



Can't Have It Both Ways!

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 10:1-22

The need to run the race and compete well to receive the prize functions as a transition to 10:1–13, where Paul warns the Corinthians about the danger of apostasy. Parallels are drawn between the experience of Israel and the church of Jesus Christ, and a litany of Israel's sins are noted so as to admonish the church not to fall as Israel did. Because of its defection, Israel did not enter the land of promise, so the Corinthians are admonished in order that they will receive the eschatological award on the day of judgment. The section ends with a word of comfort (10:13), reminding believers that God will faithfully keep from apostasy those who belong to him.

The main point Paul is driving towards surfaces in 10:14–22: the Corinthians must flee idolatry, for idolatry will lead to final judgment. Those who partake of the body and blood of Christ share in the benefits of what he has accomplished, just as those who eat the sacrifices benefit from what is offered on the altar. Paul does not revoke what he said about idols being nonentities, yet the situation is deeper than meets the eye. As we saw in chapter 8, the knowers believed that eating in an idol's temple was permissible since idols do not exist. Even though idols have no existence, Paul instructs the Corinthians that there are demonic powers behind the idols; hence if they partake of food in the temples of idols, they share with demons. There can be no compromise here: one cannot eat at the Lord's table and the table of demons. If the Corinthians go down that road, they will provoke the Lord to jealousy and face his judgment as Israel did in the wilderness.¹⁷

BREAK THE ICE

Write a brief “proverb” based on a lesson you’ve learned from the past.

¹⁷ Schreiner, Thomas R.. 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 7) (pp. 267-268). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-22

EXPLORE IT

1. What examples from Israel's history does Paul use in verses 1-5 to illustrate his point?
2. According to verses 6-10, what specific sins did the Israelites commit that led to their punishment?
3. How does Paul describe the purpose of these Old Testament examples in verses 6 and 11?
4. What warning does Paul give to the Corinthians in verse 12?
5. What does Paul say about the nature of temptation and God's faithfulness in verses 13?
6. In verses 16-22, how does Paul connect a believer's participation in Lord's Supper with the issue of food sacrificed to idols?

APPLY IT

Wisdom from the Wilderness (1-11)

Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the power of God, just as the Christian believer has been redeemed from sin. Israel was identified with Moses in their Red Sea “baptism,” just as the Corinthians had been identified with Christ in their Christian baptism. Israel ate the manna from heaven and drank the water God provided, just as Christians nourish themselves on the spiritual sustenance God supplies (John 6:63, 68; 7:37–39). However, these spiritual privileges did not prevent the Jews from falling into sin. There are dangers to maturity as well as to immaturity, and one of them is overconfidence. When we think we are strong, we discover that we are weak.

We can hear some of the “strong” Corinthians asking, “But what does that have to do with us?” Paul then pointed out that the Corinthian church was guilty of the same sins that the Jews committed. Because of their lust for evil things, the Corinthians were guilty of immorality (1 Cor. 6), idolatry (1 Cor. 8; 10), and murmuring against God (2 Cor. 12:20–21). Like the nation of Israel, they were tempting God and just “daring Him” to act.¹⁸

7. What are some practical lessons we can learn from Israel’s example in this passage?

8. Thinking of our liberties and freedom in Christ, how can we be susceptible to misunderstand and misapply these liberties?

¹⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 101-102). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

We must not think that because the Jews were under the law that their sins were worse than ours and therefore dealt with more severely. Sin in the church today is far more serious, because we have Israel's example to learn from, and we are living "at the end of the ages." To sin against the law is one thing; to sin against grace is quite something else.¹⁹

9. Why are Christians today inclined to abuse God's grace?

10. Considering the example of Israel's past, what do you think Paul is concerned might happen if the Corinthians stay on their current course?

This kind of sin is serious and God must judge it. Not only did some of these rebels immediately die (1 Cor. 11:29–31), but those who remained were not permitted to enter the Promised Land. They were saved from Egypt but were not privileged to claim their rich inheritance. Paul was not suggesting that his readers might lose their salvation, but he was afraid that some of them would be "castaways" (1 Cor. 9:27), disapproved of God and unable to receive any reward.²⁰

11. In light of the consequences faced by Israel, how should we approach the seriousness of sin in our own lives?

¹⁹ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 103). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

²⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 103). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

Watch your Step (12-13)

The Corinthians, then, should learn valuable lessons from the Hebrews, and so should we. However, there is something unique about our situation. Since the coming of Jesus Christ, a new age has dawned. We are among those “on whom the ends of the ages have come.” The last days have been inaugurated with the first coming of Christ. But the consummation or climax awaits his return (Rev 19:11-21). Gardner writes, “This is the age toward which all history and all God’s activities with his people have been leading” (1 Corinthians, 437). In that light we need to heed the warning of verse 12—“So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.” The Message has a colorful paraphrase: “Don’t be so naïve and self-confident. You’re not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else.” Pride is always a problem for the people of God. But a know-it-all posture is foolish and dangerous. Be careful. Watch out! God is the one who keeps you standing. You are incapable of doing that yourself. So, remember Proverbs 16:18 (NIV): “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”²¹

12. How can pride cloud our ability to recognize areas in our lives where we might be falling short or in need of correction?

13. What might it look like for pride to be disguised as Christian maturity?

²¹ Akin, Dr. Daniel L.; Merritt, James. Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 199). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Verse 13 confirms that promise and warning work together to strengthen the Corinthians as they run the race to the end (1 Cor. 9:24–27). Paul warns them against presumption, but he then assures them of God’s faithfulness. The temptation they are facing is not atypical or extraordinary, but accords with the experience of all people everywhere (cf. Jas 1:13–14). In such temptations, particularly the temptation to apostatize – which is here represented by eating food offered to idols – God is faithful. He does not abandon his people in the midst of temptations to sin, even if the temptation is quite strong in that the Corinthians would be cut off from society if they did not accept invitations to the temples of false gods.²²

14. How do we deal with the tension between personal ability and agency in fighting temptation and God’s provision in fighting temptation?

15. How have you experienced God providing a way out in times of temptation?

16. How can we learn to recognize and respond to God’s provision in moments of temptation?

²² Schreiner, Thomas R.. 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 7) (p. 278). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

Flee Idolatry (14-22)

In the Lord's Supper believers participate in and enjoy the benefits of Christ's broken body and shed blood. At the same time, the unity of the church is represented in the Eucharist since believers share the one loaf. Thus the Lord's Supper reminds believers both of their redemption in Christ and of their solidarity with one another. We also see from this text that the relationship between idols and demons is complex.

- On the one hand, idols are nonentities (cf. Ps. 96:5; Jer. 10:11). Idols are completely ineffectual and cannot speak, see, hear, smell, feel or walk (Ps. 115:4-7).
- On the other hand, demonic powers are also present where there is idolatry; thus believers cannot eat in the temples of idols and escape unscathed.

We also see the influence of Deuteronomy 32 with respect to the theme of jealousy. Those who sacrifice to demons provoke God to jealousy (Deut. 32:16-17, 21). Such jealousy will lead to judgment and destruction, for the Lord does not, and cannot, tolerate idolatry.²³

- 17. While idol worship and food sacrificed to idols may not be part of our daily lives, what are some modern forms of idolatry that you need to be aware of in your own life?**

What steps will you take to address these areas and move forward in faithfulness?

- 18. Paul calls believers to avoid participating in idolatrous ceremonies ("You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons"). What are some areas today where Christians would need to consider their involvement in idolatrous or sinful practices?**

²³ Schreiner, Thomas R.. 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 7) (pp. 285-286). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

“Are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor. 10:22) is directed at the strong Christian who was sure he could enjoy his liberty in the pagan temple and not be harmed. “You may be stronger than your weaker brother,” Paul intimated, “but you are not stronger than God!” It is dangerous to play with sin and tempt God.²⁴

- 19. Considering the strong warning in Hebrews 10:26-31, if we are covered by grace, why would we have any concern about God’s judgment and discipline being directed toward us?**

²⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 104). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

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