

1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1

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[0 : 00] And I think Paul is pulling this forward to the Corinthians to remind them of their blessings. Notice how he frames the saving act of the Exodus, baptism into Moses.

And notice how he refers to miraculous manna from heaven. They ate the same spiritual food. And water from the rock is an image from Exodus that comes forward to they drank the same spiritual drink.

And so Paul is pulling forward from Exodus God's blessings to his people in a way that the Corinthians would understand. You remember back in chapter 1, baptism's already popped up, hasn't it?

The Corinthians were baptized. They were believing Christians. In fact, who they were baptized by became a bit of an issue for them. And we're going to see in the next chapter that they are participating in a spiritual meal with both food and drink.

And so Paul gives them a sense of, you are like the people of God at the time of Moses, and you are blessed in these ways. And then it takes a turn in verse 5.

[1 : 16] Nevertheless, with most of them, that is, the people with Moses in the wilderness, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

This is actually a quotation from Numbers 14, verse 16. And if you remember back to Numbers 14, this is the moment at which it becomes clear that Moses and all the people, with two exceptions, are not actually going to make it to the promised land.

Just Joshua and just Caleb were actually going to enter the promised land. Now, it's important to note here that nothing is being said about the eternal salvation of those people.

This is prevention from entering the earthly promised land. Nevertheless, Paul continues, I think, to treat this as an example.

He actually raises it as a warning. So look at verses 6 to 11. We see that the Israelites had presumed upon God's grace and God's provision.

[2 : 19] The wilderness was 40 years of celebrating God's blessing and alternating with presumptuousness.

Constant devolving. The people of God saw the blessings. They knew their status as God's chosen people. And yet, counting on that, counting on his grace, counting on his forgiveness, they gave in to sin.

They took it for granted, acted cavalierly, and gave themselves to full-on rebellion. Idolatry, disbelief, sins of every sort became a part of who they were.

And then they would get forgiven and bounce back, and it was this cycle in the wilderness. A cycle that actually continues in the promised land. A cycle that continues into Judges, or through the time of the Judges and into the promised land.

A cycle that continues in the representative king. I think this is something that resonates with us.

[3 : 36] It's easy for us. I was looking online, and I love the internet. I love Wikipedia. I love all those little websites, how things work, that tell you.

And I love it because there's a process for everything. So I found, I kid you not, a seven-step guide to justifying your sin. I assume, I mean, I actually hope it was tongue-in-cheek, but I wanted to read you these seven steps.

Because I think it does resonate with us. So step one, define exactly what sin is. Okay, seems simple enough. Step two, consider that the concept of sin is a social construct, much like the concept of religion, and has no basis in reality beyond what you make of it.

Interesting. Step three, remember that you are a biological being, despite all social influences. So, okay. Step four, think back on all the good that you have done, and think of all the good that you will do.

Okay, we're moving forward now. Step five, accept your failure and move on. Step six, if you hold to the belief in a being who created the universe, it is completely rational to blame your current situation on that being.

[4 : 53] And of course, step seven, at the end of the day, just follow your heart. Because our hearts are never deceptive, right? That's it. It's easy. We think, God forgives, so what's this one little sin, right?

Say a quick prayer of repentance, and it'll be like nothing happened. We think, I do a lot of good things. That kind of balances it out, so I can give in this one time, right?

We think, well, people sin, and I'm a person, so this little sin must be inevitable. I think Paul's arguing against that attitude.

Look at verse 13, because he gives us, I think, a moment of hope here. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.

But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. So those little sins are not inevitable. He's saying, no.

[6 : 02] God is faithful. And because God is faithful, you are not going to be tested beyond your ability. You don't need to give in to sin.

I think Paul's words are clear. You have a way out, a kind of exodus of your own, out of each test.

But do we believe that? Do we really believe that? I think I'm rather prone to not believing it.

I conclude that sin is really not that big of a deal. And so for the sake of amusement, or for the sake of irony, or for the sake of comfort, or for the sake of whatever, I find it much easier to give in to a little sin here and there.

Confident that idols aren't real, there's only one God, I'm a stronger Christian, I'm going to be fine because I'm forgiven. Why is it so dangerous?

[7 : 12] And I think that's what Paul gets to in this next section on partnership. Verses 14 to 22. Partnership. Paul would rather that we avoid all idolatry, all sin.

Listen how he starts. Verse 14. Therefore, my beloved, once again addressing the Corinthians as beloved children, flee from idolatry. Giving in to a little sin, even if it doesn't start out as sin, is a bad plan.

Flee from idolatry. Just as I told you back in chapter 6, flee from sexual immorality. Why? Why? Paul turns to a communion table illustration.

I think this is brilliant. He already anticipated this in how he chose the illustration of blessings, looking back at Moses. He goes to food and drink, and I think he does so for a reason.

Because he turns here to a communion table illustration. He says, we are Christians. We participate in a table.

[8 : 19] We actually, literally, partner in the table. When you go eat food offered to idols, fully aware of what you are doing.

Yes, of course, idols aren't anything. There's only one God. You're a strong Christian. I get it. But when you eat that food offered to idols, fully aware of what you are doing, it is not helpful.

He actually says that in verse 23. But he says, in fact, you are participating in the table of demons when you do that. Demons see this as a nothing act.

They see this cavalier attitude among Christians about idolatry, and they pounce. They see this nothing act.

They see this cavalier attitude of Christians, and they pounce. It's only a matter of time. The more you give in to that little sin, the more it will get you.

[9 : 23] And then you are gone. The Lord has been provoked to jealousy, so flee idolatry. I think, again, this is us.

When we do give in to sin, we want to whitewash it. We think that coming to the communion table simply solves our problems, and we can go on living however we want.

I don't think we do this with planning and intent. I think we just fall into the pattern. We try desperately to be partners with demons and sinfulness, and yet to be partners in the blood and the body of Christ in that table.

Paul is simply saying, this isn't sustainable. You actually miss the point of the table if you think it is about whitewashing your sins.

That is incredibly presumptive. And when we come to the table presumptively, we actually miss the gospel. Christ died and rose again to defeat sin and death, and we need to believe that.

[10 : 34] And if we don't believe that, then this table is a meaningless ceremony. It's little more than a snack.

But because we believe it, we should work hard to avoid such presumptive sin. And I want to be clear. I'm not talking about perfectionism or legalism in that you're going to go and avoid presumptive sin by sheer force or will.

We all sin. And we will all continue to sin. And we should all come back to this table, repentant and faithful and celebrating that Christ died and rose again to free us from the power of sin and the consequence of death.

This is our message today. Christ died and Christ rose again to save us. We must cling to that grace, and we must not presume upon it. That's the message.

So, let's conclude. Let's take a look at this summary of chapters 8 to 10. I'm going to read from verse 23. All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful.

[11 : 55] All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. One of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go. Eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the grounds of conscience.

But if someone says to you, this has been offered in sacrifice, then don't eat it. For the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience. I don't mean your conscience, but his.

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Give no offense to the Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they might be saved.

[13 : 02] Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Starts with the Corinthian catchphrase. All things are lawful.

And then he summarizes the argument. First, as a believer, you have considerable freedom. But you also have a responsibility to build up your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Sometimes that will mean voluntarily restraining your freedom. This is the arguments of verses 23 to 30 here and the whole argument of chapter 8. Second, when you do exercise your freedom, do so with a single purpose.

To build up and adapt that more might be saved. Phrase there, all things to all people. This is the argument of verses 31 to 33 here and also chapter 9, verses 1 through 18.

And finally, when it comes to being disciplined in your approach to freedom, to fleeing the sin that comes packaged with undisciplined freedom, Paul's advice is simple.

[14 : 08] He points to himself as his custom. He points to himself as is his custom when looking for an example. And he points beyond himself to Christ.

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. May it be so for us. Let me pray. Our Father in heaven, we come before you to this table, aware of what it costs your Son, our Lord.

Help us to, by your grace, not devalue our seed at this table by willfully dining at the tables of demons. As you have saved us by your grace, so conform us to the discipline of your Son.

I pray this in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.