

4.3 Those Who Fail to Learn from History are Doomed to Repeat It

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Date: 28 February 2021

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn and read in our Bibles now in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Josh has been leading us these Sunday evenings through this section of the letter.
- And we're going to read part of chapter 10 now, but I shall begin at the very last verse of chapter 9. Paul says, I discipline my body and I keep it under control lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.
- I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
- And all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock and followed them.
- And the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased.
- [1 : 1 0] For they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now, these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did.
- Do not be idolaters as some of them were. As it's written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did.
- And 23,000 fell in a single day. And we must not put Christ to the test as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents.
- Nor grumble. As some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now, these things happened to them as an example. But they were written down for our instruction.
- On whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.
- [2 : 1 6] No temptation has overtaken you. That's not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape.
- That you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people.
- Judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless. Is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break. Is it not a participation in the body of Christ?
- Because there's one bread. We who are many are one body. For we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?
- What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything? No. I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons. And not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.
- [3 : 2 5] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? Amen.

May God bless to us his word. Well, do open your Bibles again to 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

It's very easy to see ourselves through rather tinted spectacles and thus lacking self-perception. And so it can be very uncomfortable to have pointed out the way other people see you.

So when you find someone to be incredibly hard work and it's pointed out to you that perhaps the reason you find them hard work is because they're just like you, that might not sit very well.

[4 : 25] The last thing you want to accept is that the very things you find annoying about someone else are true of you. Well, in our passage this evening, Paul exposes a very serious case of misjudging oneself.

The Corinthians think themselves to be incredibly spiritual. So mature even that Paul is beneath them. But Paul is about to use a particularly pointed period of Israel's history to expose a rather uncomfortable truth to the Corinthians.

The truth is that Christians have unbelievable privileges through Christ. We have every spiritual blessing. But with these immense blessings come serious responsibilities.

And so Paul is warning the Corinthians. And this is a very serious warning that God's people in any age needs to heed. It's never enough to think that warnings do not apply to the people of God because we live in the age after Jesus.

As if they were something that were banished to the Old Testament. As only Old Testament believers had to listen to warnings. If that were true, then we wouldn't have this chapter in our Bible.

[5 : 40] Indeed, we wouldn't have quite a few parts of the Old Testament or the New Testament. Now, it's also worth noticing that warnings do not undermine that precious doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

The warnings are here so that those who have God's word at work within them will listen and persevere. And so the Bible's consistent answer to that question, can a believer fall away?

The Bible's answer is don't. Well, how have we gotten here? This all started with food offered to idols.

And suddenly we're back deep into Israel's history. Well, chapter 8 focuses on the fact that chief among our considerations is the impact our actions and freedoms will have on other believers.

Paul's happy to never eat meat again if it will cause a brother to stumble. That's what he says at the end of chapter 8. Chapter 9 makes clear that for the Corinthians, the issue isn't really about whether to eat food or not.

[6 : 44] But rather their issue is that Paul, an apostle, looks so unprincipled. He bends towards the weak. He accommodates to people's ignorance.

He changes his behavior depending on who he's with. And the Corinthians can't get on board with that. Paul's message is the cross.

And his ministry and manner are also cross-shaped. And the Corinthians hate that. He will gladly bear all of the cost, if only it will save some.

But then Paul finished chapter 9 by saying that his constraining his freedoms and his rights is not solely for the benefit of others believing in the gospel. He does it for himself.

Lest, chapter 9, verse 27, he should be disqualified after preaching to others. And so chapter 10 turns to how the issue of food offered to idols and restraining our freedoms affects us.

[7 : 51] And so we see, firstly, in these verses, in verses 1 to 11, like fathers, like sons. Like fathers, like sons.

We have immense spiritual blessings, just like those who were rescued from Egypt. But remember what happened to them. Paul spends these verses giving us a very pointed history lesson from the Exodus generation.

And notice how he does that, verses 1 to 5. He uses the word all again and again. Verse 1, all were under the cloud.

All passed through the sea. Verse 2, all were baptized into Moses. That is, they were initiated into the corporate experience of Israel that was mediated through Moses.

Verse 3, all ate the same spiritual food, the manna. Verse 4, all drank the same spiritual drink. Paul's point is that all the people of Israel experienced the incredible blessings poured out by God.

[9 : 00] Indeed, just as all Christians have been enriched through the gospel, whether strong Corinthians or weak brothers, that's true. But along with the emphasis of all receiving these blessings, we also have verse 5, where Paul says, Notice too that Paul is bringing this reality closer and closer to the Corinthians.

Perhaps they might have wanted to say, yes, Paul, but they were Old Testament believers. We're triumphant New Testament Christians. We're not baptized into Moses.

We, we're baptized into Christ. We don't eat manna. We eat the Lord's Supper. We have Christ. We have the sacraments. We live in the age of fulfillment, the glorious gospel age.

We can't be compared to them. Well, look at verse 4. As they passed through the sea, as the cloud followed them, as they ate and drank in the wilderness, how was it that they were doing these things?

They were doing them through Christ. As they ate and drank these spiritual foods, they were feeding on Christ in their hearts by faith in the same way that you are when you take part in communion.

[10 : 38] The whole experience of Israelites' rescue from Egypt was a rescue that came through Christ. It was a real rescue, laced with real gospel promises.

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

What a shock that is to a complacent Christian or a complacent church like Corinth. Our great fathers of the faith had a great experience of the very same gospel as us, but almost all were left as boons in the wilderness.

And if that wasn't enough to chide a proud Corinthian, look at the astonishing claim that follows. Verse 6. Now, these things took place as examples for us.

Now, that isn't to denigrate the real experience of rescue that happened. It was a real rescue through Christ. But how pointed then that verse 11, these things have been written down for our instruction.

[11 : 51] There's no hiding from this. It is here that Paul diagnoses exactly what is going on with the Corinthians. Verse 6. Israel were an example that we might not desire evil as they did.

And then look at the specific evils that Paul draws out. There are four events that Paul highlights from the wilderness days, and every one of them is something that these mighty Corinthians were guilty of.

The first one, verse 7. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were. And he quotes from the most famous case of idolatry in the Bible. Exodus 32.

The golden calf. And notice even the phrase that he quotes from there. They sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

They had a meal in the presence of an idol. And in their joyous playing before, they were paying homage to it. Sitting down to a meal with such things gives them credence.

[12 : 59] It was at this point that God told Moses to go down the mountain because they'd corrupted themselves. They'd worshipped the calf. And his wrath was going to burn hot against them. Number one, sitting down to eat and drink with idols.

Well, isn't that what the Corinthians are doing here? Guilty. Number two, verse 8. We see unashamed sexual immorality.

The 23,000 struck down as a reference to the Moabite women in Numbers 25. Israel began to whore with the daughters of Moab. And it was utterly unashamed, happening in full sight of the congregation.

Well, turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 5. And we read, It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not tolerated even among the pagans.

For a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? This triumphant Corinthian church tolerated grave sexual sin.

[14 : 18] Number two, guilty again. Number three, verse 9. We must not put Christ to the test. And the serpents here is a reference to Numbers 21.

The people in the wilderness took their eyes off what was ahead. They took their eyes off the promised land and all that awaited them there. Instead, they choose to focus on the present over the future.

Saying, why have you brought us out of Egypt? At least there, we had food. This food is loathsome. Turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 4.

Verse 8. And we read, Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich.

Without us, you've become kings. And Paul goes on to show that the Corinthians live for this present age. They claim resurrection for now over Paul's cross-shaped life.

[15 : 24] Putting Christ to the test. Cherishing the present over all that's promised. Number three, guilty again. Number four, verse 10. God's people grumbling.

And grumbling particularly against their God-given leaders. The reference here is Numbers 14. Where the Lord's people say, We don't want Moses and Aaron anymore.

Let's appoint a new leader. And go back to Egypt. We hate the leaders God has given us. So much that we'd rather go back to our enslavement. A dissatisfaction with a God-appointed leader.

Surely this isn't a sin that happens after the wilderness. Surely not still. Well, isn't that in many ways what this whole letter is about? The Corinthians are guilty here too.

Why else would Paul have to defend himself in chapter 9, verse 3? And so Paul says, These things happened to them as an example.

[16 : 25] And they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. You can't read this and think that such a warning doesn't apply today. In fact, the strength with which Paul puts this means it applies today even more than to them.

They are an example to us who live in the age of fulfillment. We are more blessed than them. Remember the great phrase from Hebrews, How much more? How much more do we have this side of Christ?

The Corinthians get that we're richly blessed. But what they don't want to accept is that such incredible freedom and blessing in Christ comes with the same ramping up of how much more they have to listen and obey.

The Corinthians have taken all of their freedom and so sought to enjoy it that has led them into the very same position as those who got to the cusp of the promised land but didn't make it in.

Despite greater clarity on the gospel, the Corinthians are back with the golden calf. In contrast to the Corinthians, Paul disciplines his body so that he wouldn't be disqualified.

[17 : 46] He limited himself. He didn't see his Christian freedoms as things to be enjoyed and plundered for himself in this life. To treat our freedoms like that will lead to this very same ruin.

But there is a way out. And we'll see what that is after Laura comes to sing to us. Come, my fount. Notice the words in the last verse.

Let your goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee, prune to wonder. Lord, I feel it prune to leave the God I love. Come, my fount.

Come, my fount of every passage. When my hand is sick, my prayers. Dreams of mercy never ceasing.

Over songs of lightest praise. Teach me some melodious sonnet.

[19 : 05] Some my angels and some all. Praise the night I'm next upon it.

Night of thy redeeming love. Here I raise my enemies and forever by thy help I've come.

And I hope by thy good pleasure save me till I arrive at home. Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of gold.

Eater as skin be found in you. Hold me with his precious love.

Lord, I hope by thy grace.

[20 : 41] From you, Lord, I pray for God. A trusting love. Shall I have told you?

O turn and seal it for thy Lord's ■■■.

Well, despite the shadow of the golden calf looming large of the Corinthians, Paul says there is a father who can help.

Verses 12 to 13, a father who can help. So, God's people will never find themselves in a position where it is impossible for them to be faithful to him.

The pointed warning to the Corinthians is verse 12. Let anyone thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall.

[21 : 56] Paul's saying that's you, Corinth. You think you're strong. You think you're standing. But take heed. The Corinthians are the ones who have knowledge.

They are the strong. Well, Paul is saying it is far better to tread very carefully with things that could end up destroying us than to insist on all of our freedoms.

As Terry McCutcheon often quotes, when Daniel got out of the lion's den, he didn't go back for his bonnet. And so, with our freedoms, Paul cautions us.

Back to the example of alcohol. Paul, yes, you're free to drink alcohol. But if that has previously ensnared you or has wreaked havoc in your family, why take the risk?

If it's a fight to restrain how much you have, if one glass becomes two, becomes four, then it's worth pausing to reflect. Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

[23 : 00] The Corinthians didn't think that they were in danger. But Paul's diagnosis is devastating. You are idolaters.

They didn't even realize their plight. Whilst they may think they're not worshipping the idols in the temple, they certainly aren't worshipping God as they should.

They're worshipping themselves. They put themselves in real danger. Think of another example like this, one of those old conundrums that students often wrestle with.

Are we free to do it? Is it wise to do it? Should I join my mates on a night out at the club? Well, I want to foster relationships with them and be a good friend to introduce them to the gospel.

But it confronts me with so much alcohol. And it's all in an environment heavily geared towards sex. Should I go? Well, Paul would add into any discussion about that.

[24 : 03] He would say, I discipline my body. I keep it under control lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified. He says, let anyone who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.

What is our freedom for? It can be very easy for things we can enjoy, to become things we won't live without. And really an idol is anything that usurps our allegiance to Christ above all else.

Health, careers, lifestyle, romance. All kinds of things can overtake him in our priorities.

But Israel's history is a stark warning against complacency. Verse 13. Paul says, new temptation has overtaken the Corinthians that is not common to man.

They want to think that they're special. They want to think they're different. But they aren't. Paul is clear. Christians don't get a free pass, no matter who you are. They don't face a more difficult challenge than any other church.

[25 : 17] They aren't so special to God's plans for the world that he'll turn a blind eye. When a church or Christians begin to think that they've cracked it, that we're a cut above because I've done Corn Hill or because our minister speaks at all the conferences or because we've got the fruitful ministry amongst all the students.

When a church begins to think that they are in the elite, it often follows that the temptation to excuse things becomes very real. I'm sure we can hear the argument in our own minds.

I've given a lot of my time and money to church recently. The ministries I'm involved in are flourishing. No one else knows how hard it is for me at home, what my spouse deprives me of, how much pressure I'm under at work.

If other people had to put up with what I have to put up with, well, they'd have cracked weeks ago. Verse 13, God is faithful.

He will not let us be tempted beyond our ability. No circumstance will ever be too much for us to say no to you. That's worth remembering.

[26 : 33] As long as God is God, he will never put us in a circumstance in which we're unable to be faithful to him. Now, for the Corinthians, with the idol temple, they may think that the cost of avoiding that temple is too much.

Society revolves around it. How can I live in Corinth and not go to the social scene, to the eateries, to the place where we make our business contacts? I'd be cut out.

I'd be a nobody. Well, is the cost too much? Paul insists that it isn't.

God's faithfulness always includes providing for us the way of escape. That's what he says in verse 13. But notice what Paul's doing here.

His diagnosis is damning. The Corinthians are up to their elbows and all that ruined the wilderness generation. But Paul isn't point scoring. He's pastoring. Look back at his tune in verse 1.

[27 : 40] He says, I do not want you to be unaware, brothers. His tune is conciliatory, gracious, despite the shocking diagnosis. He wants to fill up what is lacking in them.

And it's clear that by calling them brothers, he isn't treating them as if they're beyond the peel, unrescuable. And now in verse 13, he's encouraging them to take the way out.

He's saying, take heed. He's saying there's a way out. He's saying, we have a father who restores and forgives. We have a God who's faithful.

So take heed of his warning. And it's true throughout the Bible that a pastoral warning is always a mercy because it gives an opportunity to respond.

God's word of warning is a kindness to us. It is his silence that we must be terrified of. He will provide the way of escape.

[28 : 42] But the problem for the Corinthians is they're not going to like it because it comes in the form of the cross. It is basically choosing the way of the cross.

Accept the cross's power, that is forgiveness at Jesus' expense, only through grace, and adopt the cross's pattern, the denial of self for the saving of souls.

And the rest of chapter 10 spells out the way of escape for the Corinthians in this particular issue. We'll cover the first of those this week and then the rest next week.

And so he goes on to say in verses 14 to 22 that the two-timers must choose. The two-timers must choose. God will not share his people's affections and loyalties.

That was the phrase that was used when I was at school of someone who was dating two girls, the two-timer. And Paul is saying that cannot be the case for a Christian.

[29 : 47] You cannot have idols and the Lord. A truly spiritual church prioritizes faithfulness over freedom. So verse 14, flee from idolatry.

Don't even have a hint of it. Run away from it. Run far from it. You see, the whole issue of food offered to idols for the Corinthians was an opportunity to have a go at Paul.

The Corinthians had their theology in chapter 8. We know that an idol has no real existence. We know that there's no God but one. And for them, that was the issue solved.

And so really, what they're wanting to do is take issue with Paul's cross-ship pattern. But whilst their theology was true, it was horribly misapplied, both for their weaker brother's benefit and their own.

You see, it's possible to be utterly convinced that you're in the right theologically, but be in cahoots with the devil. The key word in these verses is participation.

[30 : 56] Verse 16, participation in the blood of Christ. Participation in the body of, the blood and body of Christ. Verse 17, partake of the one bread.

Verse 18, participants in the altar. Verse 20, participants with demons. And the argument is basically, think about communion. Think about the Lord's Supper.

What is it that you're doing when you celebrate that? If that sacrament is really a participation in Christ's work, if it really seals to us the union that we have with Jesus, then sitting down to a meal can be something incredibly significant.

Verse 17, our common participation in one bread shows our one-bodiedness. Verse 18, Israel understood the same thing about participation.

And so verse 19, it isn't that the food in the idol temple does anything. It isn't evil food. It still belongs to God. The problem is that verse 20, behind those mute, dumb, silly idols are demons.

[32 : 16] So the first way of escape in relation to going to the temple, we're not talking about the market at the minute, we're talking specifically about the temple. The first way of escape is to flee, run away from idols.

You see, in Corinth, when cousin Jenny had her wedding at the idol temple, they sat down to eat and drink in the presence of an idol, and they ruse up to play in the presence of the same thing.

And everyone else present accepted what was going on and understood what sitting there meant. They were thinking Poseidon or whoever it was for the food.

They were celebrating together in homage to that false god. And everyone watching would assume that you, too, were paying that same homage.

Just like if you're at a football match and you happen to get a ticket for the opposition stand, you might be supporting your team. But as you sit amongst all the opposition fans, they're going to be assuming you're one of them.

[33 : 20] And the team you support, well, they're not going to know where your loyalty lies. But Paul says it's even more than just looking like you're not being faithful to God.

He says, idols aren't real, but demons are. There are evil forces at work in this world, and so anything that amounts to worship, anything that involves an understanding of worship that isn't of Jesus is a problem for a Christian.

because that is having supper with Satan. The participation language used of communion is the same language used here for the demons.

Being involved in anything that is at worship with something that is not Jesus is participating with demons. It's sharing a table with demons.

And so, in the most direct ways for us now, what does that mean? Well, it certainly means we need to be careful about joining in any kind of worship service that has Muslims praying in it, or Buddhist meditation as part of it, or even joining with so-called interdenominational or ecumenical Christian services that have people who believe in a Jesus that is so very far removed from the Jesus of the Bible.

[34 : 42] that is worshipping something that has Satan behind it. But, of course, there are more implications from this.

The devil and his minions want nothing more than for Christians to fall in love with things that aren't God, to find fulfillment in things that aren't God, to shape and fashion our lives on things that aren't God.

Satan wants us to wrap our souls around anything that isn't our rock. He doesn't care what it is that we love.

He will use things that we have great freedom to enjoy. Gold, gin, girls, glory, glamour.

He'll even use your garden if it'll work. Paul wants to be clear. Idols aren't real, but Satan is at work. He has real power and he wants nothing more than to ruin us.

[35 : 47] So with all of our freedoms, all that we can choose, all that isn't clearly off limits, we're able to enjoy it. There is great freedom and often these things will be absolutely fine.

We can enjoy them, but Paul wants to say, let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Far, far better to be a weaker brother than to think you're stronger than you are. God always gives a way of escape, but sometimes it is truly costly.

Sometimes it will mean proving beyond all doubt to the world around that you belong to him, that your loyalty is for him above anything and anyone else.

That can be very costly indeed. The way of escape here, verse 21, you cannot drink the cup of demons and the cup of the Lord. You cannot eat with Christ and his people and eat with demons.

[36 : 52] You need to choose. You can't have both. And Paul's message to the Corinthians is that thinking yourself strong is a perilous place to be.

Taking advantage of any and every freedom in this life because you think you can, because you think you can handle it, that comes with a warning. verse 22, shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?

If we won't relinquish any right or freedom, what does it say about our love for the Lord? Are we stronger than he? That's how Paul finishes the chapter.

And his message for us is that a truly spiritual church prioritizes faithfulness and the church prioritizes faithfulness over freedom. Let's pray.

Father, grant us the grace to live for you above all the fancies of this world, all the things that clamor for our attention.

[38 : 07] And may our hearts desire above all else to glorify you. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.