidently the Corinthians were complaining against Christ in some way that placed their relationship with Him under great strain. Many of the Corinthians were pushing their liberty to the limits, to see how much of the flesh they could indulge and how much of the world they could enjoy. They were trying God and risking severe discipline. As some Christians today,

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they probably said, ‘This is the age of grace. We are free and God is forgiving. We can’t lose our salvation so why not get everything out of life that we can?’ The Israelites found the answer to that question.

d) Complaining (10:10)

¹⁰...nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

The sin of murmuring or grumbling continually cropped up among the Israelites (e.g., Num. 14:1-38), but the greatest instance of it was when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram began to complain about the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). Although they were swallowed up by the earth, the Israelites continued to complain. God’s response was to send into the camp ‘the destroyer’ (*tou olothreutou*), likely a reference to angel of death who killed the first-born of Egypt (Ex. 12:33) and who would later kill 70,000 men because of David’s census (2 Sam. 24:15-16).

The discontent which led to Korah’s presumptuous verbal attack on Moses and Aaron, in company with ‘250 chiefs of the congregation,’ found its roots in their own willful pride and its resulting envy and resentment. It represented a very serious challenge to the authority of God’s leaders, and beyond that to God Himself who had chosen and appointed them. Although the ringleaders were destroyed by earthquake and fire, the people still continued to grumble, accusing Moses and Aaron of killing the Lord’s people (Num. 16:41) and thereby drawing upon themselves God’s wrath, in the destroying angel and the resultant plague in which 14,700 died.

It appears that the Corinthians were grumbling against Paul, his leadership as an apostle, and teachings which they found not to their liking. The Israelites rejected Moses and the Corinthians are rejecting Paul (cp. 4:8-21).

Grumbling is always a species of idolatry. It reveals a heart in rebellion against the way in which the sovereign God has ordered our circumstances, contradicting His providence, and affirming, ‘I know best.’

Murmuring is dissatisfaction with God’s sovereign will for our lives and the lives of others, and is a sin that He does not take lightly, even in view of His grace. When God’s people question or complain, they are challenging His wisdom, His grace, His goodness, His love, and His righteousness. Our need for contentment is not merely for our own well-being, which it is, but for God’s honor and glory. Complaining dishonors our heavenly Father; contentment glorifies Him.

B. The New Testament Exhortation (1 Cor. 10:11-13)

1. Warning by Example (10:11-12)

a) Example (10:11)

¹¹Now 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.

These events were not written down for them, nor written merely as an interesting historical record. Biblical narrative was always written with a spiritual purpose. Indeed, the whole revelation before the coming of Christ was designed to prepare for, and point to, God’s final Word in His Son. Thus, Paul states that these tragedies occurred ‘figuratively (*typikōs*), recorded

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as warnings for the benefit of new covenant believers. ‘Instruction’ (*nouthesia*) is more than ordinary teaching. It means admonition and carries the connotation of warning. It is counsel given to persuade a person to change behavior in light of judgment. In short, the apostle tells the people that the Lord has given them ample warning.

God’s judgment on the Israelites’ sins are not merely scattered and unrelated events from the past history of His people. The God of the Christians is the same God as the Lord of the Israelites. His acts of judgment then prefigure and confirm His displeasure now whenever His people sin in similar ways. God will always judge the worship of idols, fornication, testing Christ, and grumbling against apostolic teaching. To be sure, that judgment may not be as physical and dramatic as that which fell upon the exodus pilgrims. Rather, it may take a spiritual form as people are quietly cut off spiritually from the source of their life in Christ.

By ‘the ends of the ages,’ Paul means the goal and end-point of the promise-laden Old Testament Scripture. Like the Corinthians, we too live in the ‘last days,’ following Christ’s ascension and preceding His return.

Like the Hebrews in the wilderness under Moses, we can forfeit our blessing, reward, and effectiveness in the Lord’s service if, in overconfidence and presumption, we take our liberties too far and fall into disobedience and sin. We will not lose our salvation, but we can easily lose our virtue and usefulness, and become disqualified in the race of the Christian life.

b) Warning (10:12)

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

Notice that Paul moves in verse 11 from ‘them’ (the Israelites) to ‘us’ (Christians), and in verse 12 from ‘us’ to ‘him’ (or ‘her’), the individual believer. In his warning, Paul expresses a timeless principle, articulated in Proverbs 16:8. It is easy to substitute confidence in ourselves for confidence in the Lord—accepting His guidance and blessing and then taking credit for the work He does through us. It is also easy to become so enamored of our freedom in Christ that we forget we are his, bought with a price and called to obedience to His Word and to His service.

Just as the leading athlete in a race must not relax or stumble if the prize is to be his, so we can never afford to relax our spiritual attention and grip in this world. That was Israel’s great mistake. Having the blessings of God’s covenanted grace in the promises and in the law, they became complacent.

Great privileges and great judgment – that is what Paul wanted the strong Corinthians to see. He had asked them to give up a personal liberty for the sake of the race that had been set before them. But they were reluctant to do so. They loved this meat from their former way of life. So great was their yearning for it that they were even willing to flirt with the idolatry and sexual immorality that surrounded it. They were stretching the grace of God to the breaking point to justify their love for it, and they grumbled at any suggestion that they should change their position. So we have Paul saying to these Corinthians, ‘Look out! You are acting very much like the Israelites of old. If you don’t change, you can only expect God’s judgment to fall!’

We shall be terribly mistaken if we think this passage of Scripture is just about Corinthians and Israelites. It is about them, but it is also about us. What are the sins that continually best the contemporary church? Idolatry; immorality; testing the Lord; and grumbling. They are right up there at the top of the list in all our congregations, because they are endemic in the fallen human heart. So we must ask ourselves how we are doing in our race for the Lord. Are we going about

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it with diligence and discipline, or are we as complacent and casual about it as the Israelites and Corinthians were?

2. Way of Escape (10:13)

However, verse 13 teaches us that while we can be easily deluded, we can also be delivered.

a) *Human Experience (10:13a)*

¹³*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.*

We tend to associate the word ‘temptation’ with enticement to sin, but the Greek word Paul uses (*peirasmoi*) carries no negative connotation. It simply means to test or prove. Both temptations and trials can be meant by this word, and both are part of general human experience. Whether it becomes a proof of righteousness or an inducement to evil depends on our response. If we resist it in God’s power, it is a test that proves our faithfulness. If we do not resist, it becomes a solicitation to sin. The Bible uses the term in both ways, and Paul likely has both meanings in view. As fallen people in a fallen world, we are all subject to moral temptation and prone to trying circumstances right through our lives, from cradle to grave.

Because Paul uses this general term, we may conclude he has in mind any kind of trial that comes upon the Christian, whether it is a solicitation to sin or a testing of faith (compare the ‘temptation’ of Christ in Matthew 4). The Corinthians were, of course, facing both of these. The solicitation to repeat the sins of Israel was strong, but God’s call to discipline was also strong.

‘Common to man’ is one word (*anthrōpinos*) in Greek and simply means ‘that which is human, characteristic of or belonging to mankind.’ In other words, Paul says there is no such thing as a superhuman or supernatural temptation. Temptations are human experiences. The term also carries the idea of usual or typical, as indicated by ‘common.’ Temptations are never unique experiences to us. Even the Son of God was ‘tempted in all things as we are’ (Heb. 4:15).

We are being warned not to think that we are any different in our human nature, or superior in ourselves to the Israelites whose bodies fell in the desert. The temptations they faced, we face, and always will do in this world. We would be foolish to think otherwise. Once again we are being warned to be active and watchful.

Sometimes we are tempted to sin, but this type of temptation never comes from God (cp. James 1:14-15). When God ‘tempts’ us it is always in the sense of testing or trying our faith in order to bring us to a greater reliance upon Him.

b) *Divine Faithfulness (10:13b)*

God is faithful...

Regarding the nature of God, Paul simply says, ‘God is faithful,’ a truth set out already in 1:9 with the citation of Deuteronomy 7:9. Paul wanted them to understand that the work of salvation is all God’s work and, therefore, it cannot fail. God started the work of salvation in them and they could rest assured he would continue it until they were safely home in heaven (cp. Phil. 1:6; 2 Pe. 1:3). In asking the Corinthians to be committed to the Christian race and to avoid the sins of the Israelites, Paul was not asking them to do the impossible. He was only asking them to do what God’s grace enabled them to do. Those three words, ‘God is faithful,’ ought to come as an encouragement to any Christian who is beleaguered by doubt, weariness, or discouragement. Does the Christian life seem to be too much for you? Think about this: God is faithful!

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God is not fickle, petulant, arbitrary, or vacillating like the gods of Greece and Rome. The God of the universe is a moral, constant, and good Being, who is unchanging in His faithfulness. He remains true to His own.

Paul proceeded to give two provisions this faithful God makes for those who are facing temptation.

c) The Hedge (10:13c)

...and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability...

First, he says God provides a hedge for the tempted. In other words, he filters some temptations out before they ever have a chance to get to us. For one thing, he filters out all uncommon or extraordinary temptations (10:13a). Nothing is allowed to come through the hedge that is not characteristic or typical for mankind. Sometimes we think our burdens are unique, but they are not. No matter how great our burden, we may rest assured others either have carried, or are carrying, burdens just as great.

God also uses His hedge to filter out any temptation that is too hard for us to bear. This is the unpopular part of the verse. Some object to it because it demolishes a favorite excuse for sin, namely, that the temptation was just too great. No believer can claim that he was overwhelmed by temptation of that ‘the devil made me do it.’ No one, not even Satan, can make us sin. People sin because they willingly sin.

God never places the Christian in a situation where sin is unavoidable. The hand that governs all our circumstances is that of a God who is totally faithful, so that while we have no ability to stand, or any security of foothold in and of ourselves, we can be completely confident in Him. When the temptation is fierce, the help is increased. The sovereign God is not absent from His world. His loving hand will be there to shield you.

No one in human history has suffered more than Job. But even though his trials were terrible and severe, God’s protecting hedge was still around him. How thankful we should be that God’s filtering hedge still exists for us!

d) The Bridge (10:13d)

...but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

The second provision God makes for the tempted is the bridge. Paul says, when God allows a temptation to come through the hedge to test and try us, he also provides a ‘way of escape.’ The ‘way of escape’ is more than an exit sign. It is a word used of finding one’s way through a mountain range, by sticking to the one pass and not deviating from that route. It speaks of disembarking from a boat after a perilous journey – a safe harbor and a deliverance from danger.

In Greek, the definite article ‘the’ is used with the singular noun ‘escape.’ That means Paul was really talking about only one way of escape, not a different escape for each temptation. The way of escape from temptation is not God dashing in at the last minute to pick us up and carry us out of the situation. The way of escape from every temptation, no matter what it is, is the same: it is *through*. It is facing the temptation and going through it with the power God supplies to those who walk with Him in prayer and discipline. We ‘escape’ temptation not by getting out of it but by passing through it. God does not take us out; He sees us through by making us ‘able to endure it.’ The battle with temptations of every sort can be won, if our dependence is on God

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alone. God provides three ways for us to endure temptation: prayer, trust, and focusing on Jesus Christ.

God's own Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. It was the Father's will that the Son be there, and Jesus did not leave until all three temptations were over. He met the temptations head-on. He 'escaped' the temptations by enduring them in His Father's power.

In His strength you will be empowered to resist whatever pressure that temptation places you under. Paul does not say that we are enabled merely to 'bear' the temptation or trial, but that He will empower us to 'bear up' under it, that is, prevail in it. Paul is, of course, speaking of matters from an eternal perspective.

For next time: Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1.