

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Title: Do not Follow the Example

Truth: It is dangerous to ignore God's provision and to desire evil things.

Date/Location: Sunday October 4, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Chapter 9 ended on the sobering note that we must live before God in a purposeful, useful, disciplined, self-controlled, and holy way so that we will not be disqualified. Whatever you think *disqualified* means, it is not good. In fact, it can be very bad. Do not ignore it.

1. A genuine believer in Christ can be disqualified from certain service for God and lose his rewards.
2. Professing Christians face another reality, and that is that disqualification may mean that they fall under the judgment of God—not as Christians but as non-Christians because their profession was false.

A words-only claim to salvation is as meaningless for salvation today as Israel's genealogy was to provide salvation for them back in their day. Just because you were born as a Jew did not mean you had favored status in salvation. And just because you were born into a Christian family or professed faith with your lips does not mean that you have it in your heart. Salvation is promised to those who truly trust in (believe in) Christ alone for salvation. Knowing facts is not the same as Christian trust. Wanting blessings but not Christ is not trust. Adding Christ to your other religious ideas is not Christian trust.

3. Then there are those who are just plain pagans, unbelievers, atheists, secularists, etc. They believe in themselves, perhaps, but not in God, and certainly not in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What Paul writes below is applicable no matter which of these three situations you are in. Hear God's word on it, because what we will learn is that to avoid being disqualified, we must reject lust and temptations (this message), and we must flee from idolatry (next section). Whether our propensity is to satisfy our flesh with pleasures or to fulfill our religious propensity with false gods, we

must not do that if we desire to receive an imperishable crown of life and good reward.

I. Biblical History: No Self Control Leads to Disqualification

The apostle brings us back in time to approximately 1440 B.C. to a time when human nature was exactly the same as it is today! Follow along with these Bible references.

- A. God's provision for the people, 10:1-5. This refers to the time of the great departure from Egypt which is recorded in Exodus and Numbers. See Numbers 14:29, 32, 33 and Joshua 5:4.
 1. **Under the cloud.** This was the physical and visible manifestation of the special presence of God that protected and guided the nation of Israel on their journey from Egypt and through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22, 14:19 and Nehemiah 9:12). This manifestation was a theophany which was also active around the tabernacle (Exodus 3:9, Num. 12:5). Paul is more specific and call this a Christophany.
 2. **Passed through the sea.** See Exodus 14:22. Yes, this was an historical event, not a legend or myth. The story was told among the nations even 40 years later (by Rahab in Joshua 2:10). Until the resurrection of Christ the exodus was the standard of miraculous divine power.
 3. **Baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.** The events of Exodus 13-14 and beyond occur under Moses' leadership. The people shared a national solidarity with their leader under God. This is why Paul says that they were baptized (immersed into) Moses. They were *identified* with Moses. Baptism means identification. Notice that the people were not baptized into the cloud and water. They were baptized into MOSES.
 4. **Ate the same spiritual food.** This was the manna of Exodus 16:4-5. It was "bread from heaven" which is analogous to the true bread from heaven, Jesus Christ (7x in John 6:31-33, 41, 50-58; also Neh. 9:15).
 5. **Drank the same spiritual drink.** This is a reference to the incident of Exodus 17:5-7 (and perhaps also Numbers 20:11).

The people were thirsty and complained. God arranged for them to have thirst in order that they might trust Him. It was also a way for God to display His providing character to them. But they failed and complained instead. They did not have enough self-control to avoid the temptation to sin.

- B. What is the “spiritual” aspect of this provision? With the last three points, Paul emphasizes a “spiritual” element to the events. The people were “baptized” and they ate and drank “spiritual” nourishment. What does this mean? They ate and drank literal food. The spiritual meaning of baptism is identification, which we stated above. The “spiritual” nature of the food they ate was that it was provided by God. It was literal food produced by a divine miracle. They were living also by the words of God, not merely by physical food. The Exodus and Numbers passages are not typological prophecy that was hidden for centuries until Paul found it. No, rather, the experience of the Israelites was that God provided for them, but they had no discipline, no self-control, and they did not bring their bodies and mouths into subjection. God in Christ was covering all their needs, but they did not have a thankful spirit.
- C. Verse 5 records, therefore, that God was displeased with most of them. Consequently, most died in the wilderness. Notice that they **all** shared in these blessings (*all* is used five times). And they all shared in the *same* blessings of nourishment from Heaven. But only *some*—a very small number—were pleasing to God. God is very gracious, showering blessings upon a broader array of people than will ever appreciate it. This is common grace—universal, undeserved blessings to all men—yet in the main, most people reject those blessings and want things that God has not provided. What made the difference? Hebrews 3:17-19 tells us—lack of faith in God. The blessings do not guarantee a right response.
- D. The people’s rejection of God’s provision. The people lusted after what God had not provided, 10:6. The second half of the verse is a general statement about the following four evil behaviors.
1. The people fell into idolatry although they were told not to do so in the Ten Commandments (1 Cor. 10:7). See Exodus 32:1-8, 19-

28. The golden calf incident shows how quickly a large segment of the population gave up on God and Moses and went after a manufactured god. No doubt they had “good reasons” in their own minds for doing what they did, but ultimately it was an excuse for their lust. They were in a drunken party mode (v. 6, 7, 25). Aaron had not restrained the people and so failed in his leadership role. 3000 people were killed in judgment.
2. The people committed sexual immorality (1 Cor. 10:8) even though it was forbidden in the decalogue, 20:14, 17. See Exodus 32:6, where there were offerings, eating, drinking, and then playing. Sexual immorality is often linked with idolatry. The same kind of thing happened with the Moabites: idolatry and food and then immorality. See Num. 25:1-13, 31:16. And notice the same issue in Corinth: the connection of food and idolatry (1 Cor. 8), and an ongoing problem with sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5-6) left them open to God’s wrath.
 - 3 The people put Christ to the test and were killed by snakes (1 Cor. 10:9). This event is recorded in Num. 21:4-9. See also 2 Kings 18:4. The people were impatient with their progress and diet, so God sent a fearful punishment among them, and then also provided a cure which later became an emblem of the salvation provided in Christ (John 3:14).
 4. The people complained and were destroyed (10:10). Refer to Numbers 14:1-37 for an example, though there were several times an episode of complaining is recorded in Exodus through Numbers. In fact, the Lord said, “all these men...have seen My glory and the signs which I did...and have put Me to the test now these ten times” (Num. 14:22). Even more to Paul’s point is the incident of Korah in Numbers 16, where a divine plague killed many people.
- E. God today is exactly the same as then. He gives wonderful and gracious gifts. But people today are also like people then. We complain at what God has provided. We want food that is not on the menu. We want a partner who is not our spouse. We want a God who is not the true god. We want conditions easier than they are. Do not do that!

II. Lesson from History: Do Not Follow their Example

A. The saying goes that those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. Those who *do* know history are not guaranteed to avoid its mistakes, since human nature is incorrigibly bad apart from divine grace. But those who don't know it are much more prone to repeat its errors and disasters. Thus, the problem with public school histories (plural) which do not teach the facts of what happened, but traffic in all manner of creative interpretations colored by present concerns. History must teach the facts of *history, not the fancies of the interpreters couched in historical story*. History long ago became what most modern media is today—not reporting the news but participating in and shaping the news to create opinions among their listeners.

Coming back to the Bible, this is why fanciful interpretations of the Bible and Bible history are dangerous, because they will miss the truth lessons of history. If the Old Testament is just legend or myth, then it has no authoritative lessons or dangers for us to consider. If the Bible is a malleable thing to be used to teach whatever lessons we desire, then we have turned ourselves into the authorities instead of letting the Bible be God's word.

From Israel, the lessons are repeatedly clear. Do not do what they did, lest you suffer the consequences that they suffered.

B. Verse 6. The Bible just says it like it is: all the above things are examples. Examples of the provision of God and the complaint about those provisions. To what end are these examples given? God tells us that too—to the intent that we should not lust after evil things like they did.

We can expand this to *all* of the bad stuff we read in the Old Testament. It is recorded there so that we do not desire to do bad ourselves. Implication: we must read it. Some have asked, "What's the use of the Old Testament?" It is right here. You want to be holy and pleasing to God, don't you? Then read and obey your Old Testament.

By the way, this is interesting—the Bible is transparent about the sinful, gross behavior of the patriarchs and the people of Israel and

the pagans around them. It does not sugarcoat the matter, like you might see in a history written in favor of Abraham's people. This is history unvarnished.

This idea of truth-telling is a legitimate concern in modern historiography, so that the historical ills of society are not buried in the pages of a pollyannish history book. The opposite extreme must be guarded against, however, which turns to heavy criticism and ignoring of "good" aspects of the historical situation.

- C. Verse 11. Again, these things are examples. The provisions, the complaints, *and* the judgments are examples. They are written for our *admonition*. This word refers to counsel or instruction about avoiding a wrong course of behavior. Do not go *that way*!

The last phrase of verse 11 says "upon whom the ends of the ages have come." Speaking about Christians in Corinth, and us by natural extension, Paul adds urgency to the matter of obedience to Christ and not being disqualified. Look—the Lord can return at any time. We must be ready by being holy people, busy serving how the Lord has directed us. How much closer we are to that return than even the Corinthians, upon whom this should have weighed heavily—instead of divisions and immorality and marital strife and misuse of Christian liberty and rights.

III. Application to the Present: Humble Yourself and Flee Temptation

- A. As right with God as you think you might be, it is necessary considering the above that we take heed. There is no space for pride, as if we are better or more enlightened than those poor souls in the old days. Because of the plenteous examples of failure, and because God has warned us, and because judgment comes to those who reject God, and because the end of the world is far closer now than then, it is essential that we pay attention to ourselves.
- B. We must watch out for ourselves so that we will not fall. Prov. 16:18 teaches that pride goes before destruction and arrogance before a fall. Pride brings God's judgment, which is exactly what

happened to the Devil (1 Tim. 3:6). Please do notice that the word “fall” does not just mean “fall into temptation.” It is worse than that—falling means falling into destruction!

Some of the Corinthians were making a case that they could continue to eat idol-meat without regard for its effect on others, and even do so in the idol temple. While the meat itself was nothing, the circumstances around it (offending other brothers, temple worship) were very dangerous to their souls. Therefore, Paul is warning them in light of the example of Biblical history. We do not want to displease God or get close to idolatry or sexual immorality—but these things were already ongoing problems in the Corinthian church! They were near to judgment.

- C. Humble yourself: Matthew 23:12, like Jesus Philippians 2:8, and as James and Peter teach us (James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:5-6). Do not think you are above sinning like the people of Israel did. Think about it—you already have done so in your life, many times.
- D. Memorize verse 13. This verse is easily worth an entire message all on its own. It contains two facts and two promises applicable in Corinth as well as today.
 - 1. Fact #1: Your temptations are not unique. What Israel experienced and what you are experiencing are similar enough that the same truth applies to them all. Right now, think of the things that often tempt you to sin. Then remind yourself that it is a human thing that you face. The trials of sin because of our broken nature are everywhere.
 - 2. Fact #2: God is faithful. When we are tempted to be unfaithful, we need to look to our God, who is never unfaithful. Our God is always faithful, always available to seek for help.
 - 3. Promise #1: His faithfulness means that God will not permit you to experience too great a temptation. Whatever therefore comes your way, you can endure. The pull of your old life—in this passage, idolatry and immorality—is not so strong that it will inevitably swallow up the Christian. God can and will help you to pull away from that situation.

4. Promise #2: God will help you escape the temptation. There are various ways this can happen. You can flee, like Joseph. You can turn away if it is something you cannot flee. You can pray. You can ask for the assistance of a brother or sister. You can change your behavior, replace the bad with good. Of course, you can repent of the sinful desire or tendency that causes the temptation to be “tempting.”

Conclusion

The way Paul writes in this section could just pass us by. But we must stop and notice that this is very serious business. He is talking about being disqualified, about deep sin, and about judgment unto death. We continue to stubbornly cling to the belief that salvation is eternally secure. Salvation is not secure for false professors. And true believers can lose their lives because of sinful behavior (see 1 Cor. 11).

So, do not follow the example of Israel. And do not follow the behavior pattern of the Corinthian church either. Thanks to God for giving us such clear instruction to help us avoid the errors of history!

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