

Passover and I Corinthians 10

Passover

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We're going to be spending some time in I Corinthians because it addresses itself to problems within a congregation that had grown careless through pride and lethargy.

What is so interesting about this is that the book of I Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church just prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread and Passover. The problems that were listed there were extant in that congregation and they were things (at least some, maybe even many in the congregation) they were going to have to resolve to some degree, repent of (maybe not completely overcome), but they were going to have to be addressed before they took the next Passover, if they were going to take the Passover rightly discerning the Lord's body.

Paul draws on the history of the Israelites to use them as illustrations for the problems that these people were having. That is what we're going to do because my purpose in this sermon is to bring to your attention some of the problems that our forefathers, our ancestors, had while they were in the wilderness.

Is it possible that we, the modern day descendants of these Israelites, might have the same problems they had? Has human nature changed over the centuries? Are you on a spiritual pilgrimage? Of course you are. Is your life at times subjected to the same kind of pressures and forces that these people's lives were? Maybe not exactly, maybe not specifically because we're not walking in a desert, having hot winds blow in our face, wondering where the water's coming from. But in principle, the problems are the same.

We go through periods of privation. We go through periods of time when we think the pressure is too hot, that we have been denied by God the kind of access to the things that we really desire to have. There are times when we are tempted by things out in the world that are habits that we are trying to give up. There are things in our lives that are so similar to what these people went through. I think it would be good to go through these things and maybe it will provide a basis for you examining yourself prior to this Passover.

I feel the things that Paul writes are lessons of vital importance to you and me, and at times the things that he is implying—things that might be part of your life—are down right alarming. I mean that.

Let's begin in I Corinthians 10. This is going to be the basis of our operations for the next hour or so. We're going to go first through the first five verses. I'm going to read all the way through that, then we'll go back and expound some of the things that are in there as we begin to lay a foundation for this message.

I Corinthians 10:1-5 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be

unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

That last phrase is the one I think is down right alarming. I may as well begin there in verse 5 and then we'll go back to verse 1. How many people of those 2 to 2 ½ million people who came out of Egypt under Moses made it into the Promised Land? Only two, along with their families made it.

When Paul wrote this he used very vivid terminology and he literally means that all across the desert their bodies were scattered. In other words, they fell aside as they went along the way and they did not make it. They were buried where they fell. The Israelites left a trail of graves all the way from Egypt, through the Sinai, and up into the borders of Israel.

I don't foresee anything like that occurring to us. God is working out something different with us than He was with them. With them He was establishing a type. With them He was setting examples. With them, we can look at what they did and we can learn from what occurred to them. With us, we have the Holy Spirit. They did not have it.

When it says in verses 1 and 2 that they all went under the cloud and they were baptized into Moses, they weren't literally baptized in the same sense as we are, but they did pass between the waters. When they went through the Red Sea they walked on dry land, but the water was completely surrounding them. The Apostle Paul picks on that as a type of the baptism we go through.

They were buried into Moses as it were. They became partners in the Old Covenant. Moses, who was the mediator of that covenant, was a type of Jesus Christ.

What this is—as we begin to read through these first five verses that also adds to the alarm that we need to have ringing in our minds regarding where we stand in regard to this way of life—is that here is decisive proof (most of it contained in the books of Exodus and Numbers) that though a person goes physically through all the ordinances, it doesn't mean a thing spiritually.

You see where it says, "*They were under the cloud, they all passed through the sea, they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; they ate the same spiritual food [in other words they were sitting at Sabbath services listening to Moses preach] and they all drank of that same spiritual drink for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them and that Rock was Jesus Christ?*"

They were in the presence of Jesus Christ. He was in the cloud. He was in the pillar of fire. He was there. He was the Angel that was leading them, the Messenger of God who was leading them through their pilgrimage on to the Promised Land.

The alarming warning is: One can still lose salvation if one is living a life of divided loyalties.

That is the message here—that a person can lose his salvation if he is living a life of divided loyalties.

I Corinthians 10:6-11 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 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" Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition [for our teaching, for our learning], upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Five major sins of the Israelite people are listed here. We're going to find as we go through this that there was really, in one sense, only one major sin. But the others led to this major sin. That major sin was idolatry. The other sins they committed were just a step that took them into idolatry.

You might say that what we're examining ourselves for in this sermon are those specific areas that lead to idolatry. Remember, that's the first and great commandment. You shall have no other god before God and we are to love Him with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our being. That is the first and great commandment and that is the one upon which all other laws rest.

We have here lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting God, and murmuring. One of the things we are going to see is that the Corinthian church had a problem that was not listed here. It's listed a little bit later. It's something that one almost has to read between the lines in order to actually see it. But once you begin to see it, it begins to become very clear. Their problem was a careless presumption that had its roots in pride. They were elevating themselves above their brethren and that careless presumption that they were all right led them to treat their fellow man in a way that they ought not to have done. What he is implying is that behind this whole thing is idolatry. They themselves were the gods they were worshipping.

What we're going to do for a while is look at each one of the actual occurrences as Paul lists them. We're going to learn from them as the Israelites went through them. We're going to begin with lust.

The story for this particular sin begins in Numbers 11:1-9. You have to understand that at the beginning of this section, this occurrence really didn't take place very long after they left Egypt (which is kind of interesting).

Numbers 11:1 Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of

the camp.

Exactly what occurred, no one knows for sure, but they do know that somewhere on the outskirts, what we might call the suburbs of the camp of Israel, a literal fire broke out. Now whether it was started by something like lightening or fire coming down out of heaven, nobody knows. They only say it was from the Lord. At any rate, fire broke out there and began to consume part of the camp. Of course, people were involved in the pain that was coming as a result of that.

Numbers 11:2-4 Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched. [God responded.] So he called the name [Moses did] of the place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord had burned among them. Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving . . .

Now we're beginning to see what is going to motivate the rest of the story in chapter 11. They yielded to an intense craving. Did you ever have intense cravings? Was there a time when your taste buds were watering away for a piece of chocolate, something like a sundae, a piece of cake, pie ala mode, or maybe a nice filet mignon? Sure, everybody has gone through that. But in most cases there's something that stops us and that is we either don't have the money or we don't have the time or we're not in an area where we can fulfill that desire.

But we don't have to stop with the desires that emanate from the stomach and taste buds. We have desires for a lot of things. We have desires for nice clothing. We have a desire for nice homes to live in. We have desires for nice automobiles. We have desires for a husband or a wife. We have all kinds of desires that we can become so intense about it begins to drive our lives.

When you get into that kind of an attitude, then you're going to begin to find that this desire is not only dominating your thinking, it's making you do what you do. It's making you think what you think. The chances are that if you don't control it, you're going to begin to take advantage of situations in order to satisfy that desire. You'll take advantage of people, if need be, in order to satisfy it.

Numbers 11:4-5 Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic."

They were out in a wilderness area. They didn't have any gardens they could go to. They were on the move. There were no little stores that they could run to—no Vaughn's, no Ralph's, there was nothing there they could just zip in and zip out of and get what they needed. They were completely dependent upon what God gave them. There weren't even water wells all that often.

They had their flocks and herds with them, but if they had eaten those things (remember there was over two million people) those things would have soon been gone. They were on the move. They couldn't stop and allow all the animals to reproduce and keep things going. They were between a rock and a hard place. God had to be the One who supplied their need.

What was God giving them? There would be an occasional rock that Moses would whack and water would come out of, and there was the manna every morning. Everyday you had manna pancakes, then you had manna hamburgers, and you had manna roast and manna salad. Everything was manna. It says here they ground it up, they beat it, they boiled it, they baked it; they did everything they possibly could to get some kind of variety. But everyday it was manna.

Would you like to eat the same basic thing everyday? Most of you wouldn't. Well, these people wouldn't either, but there's a spiritual lesson here that God was working out because He knew that sooner or later His church would come along and we'd need to learn something from these people.

Numbers 11:6-10 "But now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. [That doesn't sound bad, but even cake would get boring after a while.] And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it. Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased.

First of all let's note that these people, spiritually, were so far from God that they didn't take the first warning. The first warning was that burning that took place on the outskirts of the camp. Just a little thing from God to say, "Hey, wait a minute here. You need Me. I'm giving you the manna you are getting and if it wasn't for that you would die. And not only that, I was the One who gave you freedom." But how quickly they were forgetting.

What's the lesson here? We can see they wanted variety; that they felt they were leading a monotonous life. There's no particular occasion that is mentioned for the beginning of their complaint except that they were bored with what they were getting to eat.

What the words are expressive of is dissatisfaction with privations incurred by their journey through the wilderness. You and I are to learn from that. It is the Old Testament's form of whether or not we are going to be willing to bear our cross; that is whatever comes upon us as a result of our repentance, our baptism, our receipt of God's Spirit, our entering into the covenant with Jesus Christ, and being His slave! Are you willing to really be His slave and take what He dishes out for you?

What they wanted in the way of food was something that had a sharper, more distinctive flavor

to it; something more stimulating than this food that tasted like pastry. They wanted the equivalent of cayenne powder. They wanted the equivalent of hot sauce. They wanted the equivalent of all of those subtle sauces—the herbs you ladies put in the meals that you fix. It is something that really adds a dimension to eating that otherwise would not be there except for the addition of this something extra.

It's interesting how quickly our taste can become perverted. There are many people who put far too much salt, for example, on the food they eat. If they get a dish that does not have the quantity of salt they feel it needs—in fact, it's so bad (just observe this the next time you're in a restaurant and you notice somebody getting a meal) that there's a 50/50 chance they are going to pick up the salt and pepper shakers and they're going to shake them over the meal before they even taste the food. It's been ingrained and the taste has become perverted.

That's what happened to these people. They didn't understand that God was feeding them food, as it were—angel's food as it is called in the New Testament—it was the best possible meal they could possibly eat in the circumstance they were in. Would we expect God to supply anything less than the best—I mean the best for the situation? I don't think He would do that because He's a God of love and He's always going to do the best for us in every circumstance.

He was doing that for those people, but their taste was perverted. Because of it, they were unwilling to be content with what God was supplying. Therein begins to come the lesson for you and me. Are you content with what God is supplying or are you a person who is looking for, in his life, the stimulation that Christianity somehow or another seems to lack? Are you looking for an edge? Are you looking for a flavor? Are you looking for something out of life in the way of entertainments, social contacts, whatever it might be that somehow or another you feel you're being denied because you are a Christian and that this is a cross you have to bear and you're unwilling to do it? The lesson of these people is if that thing begins to gnaw away at you, there's a chance you're going to give in to this intense craving and you're going to complain to God.

Numbers 11:18 "Then you shall say to the people [this is God speaking to Moses], 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt."

How quickly they forgot. They were slaves in Egypt. They had a variety of food, but they were slaves. Was that a good trade off? Would you rather be free or would you rather have good food? If you take the food, you're in the same category as Esau. What do you want—the stimulation of the senses that the world can provide, or do you want eternal life? It comes down to questions like that. The world can supply great stimulation. What is it that you want? Are you going to crave that or are you going to go with God? That's the question here.

Numbers 11:19-20 [Here comes God's sentence.] "You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among

you, and have wept before Him, saying, 'Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?'"

God's going to give them exactly what they want. Remember this, those of you who have a craving for something and you pray to God for that craving—He may give it to you. Hang on to that thought. Just because you appear to be blessed with it does not mean it's a blessing.

Moses came back and asked how in the world are we going to feed all these people.

Numbers 11:23 And the Lord said to Moses, "Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."

God sent a great deal of quails. He had the wind blow the quails over there. The quails arrived, tired from their journey against the wind, and there they were one mile on either side of the camp—two miles wide. Here were all these quails fluttering around about two feet off the ground and all the people had to do was run out there and grab them.

Numbers 11:33-34 But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

Kibroth Hattaavah means "the graves of greediness." Their sin was not just in giving into their craving. Their sin was they doubted God's ability to supply and also His concern for their welfare.

Now understand this: God's concern for us is just as great after His calling as it is before. He is still working out His purpose and He will supply our need. I told you to hang onto that thought—that you may pray to God and ask Him to give you your craving and He may give it to you. But that doesn't necessarily mean that it's a blessing.

I want you to see here that He shows that when it was asked in that attitude of intense craving, the "blessing" turned out to be the instrument of their death. It's a sobering lesson to always have in the forefront of our mind, "Not my will be done but Yours. God please remember I'm just a man."

There are two lessons that are vitally important here. Number one is that human nature is never satisfied. It is filled with self-concern and it doesn't know what is best for it and what it lusts for may even lead to that person's spiritual death. It is something, brethren, which we're always going to have to deal with. We always think in some area that grass is greener on the other side and that there's more and better in something else.

Also, a part of this first point is that when lust is involved, anticipation is greater than realization. There is a law of diminishing returns at work in this universe that perversion lessens rewards. These people had a perverse craving for food and their reward ended up being death.

God was not dealing with these people in terms of salvation. The lesson is for you and me to not let these cravings, these desires for something that might even be good—we're not talking about a desire for something that is evil. God would not withhold good food from people.

You might jot down Jeremiah 10: 23-24. It's a point to remember. That's where Jeremiah stated that the way of man is not in himself. It's not in him to direct his steps. It's something that we have to understand that when we come to God we are admitting to Him through repentance that our salvation is not internal—it's not something we can produce. It's not something mankind can produce.

The right way to live is not within us. It's something that has to come from the outside and that outside is God. So we ask God to direct our steps. We're asking God at baptism to make us into the image of Christ and to get rid of the perversions of human nature that have produced this world that we live in.

We're still on the first point here, because what these people are showing us is that when the going gets unexpectedly rough and hardships occur, as in areas such as tithing—we're not blessed to the extent that we feel we deserve—or when we run into a problem in regard to the Sabbath. We lose our job because of the Sabbath and then we have a very difficult time finding another job. Sometimes months upon months go by and we think we should have been blessed with a job because, after all, aren't we keeping God's commands?

Then we have an intense craving for something or it could be family problems because of the church. It could be job related problems—not in regard to the Sabbath specifically, but job related problems. We begin to look back like these people did—they looked back to Egypt—and we begin to lust for the very things that a while before we considered to be expendable and holding us in bondage.

Lesson number one is that human nature is fickle. When it begins to get an upper hand, it points to our lack of faith and understanding. What God was doing with these people was that they needed privation to prepare them to take over the land. They came out of slavery. How much privation do we need who are living, in comparison, in the lap of luxury? Interesting comparison.

A good example is Philippians 4: 11-13 where Paul said he had learned to be content. Notice he *learned* to be content. It was not something that came naturally. He said there were times he was abased and times he abounded. But he found that he could count on Christ to supply all of his needs.

The second point in this lesson is that in rejecting the manna, they were rejecting the major source of their strength. That wasn't the way they looked at it. They said that their life was dried up. But we have the New Testament aspect of it. You can write down John 6: 35 where Jesus said that He is the true manna which came down from heaven.

We connect that to Matthew 4: 4 where it says, "*Man is to live by every word of God,*" and John 1: 1, that Jesus is the Word, and we find that typically, symbolically, what they were doing was rejecting the major source of their strength—God's Word.

Unfortunately some of us are spiritually malnourished. We're really on a starvation diet,

spiritually, and yet we need the word of God because it is the food from which we get our spiritual strength (not all of it, but we get part of it from there).

You need to ask yourself in examining prior to the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, what are your study habits like? Do you have lust; do you have an intense craving to go back to the world in terms of television? We're talking about things that feed the mind, not things that feed the stomach. What's feeding your mind? Is it television? Is it movies? Is it reading romantic novels, soap operas? What's feeding your mind? Maybe it's nothing. Maybe you don't do anything like that. If it's nothing, your mind is wide open for God's word. Why don't you try it? You'll like it.

Israel's physical taste buds were perverted. Spiritually we have to be concerned about this because we have come out of the world that has a tremendous ability to pervert our spiritual taste buds. There are all kinds of sights, sounds, colors, amusements, and entertainments—all kinds of things that are very stimulating. I'm not saying that they're bad of and by themselves, but like any spice, they need to be controlled or they'll take over the whole deal. Unless your life is just delicately flavored with those things, you might be in spiritual trouble.

I Corinthians 10:7 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.*"

In the commandment it says, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" Before means "preceding, in front of, rather than, in preference to." These definitions are shown by what we submit to, what we obey.

Romans 6:15-16 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey [a slave submits before, in preference to, his master], you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

Obedience is submission. In the context of this verse, that if one serves sin then one is sin's slave. Sin is the master. We're not talking about an occasional mistake, an occasional falling short of the mark, or an occasional wandering from the way. We're talking about a sin that is dominating the life, a sin that is lived in as a way of life.

If a person is in that position, the master has jurisdiction over the slave's skill, energy, and time. You have to remember that. That's what a person gives himself over to. In the context of I Corinthians 10 and 11, it becomes obvious that that is what the Corinthians were doing—they were giving themselves over to something, they were being dictated to, and they were obeying it.

What were they doing? If we would read this, the context of what we just read in I Corinthians 10 actually begins in chapter 8:1. The major subject is eating meat offered to idols. What they were doing in the practice of their lives was blending together elements of their former worship

of demons with the truth that they had received through the apostle.

Now Passover was involved. In chapter 11 Passover comes directly into the story flow. In fact, it appeared all the way back in chapter 5. But Passover and the keeping of the Days of Unleavened Bread were involved.

What was occurring is these people were still involving themselves in some sort of service at the idol's temple—a service that involved the sacrifice of animals and the eating of a meal. We're not concerned about that. We're talking about the syncretism—the blending together of things from the past with the present; the old way of life and the new way that God is giving to us that will lead us to be in the image of Jesus Christ. This is drawn from Exodus 32.

Exodus 32:5-6 So when Aaron saw it [the golden calf], he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord." Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Now look at this thing. They made an idol of a golden calf; they proclaimed a festival; and they dedicated it to the Lord. God wasn't pleased and it's good that you understand this.

Exodus 32:7-10 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

These people were undoubtedly sincere. I don't think we can question that. But God didn't like their sincerity one bit. Do you know why? Because God saw this as an attempt by these people to control Him through a human redefining of His nature.

When we turn aside from the path, whether we realize it or not, we are beginning to redefine according to our own thinking of what He is. If you think that this is not a prevalent sin, go back to Mark 7:7 where Jesus said, "*In vain do you worship Me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" He's not saying that these people are not sincere, but they aren't following the way of God. They're proclaiming their religion in the name of God though.

Jesus also says in Luke 6:46, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not the things that I say?*" That's what these people were doing here.

Now, this really gets interesting. What do you think the motivation was for what the children of Israel did? Do you think this has any end-time application to the church of God? Look what it

says in verse 1. It will tell you what started the ball rolling.

Exodus 32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

Moses, the charismatic leader, the type of Jesus Christ, delayed his coming! That's alarming! I'll take you to another place in the Bible, just in your mind. What motivated Saul to make the sacrifice that he did (I Samuel 13)? Because Samuel delayed his coming and when Samuel was late getting there Saul took it into his own hands to presumptuously do something that he had not been commanded to do—that was to make the sacrifice. The problem was the delay that he perceived.

Do you understand why Christ said, "*Don't say in your heart the Lord delays His coming?*" He knows from the experience that occurred in the Old Testament that if we begin to think that Christ is delaying, then we are going to turn aside through idolatry because we are going to use that as a justification for adjusting ourselves to the spirit of the times we live in. This has alarming ramifications.

You know what the Israelites did here? Redefining the nature of God is merely sin that led to the one that made these people adjust their lifestyle. We need to think about this. Will that be a problem for this generation? Are we going to maybe think that Christ is delaying His coming?

Sincerity is good, but truth is needed with it. Jesus said in John 4: 24 that God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. You need to examine yourself to see whether or not you are making adjustments in your way of life to be in harmony with the spirit of the age. Do you keep Sabbath just like the world keeps Sunday? If you do, you've adjusted already. Are you careful in tithing and you're concerned God is not going to come through with the prosperity? If so, you're already beginning to make the adjustments. Who is the idol? We are.

We change the image of God by saying, "He won't mind. He understands." He does understand, but He wants you and me to trust Him. He knows you're under pressure. But you need that privation. Do you believe that?

Let's go to the next one—fornication.

I Corinthians 10:8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell.

The story here comes from Numbers 25. The background for this is that Balak, who was a king of Moab, was fearful as they began to see these 2½ million people moving toward the land of Moab. He was fearful he was going to fall before them in some kind of war because the Israelites were not in the habit of losing. The daily newspapers then were saying, "Hey, these people are mowing down everybody that gets in their way."

He was justly concerned. His solution to the problem was to hire Balaam. Balaam might be considered or likened to the Pope of his day. So Pope Balaam is brought over to the area and he's hired by Balak to pronounce a curse against Israel. The story goes that every time he opened up his mouth, nothing came out but blessings because God wouldn't let him curse Israel.

However Balaam did tell Balak how he could make Israel fall and that was to lure them into idolatry through fornication. Fornication played a large part because it was commonly a part of those ancient religions. There were temple prostitutes. Not only that, it was considered that that was a way in which one had an intimate relationship with the gods.

Those people, the Moabites, the Midianites, the Canaanites were doing that in their ignorance. They were sincere in what they were doing. They were sincerely wrong, but Israel should have known better because they had truth from God.

Numbers 25:1-5 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods [this is what the Corinthians were involved in], and the people ate [eating a meal at sometime during the service was a regular part of the ceremony they went through] and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel." So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."

Israel fell to idolatry through fornication. The physical fornication produced spiritual fornication, which was idolatry.

In Revelation 2, in the comments regarding each of the eras of the church, in verse 14, we find that this problem was still haunting the church. It actually surfaces in Revelation 2:6, where it talks about the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which God hates. But it is more clearly stated in verse 14 where we're in the church in Pergamos.

Revelation 2:14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."

That's two of the first three churches and then it surfaces again in verse 20, only this time in Thyatira.

Revelation 2:20 "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat

things sacrificed to idols."

Today brethren, we are bombarded on every side with sex. It's something, that even if one is blind, it cannot be escaped because we hear about it. But those of us who are sighted have a much more difficult problem to face. It is presented to us as an inducement to do something.

Back in Numbers 25 the inducement was to idolatry. Today, the inducement is to get you to buy, to get you in debt, to get you in hock, to get you to be the slave of the bank (whoever's holding your loan). So sex is thrown at you in things in which it should not even appear—selling pipe wrenches or automobiles. It is used as an inducement and we have to be very careful because it is so flagrantly thrown at us.

In I Corinthians 6 Paul speaks about fornication and our relationship with Christ.

I Corinthians 6:18 Flee sexual immorality.

The Greek says, "Make it your habit." He is implying that fornication is not going to be a problem only one time, but it is going to be a continuous process. A person has to engrave it in his mind to flee from it constantly.

I Corinthians 6:18 Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

What he is saying is that sexual immorality creates an atmosphere or attitude that other sins do not—conviviality, a closeness of relationship that is not involved in other sins. Why? Because you actually become one with the other person.

In verse 19 he gets to the more spiritual aspect:

I Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own?

Now we're looking at the spiritual aspects of it. As slaves, we belong to somebody and that somebody is Christ.

I Corinthians 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Christ, as our Master, has exclusive jurisdiction over us physically and spiritually.

Let's continue into I Corinthians 7:1, where the thought continues, only it goes into marriage. We're going to extract something regarding fornication from it.

I Corinthians 7:1-4 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to

me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. [Here he means regarding this particular situation he is addressing. He is not saying we should be celibate.] Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. [What we want is in verses 3 and 4.] Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Physically, you don't belong to yourself exclusively either! If you are single, you belong to the one you are going to marry. And, even though you may not know that person, they have authority over your body. It is of such seriousness (if you want to check it in Deuteronomy 22) it can lead to the defrauding of that person. All that's wrong with sex in this case is the timing. It has to wait until it is within the marriage bonds.

In verse 4, where it says "authority"—another translation would be "you have rights over the other person." Paul says we are responsible to pay them what is due. The conclusion is that neither person—man or woman—has the right to use his body completely as he chooses because of the responsibility to the other person, married or unmarried. Even though unmarried, and you may not have met that person, that person that you might marry has a vested interest in your body. It's a defrauding of that person because you're not using it in the right way.

Let's go to II Corinthians. This was written just a short time after I Corinthians, after Paul received a reply to I Corinthians and he undoubtedly still had this thought in mind.

II Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

Those of you who are single need to be fully assured in your mind what God's attitude is toward sex and marriage. What you very thoroughly need to do is read I Corinthians 7. If you don't understand it, begin to ask some questions.

What this verse means (if I can put it into a more colloquial use) is do not get doubly harnessed with unbelievers. What he's actually doing is drawing on Deuteronomy 22:10. He's telling you there that you shouldn't hook an ox and an ass together. That's double harnessed and the pulling is not going to be good. Here the illustration is a believer with an unbeliever and the pulling together isn't going to work because the minds are not working in the same way.

So don't rush yourself into just any relationship because your faith is weak and your self-esteem is low, maybe so low that you'd be just about willing to marry anybody. If you do, you're going to very likely do what those people did in Numbers 25, and this is, you're going to make a compromise that is going to lower your Christian standards.

The next sin was that they tempted Christ. That's in I Corinthians 10:9. It means "to put to the test; to prove out; to try or to test God's patience." What one is doing here is he is trading on God's mercy. Whether it's done consciously or unconsciously, it somehow or another is at the back of our mind that it's all right. "God knows I'm weak. He'll forgive. He understands."

Well brethren, we are weak and God does understand and God does forgive. But how can we know when we have pushed Him too far? You don't until you get hit with a ton of bricks. That's what tempting God is. It's testing His patience until, in the human sense we say, He blows up. Any parent knows that, because at sometime in our life our kids nag, nag, nag saying, *Mommy do this. Mommy do that. Daddy do this. Daddy you promised. Mommy you promised. No you didn't. Yes I did.*" And on and on it goes until finally you've had it and then the wrath of God comes down. You've just been tempted to blow your stack. That's what it's talking about here—pushing God to the wall until He blows His stack.

We know that He doesn't literally blow His stack, but Israel was good at this. It's something that they really had down pat.

Psalm 78:16-18, 40-42, 51-57 He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness. And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy. [We just read about that in Numbers 11.] . How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power: the day when he redeemed them from the enemy. . . And destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt, the first of their strength in the tents of Ham. But He made His own people go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock; and He led them on safely, so that they did not fear; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And He brought them to His holy border, this mountain which His right hand had acquired. He also drove out the nations before them, allotted them an inheritance by survey, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents. Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies, but turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers.

Paul is drawing here on Numbers 21:4-6 and what they did is they disbelieved in God's mercy and goodness by presuming to tell Him what He should do and what He should give them. It was not, "*Thy will be done,*" it was not humble and yielded, but they became impatient (like a child nagging his parents) by requiring unreasonable proofs from Him.

If you read through Psalm 78, over and over again He shows the proofs He gave these people that He loved them, that He cared for them, that He was providing for them, that He protected them, but they always wanted more. It was never enough. So they wanted unreasonable proofs of His presence, of His help, of His goodness, and all the while they really failed to try Him to

supply their needs. What did they do? They took things into their own hands. That was always the end and they ended up sinning.

Don't egg God on by continuous sinning or failing to exercise your faith. Because if you do, I can almost guarantee He'll probably do something you wished He hadn't—He'll do something pretty drastic.

The last sin is murmuring. Boy, I tell you, we come by this one naturally. It almost seems like it is in the genes of every American.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without complaining [murmuring] and disputing.

Wow! All things! Now all of us can do *some* things without griping, but none of us can do *all* things without griping and yet the standard is right there.

Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without murmuring and disputing that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

I don't know that there's anything that characterizes Americans as much as this. Those of you who went through World War II probably remember the cartoon by Bill Malden called *Willie and Joe*. The whole story line of *Willie and Joe* was a couple of GI's who were always on the march, or who were always waiting for a battle, or they were always in a battle. But Willie and Joe were typical American soldiers—they were always, incessantly, everlastingly complaining. It was too hot. It was too cold. The cooking wasn't any good. Why didn't they have motels? On and on it went. There was always something wrong.

Well brethren, we have to recognize that we are intensely as a nation—I'm not talking here about individually, I'm talking about a generality—we are intensely spoiled as a people. We are, and this shows, I think, in our impatience. We come by it naturally. Our forefathers were that way too.

You can go through Numbers 14—this is when they were just about ready to go into the land and then they refused to go in it. That's where this is drawn from. Now don't take this lightly because it is serious business.

What were those people afraid of? What did they gripe and complain about? Were they afraid of an uncertain future? Were they afraid of the size, the tallness, and the military power of the Canaanites? Had God not demonstrated His power and His willingness in destroying Egypt just two years before? What were they afraid of? What do we have to be afraid of that makes us nag and complain and murmur about God and what He is providing for us?

Brethren, it does show a great lack of faith. There's one basic question in regards to this that needs to be resolved and that is: Is this God's church or isn't? If it is, He is in it. If He is in it, He has its well-being and its welfare in mind. It is going to be taken care of and because you are a

part of it you will be too.

So learn to be patient. Learn to not jump to conclusions. Learn not to strike out and accuse others of misconduct.

We can learn in Hebrews 12: 25-29 that those people in the wilderness rejected Moses and the warning is to us to be careful that we don't reject Christ. Now how did they reject Moses? By rejecting what he stood for. He stood for the Old Covenant. He stood for the way of life that God revealed through him. They rejected him in the manner of life that they lived while they were out in the wilderness.

What we have to understand is that now is the decisive time for you and me; now is judgment on the house of God. We want to be careful that by our way of life, and by our attitudes that our motivating this way of life, that we don't do the same thing they did. It's far more serious because we stand in the position of being able to reject Christ—not His type, but God.

That section there ends with, "*For our God is a consuming fire.*" What we have to understand, brethren, is that God is not to be trifled with. He is implacably opposed to evil so don't tempt Him. Stay away from the edge of the cliff, be willing to sacrifice yourself, and not play with sin.

I Corinthians 10:22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?
[Remember, our God is a consuming fire.] Are we stronger than He?

You connect this with the context that Paul is talking about here and it gives us something to remember and that is, if we share in pagan idolatry, we stir God up against us; that He is intensely interested in our welfare, and He has a very sensitive regard for our faith and for our needs.

If we need to be chastised and corrected, and it needs to be hard, He will do it because He's interested, because He's concerned. He will not allow the honor and respect that is due to Him to go to another because that would be unfair and misleading to us. So He has to strike out.

I Corinthians 10:11 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.

Here is the lesson to the Corinthians. I said earlier that they had a proud self-confidence that they were all right. Paul says, "Oh really?"

I Corinthians 10:12-13 . . . Let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall. No temptation [no trial, no test] has overtaken you except such is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

There's no need for us to fail. The trials and tests will come. And they are common tests.

They're not something that is so unusual that we are absolutely unique. But God is faithful in that He promises that He will provide us a way out of it—not avoiding it, but out through it.

I Corinthians 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

There's the main subject right there. Flee from idolatry. Lusting, fornication, tempting Christ, murmuring—all of these were aspects that led to idolatry.

I Corinthians 10:15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.

Paul is saying, as you approach Passover, there's not to be a leisurely contemplation of sin, thinking that, "Well, it's safe if I just allow myself to go this far and no further." That's the person who is really in danger. That's the person who is thinking that he is standing. That's the person who is in the position of tempting God. The only safe course is to have nothing to do with it.