

18. The examples not to follow

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Let's review what we learned previously:

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul established two principles. First, an idol is really nothing, and it was fine for the Corinthian Christians who understood this to act according to this knowledge, in regard to themselves. Second, that as Christians, love is more important to us than knowledge. So even though I may "know" eating meat sacrificed to an idol is alright for myself, if it causes my brother to stumble, I should not do it, because the love for my brother should triumph over what I want, as our Lord Jesus shows us by His example.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul showed how important it is for a Christian to give up their "rights," just as Paul gave up his "right" to be supported by his own preaching of the Gospel, so some of the Corinthian Christians must sometimes give up their "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols, based on the principle of love towards a weaker brother. At the end of chapter 9, Paul shows how a Christian must be willing to give up some things – even "good" things – for the sake of winning the race God has set before us, or else we will become disqualified from the competition.

This morning, the apostle Paul is going to use the bad examples of the Hebrews in the wilderness, he urges the Corinthian Christians to stick to the guidelines God gave them to live by so that they may not fall into temptations.

A. PRIVILEGES EXPERIENCED BY THE HEBREWS

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were (1) under the cloud, (2) all passed through the sea, (3) all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (4) all ate the same spiritual food, and (5) all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

From v1 to 11, the apostle Paul takes us back to the wilderness of Sinai where the Hebrews wandered around 40 long years to make his points – learning from others' bad examples.

The apostle points 5 things from the past that we should take a note of them:

1) Under the cloud – The cloud he was referring to is the "pillar of cloud by day" and "pillar of fire by night" that led them in their journey to the Promised Land. It was God's concept of a night light. It was a constant, ready reminder of God's glory and presence. – Exodus 13:21

2) All passed through the sea – Unless these 2 million people were in a gigantic submarine, they should have drowned. Yet, because of God's intervention, not even their feet got wet. – Exodus 14:21-22

3) All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea – It is easy for someone to be confused here. Moses didn't have a massive baptismal service for the 2 million people. The word "baptize" comes from the Greek word "baptizo," which carries the idea of identifying with something else. In Paul's days if you wanted to have a garment dyed in a different color, you would take it to a merchant who would "baptize" it – dip it completely to change its identity. The Hebrews had been spiritually dipped into a union with God, Moses, and his leadership.

4) All ate the same spiritual food – Of course, this spiritual food is referring to the manna that God supplied for the Hebrews for 40 years – 6 days a week, so that they never went hungry. – Exodus 16:4-36

5) All drank the same spiritual drink. They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ – With the food came the privilege of God-sent water. Here is another great illustration of the pre-incarnated presence of the Lord Jesus. Paul did not leave us to wonder what the rock represented. He tells us that it was the presence of Jesus. He provided them with all the water they needed. – Exodus 17:1-7

Israel, even had ancient versions of the two Christian rituals we do to this day: baptism and communion. The early Christians considered communion and baptism to be an “oath of allegiance” into Jesus Christ.

Just a side note, at no extra charge: Moses and the people were in the desert, but there was no Walmart or Costco. They had to be fed, and feeding 2 to 3 million people requires a lot of food. Let’s think about the logistic situation:

The people needed 2,000 tons – 4 million pounds – of food each day. To bring that much food each day, would require 3 freight trains each a mile long.

In the desert they needed firewood to cook and keep warm at night. Each day this would take 4,000 tons – 8 million pounds – of wood that requires 6 more freight trains, each a mile long.

Of course, they also needed water. If they only had enough to drink and wash a few clothes and dishes, it would take 11 million gallons each day, and 370 freight trains with tank cars, just to bring water.

And then another thing: They had to get across the Red Sea in one night. If they went on a narrow path, double file, the people’s line would be 800 miles long and would require 35 days and nights to get through. So, God made an opening in the Red Sea 3 miles wide so that they could walk 5,000 abreast to get over in one night.

Each time they camped at the end of the day, they needed a campground two-thirds the size of the State of Rhode Island, about 750 square miles. The Lord provided all these for them for 40 years.

With all of these in mind, do you still think that our Almighty God would have a problem meeting your individual needs?

B. LESSONS FOR THE CORINTHIANS AND US

1 Corinthians 10:5-11 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. 6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that (1) we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 (2) 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.” 8 (3) Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 (4) 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. 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.

You'd think that the people as blessed as the Israelis would have responded to our Lord with absolute thankful hearts and obedience. No, it was not the case in the wilderness. Before we think that they were terrible, let me ask all of us this question: "When was the last time I was truly thankful to the Lord for everything He provided for me, as well as not allowed to have for my own benefit according to His wisdom?"

Only two men from the adult generation which left Egypt came into the Promised Land – Joshua and Caleb. Two people out of two million people, it was the longest, saddest funeral procession in human history. The almost two million graves on the windswept hills of the Sinai desert were grim reminders of the consequence of the first generation's disobedience to the second generation of the Israelis who were about to enter the Promise Land, as well as all of us.

Here, again, Paul gives us 4 lessons to learn from the Hebrews' bad examples:

1) We should not lust after evil things as they also lusted – Being ungrateful for what we have and craving for the things we should not have is simply a sin. The Israelis had been overexposed to supernatural miracles, yet they lacked the proper response. They were dissatisfied and ungrateful. They kept longing to go back to Egypt where they were nothing more than slaves.

The majority of us are blessed beyond what other world population could ever imagine. I know, I came from one of those countries 37 years ago. Sometimes I catch myself acting like a spoiled rotten over-blessed brat to the Lord.

2) We should not become idolaters – Idol is anything that seizes the adoration that belongs to our Lord. It can be a spouse, a child, a friend, a parent, a job, our money, even a ministry – anything that takes God's seat on the throne in our hearts.

3) We should not commit sexual immorality – The Israelites failed in that they could not say "no" to their carnal desires, nor should we lust after evil things as they also lusted.

Paul was referring about the incident in Numbers 25. The Israelites were having sexual immorality with the Moabite women. According to the Book of Numbers, we are told that 24,000 died from the judgment of God. This is one of the areas of the Bible where the critics of the Bible go haywire. They say that they found a contradiction in the Bible. No, the total number of deaths was 24,000. But did you notice that Paul is clearly declaring 23,000 deaths in one day, not total? The Bible is accurate.

4) We should not tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; we should not complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. – Numbers 16:41, 17:5 and 21:4-9 describe the incident where, in response to the bitter and relentless complaining of the people, God sent fiery serpents among the Hebrews.

Whenever we complain about the situations we are in, good or bad, they were provided by approval of God. In other words, if we complain about them, it is same as we are complaining against His providential will. That is an insult to Him and a testing of His patience. Yes, our God is extremely patient, but His patience has a limit. So, don't push it.

In v11 the apostle Paul wants to show us through the Israelis' examples that having privileges doesn't guarantee successful living.

It has been said that people with good hindsight learn from their own mistakes; but people with better hindsight learn from other people's mistakes. We have a greater responsibility because we can learn from the Israel's mistakes.

C. DON'T BE COCKY

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Don't think that you won't make mistakes like the Israelites. We all have done them and we most likely will again.

It has been said that you can tell a lot about a man by who his enemies are. The same is true for us. We are no longer opposing God, but we now have a new, very powerful foe, and he is described in the Bible as the devil. The devil, of course, is not happy with the fact that he has lost one of his own. He is angry that you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. Now you have become a potential threat to his kingdom as well.

The closer you stay with the Lord, the safer you are, because you stand in the work that Jesus did on the cross. Don't try to engage the devil in your own ability because he can chew you up and spit you out. But if you stand in the Lord and in His power and stay as close to Him as you can, then you will be safe.

D. NOT BEYOND WHAT WE CAN BEAR

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

We often want to excuse our particular tempting circumstances as "very unique" and a "special exception." But God reminds us that our temptation is not unique – many other men and women of God have faced the same or similar temptation, and have found the strength in God to overcome the temptation. God promises to limit it according to our capability to endure it – according to our capability as we rely on Him, not relying on ourselves.

God has promised to not only limit our temptation, but also to provide a way of escape in tempting times. He will never force us to use the way of escape, but he will make the way of escape. It's up to us to take God's way of escape.

The temptation itself is not a sin. Though it comes from the evil ones, but it does not have the power to overcome us. That's right, you heard me right. Temptation cannot destroy anyone, just as a bait cannot kill a fish. The bite of bait leads to death. Now, who does the act of biting? It is not demons, certainly it is not God. It is you and me. We take bites of temptations of baits that come from the evil. So, whom should we blame for the result? How can we avoid taking a bite of the temptation we face day in and day out?

Psalms 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Put the Word of God in your hearts, you will be strong with His strength to resist temptations that come your way.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Let's learn from others' mistakes and not repeat them with God's strength in our lives.

2) Let's put the Word of God in our hearts, then we will be strong with His strength to resist temptations that come our way.