

“Be Careful ...”

1 Corinthians 10:1-14

When we were growing up my dad had this annoying [to us] habit of saying to us almost every time we were going somewhere ‘Be careful.’ “Yes dad” we would reply as teenagers and even grown adults with a hint of annoyance in our voice. But, as we grew up emotionally (as well as physically) we knew it was out of love he said these things because he wanted to see us come back in one piece!

As we pick up Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in Ch. 10, Paul says to be careful. And I’m sure some of the believers there were getting a little tired and annoyed that Paul is still talking about meat sacrificed to idols. It started in Ch. 8 where he first laid down the correct theological perspective that there are no idols, therefore meat sacrificed to an idol really is not an issue. However, when you grew up in this idolatrous practice and some of the other immoral practices that sometimes accompanied these gatherings, it isn’t easy at first to understand these things theologically and practically.

Paul then turns to the supposedly ‘mature’ theologically and tells them out of love to be patient with those who don’t see it that way and prefer not to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols because to them it’s a sin against their conscience. But Paul wants to expand that to any area we feel strongly free to do that isn’t clearly stipulated in Scripture, that other believers may disagree with us on. We all have preferences. We all have practices we feel strongly about that we wrongly make an issue of fellowship about, when God doesn’t. This is when we use knowledge as a weapon to hurt people, instead of building each other up.

As an example of choosing love over knowledge, Paul gives his personal example in Ch. 9 that even though as an apostle he had every right to expect to receive some kind of financial benefit from teaching and preaching, he chose not to in case that may have been a stumbling block for a few who thought Paul might be doing this for financial gain. A false charge his opponents made that some had listened to.

And this became his philosophy of ministry. Out of love, he would limit his freedoms not to offend but to identify with Jews or Gentiles or weak spiritually or strong spiritually and minister to them out of their need, not from his superior knowledge base. Why? To keep himself humble and focused on the prize of being faithfully rewarded at the finish line by Jesus. Because, as he shows us in another example from the Old Testament in Ch.10, not everyone finished well. Like the generation of Israelites who experienced the miraculous exodus and the amazing blessings God provided in the wilderness.

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Notice Paul emphasizes how “all” those who were part of Israel experienced all these blessings yet God was not pleased with “most of them”. Here’s Paul’s ‘be careful’. He’s comparing Israel at the exodus with a local body of believers who

Are All Blessed by our Union with Christ **(10:1-5)**

We know Paul is making an analogy to believers in Christ from the Israelites in the exodus because of v.6,

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were

By the way, here's a very strong argument against those teachers today who say we don't need the Old Testament. How often do New Testament writers quote the Old Testament? Almost every letter. How can one know what Paul is referring to here if we don't read the Old Testament?

Paul is making an analogy with the Exodus generation who were all physically 'saved' by God's miraculous grace, who took God's blessings for granted, with the body of believers united to Christ saved by God's miraculous gift of faith by grace.

Don't take your salvation for granted (vv.1-4)

Paul lists five ways the Israelites were blessed through God's salvation. They were all under the cloud. God's visible presence was with them all the time. As nice as that would be, we do have it better; we have God's invisible presence dwelling inside us, the Spirit of Christ. He's always with us.

"They all passed through the sea" – they were delivered from the enemy physically. We have it better; we are eternally delivered from Satan's power once we're saved. Secure in the Father's hand.

² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

Baptized is used in its identification sense. As believers when we're baptized we're baptized because we identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The Israelites identified with their Saviour, Moses - a type of Christ [read Hebrews] – but we identify with the Messiah Himself, Jesus.

. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Paul is doing a little bit of spiritual gymnastics here because he is alluding to the bread and the cup of communion. How do we know that? That's where he goes in 10:16 and in Ch. 11 he talks to them about their taking communion for granted and not exercising love by not waiting for those who can't get there until later in the day.

The manna was 'spiritual' food. It was miraculously provided by God every day. Jesus compared Himself to manna, as a gift from God who needs to be received. Communion is a gift and reminder of our salvation in Christ. How was Jesus the rock that provided water? If God was with the Israelites all the time in the wilderness then so was Jesus. There were two instances where Moses struck the rock and God provided water. Once at the beginning of the exodus to the first generation in Ex. 17 and the other 39 years later, to the next generation of Israelites who would go into the promised land. He was there at the beginning and the end. Jesus is the visible demonstration of the presence of God. Jesus also called Himself the water of life in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well.

Don't take these comparisons too far. Paul was making the point that God's people before Christ were miraculously saved, provided for, and had His presence with Him and we have it even better than they did after Christ came. But 'most of them' took this salvation for granted. And they would find out that just because manna still showed up every day and God's presence could be seen every day and God provided for them with water when needed and lifetime wear-proof sandals –

God's blessing is not a guarantee of His approval (v.5)

Where is it in the Bible that we read?

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

Ex. 34:6 after Moses interceded with God when these same Israelites who saw all the miraculous plagues and the pillar of fire/cloud and the splitting of the Red Sea. And yet God was slow to anger and they did not die right away. Many of them lived for many years experiencing God's daily blessing until He saw fit to let them die.

While we need to be careful we don't equate our physical circumstances directly as a sign of God's approval on our life, we also know that He is very patient and slow to anger and when we persist in sin without any repercussions, don't think God doesn't see it. He's slow to anger because He wants us to repent. And if we don't we can anticipate somehow He may and can withdraw His blessing from our lives. Even Moses would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his disrespect of God, hitting the rock in anger the second time, when he was just supposed to speak to it. This is the point Paul makes here as we move on to v.6

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

Paul is imploring the Corinthian believers who lack love while ignoring the weaker brothers/sisters in order to practice their freedoms, to

Learn from Past Sins **(10:6-10)**

Preferably learn from the sins of others and not your own. Paul listed 5 privileges the Israelites of the exodus had and now he lists 5 ways they lost sight of their privileges and sinned against God. *"Their dead bodies were scattered over the desert"* because they listened to ten of the ten spies who agreed with Joshua and Caleb that the land was good but counseled against going in out of fear. Essentially they disobeyed God – the same God who demonstrated miracle after miracle to get them out of Egypt – whom they failed to believe could do the same thing against a different enemy.

Paul lists 5 ways Israel sinned so that the believers in Corinth would not repeat, which based on their loveless attitudes in practicing their privileges, Paul warns

Don't let your freedoms deceive you (vv.6-8)

How? The first sin Paul lists is the craving evil things. The NIV generalizes it by saying 'set their hearts on evil things' but the translations that use the word 'craved evil things' deliberately make the connection to Num. 11 when the people 'craved' meat and God gave so much that they gorged themselves on it and God struck them with a plague and many died. And the place they buried them was called the Graves of Craving – the same Greek word in the LXX and here.

Their craving was evil because they complained about the miraculous manna and wanted to go back to their former lives in Egypt. V.7 refers to Ex. 32 when the Israelites made the golden calf and worshipped the golden calf as well as committed adultery. Just like the idolatry of the Corinthian's day. Paul's not being very subtle here. He's basically telling the believers who had no problem with eating meat sacrificed to idols, to be careful. Don't let your freedom slip you back into the lifestyle that goes with it; idolatry and adultery. Watch your 'cravings/desires'. Don't let your freedoms deceive you and turn you back to godlessness.

Two more sinful incidents are mentioned from wilderness wanderings in vv.9-10. When they put the Lord to the test in Num. 21 and He sent snakes to bite many, some dying while others were spared by looking up at Moses' staff with the bronze snake on it. And Num. 16 when Korah and a few others led a rebellion against God's appointed leaders Moses and Aaron. And God opened a hole in the ground and they were swallowed alive. Why does Paul put these two together? Because some of the Corinthians were grumbling against Paul, God's appointed leader and in essence questioning God's plan.

Don't complain about God's plan (vv.9-10)

Paul was saying. Yet we do too. We grumble and complain about some of the things in our life. About negative circumstances, unpleasant experiences, the way society acts, the government, church even. While no one is perfect (including ourselves) God is sovereign over our lives. We did not earn the right to be created and have a life in the time and place where we live. We have it pretty good where we are in this world. Complaining is so easy to do. We don't even have to work at it. It just comes ... naturally. Our old sinful nature. Our new nature in Christ is supposed to be encouraging, Christ-like, God-glorifying. Be careful Paul says.

¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹²

We live in the church age, post resurrection. We're not waiting for Jesus' first coming, we're waiting for His return and the establishment of His rule on earth. We win. And that age is next in God's prophetic program. So, how can we who have even more privileges than the Exodus generation, fall into sinful habits like the Exodus generation. So be warned Paul says:

Guard Against Complacency (10:11-14)

We on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come must remember that

With more knowledge comes more accountability (v.11)

We don't have to look outside for a cloud to wonder if God is with us; We were sealed by the Holy Spirit when we believed in Christ (Eph. 1:13-14). We're not still looking for a Saviour, we're

following Jesus Himself who already came, died, and rose. We remind ourselves of these things every time we all share the same spiritual food and drink of communion. The way the world is going, Jesus could return in our lifetime. We will become complacent if we ignore God's blessings around us and complain about how bad the world is, compared to how lost the world is because they don't know Jesus could come back any time. The fulfillment of the ages has come upon us. The finish line is close. Don't get complacent.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 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.

I believe Paul was really challenging the more mature believers here, who are mature enough to make practical life choices based on a healthy understanding of Scripture but be careful that you don't let your freedoms lure you into sin. If we think we are standing firm, make sure we're standing firm on Christ and not ourselves.

All of us are capable of falling (v.12)

Sadly, I read this week of another prominent pastor, this one in Texas, who had to resign from his church because of an inappropriate relationship with a woman in her 20's and he was 73. Well-respected, written many books but he fell. Each one of us are capable of falling into serious sin. I've been here long enough to have seen people from this church fall into sin and instead of repenting continue in that life. Paul's saying, God knows we are all capable of falling so He makes Himself available to us and makes a way out. None of us will come to God one day and say that temptation was too much. I had no choice. No, the well of God's mercy and grace is very, very deep.

God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

God is with us so we can be victorious over sin (vv.13-14)

God was with Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness. Every day He provided for them and met their needs. That hasn't changed. We need to acknowledge His presence and provision each day in our lives. That will reduce the grumbings we have sometimes about God's plans. That will help us check our freedoms and preferences against other's freedoms and preferences and choose out of love to not be a stumbling block to others. Paul tells the way to escape temptations is to flee.

¹⁴ *Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.*

Put distance between you and the temptation. We may have to physically separate ourselves from a situation, from a person, from a screen, from the fridge – whatever tempts us. Don't deceive yourself into thinking you can handle this in your own strength. Pray and look for the way out so that you can be victorious. Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.

It's amazing how Jesus' model for us to pray touches on a lot of these themes. God is holy, we are not. Jesus' kingdom is soon coming. God provides for our daily needs. We need to be gracious to one another and forgive them when they sin against us. We need help in temptations because the evil one wants us to fall. Let's close with a recitation of the Lord's prayer, not just to rhyme it off out of memory but to actually pray it back to God, giving thanks for His provision and asking for help in our temptations because He is sovereign over our lives:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.*

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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