

### WHERE WE ARE HEADED

Calling on a number of Old Testament illustrations, Paul continues to address the issue he began with in chapter 8: food sacrificed to idols. Having called the Corinthians to consider sacrificing their “freedoms” for the benefits of others, Paul turns to the Old Testament to point out that those who were self-seeking (rather than self-sacrificing) found themselves falling short of experiencing all of the blessings held out to them by God.

### WALKING THROUGH THE DISCUSSION

This section of Corinthians is a challenge. Why? First, Paul uses a number of Old Testament examples that may not be familiar. Second, it may not be obvious how what Paul writes relates to what he has been speaking about.

Noting that Paul began chapter 8 and ends chapter 10 on the subject of food sacrificed to idols, it would appear that Paul is still speaking about the same basic issue. The challenge is to understand how and then discern what he would want us to take away from what he writes.

Briefly, here is Paul’s “train of thought:”

In 8:1-3, Paul introduces the issue of food sacrificed to idols and states plainly that merely “knowing” how one thinks about that issue may not be enough.

In 8:4-6, Paul agrees with those who felt free to eat food sacrificed to idols in insisting that idols are not “real gods.” The spiritually “mature” knew this. But such knowledge does not resolve the issue.

In 8:7-13, Paul explains that not every Christian fully grasps what those who thought themselves so mature were confident about. Some Corinthian Christians (having grown up in the idol-worshipping world) were not sure how to think about “idol meat.” Paul insists that the “mature” could not presume upon their freedom without regard to those who were not mature.

In 9:1-14, Paul offers a helpful model. When it comes to “eating,” he asserts that everyone knows that as an apostle he has the “freedom” to make his living from the ministry he is engaged in.

In 9:15-23, Paul explains that he sacrifices his rights, his freedoms, because there is something he values even more: preaching the Gospel without hindrance.

In 9:24-27, he goes on to illustrate the idea of sacrifice for greater good, using the image of a race.

Then we come to 10:1-13 where Paul wants the Corinthians to see that some who were “in the race” (pictured in 10:1-5) did not all finish well (10:6-10).

As he begins chapter 10, Paul draws a parallel between the “fathers” (those who lived in faith with God in the Old Testament) and the Corinthians. He points out some similarities:

We will be  
looking at 1  
Corinthians  
10:1-13

The “passing through the sea” (10:1) recalls the deliverance from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea; it pictures salvation and deliverance.

The “baptism into Moses” (10:2) colorfully refers to the nation’s identification with their great leader, Moses; it is a reminder of baptism which indicates a Christian’s identification with Jesus.

The “eating” and “drinking” of spiritual food (10:3-4) recalls God’s provision for Israel as they wandered in the wilderness; the real provider was none other than Christ Himself who is the real sustainer and provider for the Christian.

Thus, Paul has in mind those who really were rescued from slavery and became God’s special people (much like what has happened to the Corinthians who were rescued by Christ from idolatry). But then Paul makes a powerful point: Some who are in that race do not finish well!

Paul is not speaking about losing one’s salvation; that is not the subject. He is still addressing the issue of the food offered to idols and wants to help those who are not thoughtful about it to realize that their selfish insistence on having their “freedom” might actually be unhealthy.

What are the illustrations Paul uses? Paul refers back to the Israelites’ turning from God and creating for themselves a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-6) in 10:7. Paul refers back to the Israelites’ turning from God and worshipping with idolaters (Numbers 25:1-5) in 10:8. Paul refers back to the Israelites’ complaining to God and about His provision (Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 21:4-9) in 10:9. Paul refers back to the Israelites’ grumbling about God and His ways (Numbers 16:41-49) in 10:10.

Each of these moments in Israel’s history recounts a time when, having been saved by God and carried along by God and provided for by God, the Israelites gave into self-indulgent behavior. They said, in word and deed, “I want what I want how I want and when I want!” And, in each situation, God disciplined them.

And here is where Paul makes his point with the “super spiritual” who wanted to insist on their freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols. They thought they were standing well (10:12); but Paul is suggesting that they could simply be insisting on having things their own way and, therefore, would be at risk.

This is the temptation that Paul refers to in 10:13. Although the passage could be applied to all kinds of temptation, drawing on the Old Testament examples here the idea seems to be that we will all face “tests” where we will either lean into and trust the Lord and how He provides for us, or we will slip back into insisting on having things our way (as the Israelites did in the examples cited). And Paul wants the “super spiritual” to escape the temptation to self-indulgence.

To insist on having one’s own way, feeling like one has “arrived,” without regard for the greater good is similar to what happened to those in Israel Paul calls attention to. Thus, Paul wants the Corinthians (and us!) to realize that we risk losing the rich experience of God’s blessings for us when we “crave what we crave” (10:6).



### INITIAL THOUGHTS

Lots of people make “New Year’s Resolutions.” Perhaps you did this past New Year’s. Why do we do that kind of thing? What’s the purpose of making a “resolution”?

Unfortunately, for many, New Year’s resolutions don’t really “take.” We don’t follow through on our supposed best intentions. Why not? Why do people fail at keeping their well-meaning resolutions?

### REFLECTING ON THE TEXT

Although the chapter break comes with our reading today, Paul didn’t put those breaks in. Sometimes his thought carries right across a chapter division. With that in mind, what is the connection between what he wrote in 9:24-27 and what he seems to be picturing in 10:1-5? What parallels in idea do you see?

You might not be entirely familiar with the examples Paul offers in First Corinthians 10, but they do all share some common features. Do you detect anything similar with all of the examples he cites?

Verses 6 and 11 form something of mental parenthesis around the examples. Those verses help us pay attention to what Paul wants us to see. What is he underscoring in those two verses? What does that tell you about the examples he cites?

Who do you think Paul has in mind, in this passage, when he speaks of “the one who thinks he stands” (10:12)?

In this context, what do you think Paul is saying about temptation and having a “way out” (10:13)? What is the test or temptation that is in view in this passage?

### BUILDING BRIDGES INTO LIFE

Some Jews who were freed from slavery in Egypt did not experience fully all God wanted for them. They did not enjoy all of God’s blessings because they pursued self-interests. How does that example speak to you in your own journey with Jesus?

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