



Over the last few months, at various points, you may have felt like Paul is hammering the Corinthian Christians – and by extension, us. The calls and commands are high, and Paul is very serious about teaching the Corinthians their need to align with and follow Jesus. Yet, I think we all have a very nasty tendency when we hear commands and know we’ve failed. First, we feel guilty. That may not be bad if we indeed are guilty. But then there’s the next step: we turn inward to fix the feelings of guilt. We think, “Ok, what am I going to do? What do I need to change?” After figuring this out, we go to step three: “I’m sorry, God. I promise I’ll do better.” And we tend to think God is going to accept us now because we’ve come up with a plan. We’ve cleaned ourselves up.

This process is against God’s intentions. I’m not saying God doesn’t will for there to be change in your life if you’ve been sinning against him. He absolutely wills for you to follow him. But, God did not design for your acceptance to ever be on the basis of what you promise to do for him. Your acceptance is based on his promises in Christ.

“Ok, but what does this mean for application for us then? I mean, Paul is confrontational and serious here, isn’t he?” Absolutely. “So, what’s the response we ought to have?” Chapter 10 gives us the answer. I’m so grateful that’s what we see here in verses 1-13. We know these verses continue Paul’s conversation because verse 1 starts with the word “For,” which means he’s picking up on what he’s just taught. Let’s take a moment to remind ourselves of the context before jumping into chapter 10. Paul’s called the Corinthians to reject the Corinthian mindset and embrace the mind of Christ: the mind that chooses to lay down our rights and freedoms for the sake of others. While this way of living might seem crazy to the world, this life aligns with the imperishable glories found in God’s promises. Paul then makes a startling statement in 9:27: But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.¹ Last week I stated that the phrase “should be disqualified” could be better translated “should be found counterfeit.” The disqualification is because he would be revealed he was never a Christian in the first place. So, Paul was saying, by using himself as an example, that if these words about laying down rights and freedoms do not resonate with you and you do not live this way, you will be revealed as a fake.

Now, in 10:1, he says, “For.” This means he’s continuing the conversation of being found a counterfeit. But then Paul does something tricky! He adds the word “brothers” here. I believe every time (if not most of the time) when Paul uses the phrase, he’s not only communicating his unity and love for them, but he’s introducing a new truth. So, Paul is both picking up on what he has said and furthering the conversation. Personally, I think it’d be helpful to know that new truth right at the beginning here. So, here it goes. As chapter 10 goes on, Paul is going to talk about communion. That’ll be next week’s sermon, but how does he get to communion? Because this previous conversation in chapter 9 stemmed from chapter 8, which was talking about food offered to idols. Paul talks about laying down rights and freedoms in chapter 9 as it related to eating food and meat. From reading chapter 10, what we gather is

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 9:27.

that the Corinthian Christians seemed to want to say it was perfectly fine to eat food offered to idols, but they wanted to go further. Maybe they could eat the meat *in* the temple while sacrifices to gods are taking place. Are they just concerned about eating food? I don't think so. So, Paul's going to press this issue to get to the Corinthian's desires. Is it food they want or is it acceptance from society? In chapter 10, Paul will show how the Corinthians are blurring the lines of *who they worship*.

But keep this in mind: in Corinth, eating a meal at the temple would have been about as commonplace as you and me going to a restaurant. What if you didn't partake of this meat or of these customs as a Corinthian? Wouldn't that mean the Christians were rejecting the culture and the people? Also, how can a Christian rise up the ranks and be respected by Corinth if they don't do these things? Yet all of this is a smokescreen for their greater desires – which aren't for God's fame in the world. You see, Christianity isn't simply about doing things that the world think is ok. Christianity is about Jesus Christ and him crucified so that the worship and glory of God is put on continuous display!

Let's get back to verse 1 now. By using the word "for," he's calling Corinth to ask themselves an important question: "**Am I a Counterfeit Christian?**" Today, I'm going to leave us with this question instead of giving the big idea because I couldn't come up with a simple phrase to navigate through this text. What I will say is that Paul helps us evaluate the difference between counterfeits and the genuine article by referring back to national Israel under Moses as the example of counterfeits, and then in verses 11-14, he shows how a genuine believer responds.

National Israel: The Counterfeit "Believer" (vv. 1-10)

This statement does not mean all Israel was lost, but many did not have saving faith. Let's read verses 1-5 to start off: For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ²

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking to a primarily Gentile audience. People with no Jewish background and yet Paul says "our fathers." One of the things this reveals is that even if you didn't grow up Jewish, the Old Testament is your family story if you have faith in Christ! The Old Testament tells the story of our spiritual lineage we've been grafted into! As a result, the Old Testament still applies today, and now that we know Jesus, we can have an even greater understanding of the Old Testament – as Paul reveals here. Paul doesn't want us to be unaware or ignorant of the Old Testament's teaching. In particular, in verses 1-5, Paul emphasized that **Israel received external blessings from the Lord, but their hearts weren't changed**. What were these blessings? A cloud, passing through the sea, baptism into Moses, spiritual food, spiritual drink, and the spiritual Rock of Christ!

What does all of this mean? We read in the Old Testament that a cloud following and protected the nation of Israel when they departed from Israel. We read about them crossing the Red Sea on dry ground. The baptism into Moses is referring to the covenant of Moses. Because the Lord rescued them out of Israel by cloud and through water, they've been brought into a covenant relationship with God. Spiritual food and drink don't mean "non-physical" but food and drink that was provided by God. Manna was referred to as bread from heaven. Psalm 78 refers to it as the bread of angels. Then, Exodus 17:6 shares the scenario of striking the rock and the people miraculously receiving water. This fits with the

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:1–5.

next phrase of Paul here, talking about the spiritual Rock. Spiritual doesn't mean non-physical. The Rock was Christ and therefore, they receive spiritual lessons from this physical Rock. Even though Jesus was concealed to their eyes, Jesus was there as the redeemer. So, spiritual refers to spiritual lessons from physical representations. The nation of Israel received a super-abundance of physical blessings from God. Protection, rescue, special attention and care from God. Special care from God's worldwide rescuer, the Messiah! They had all these blessings. Then verse 5 comes: ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.³

How did most of Israel respond? With rebellion. When Paul says "most," he means "most." There were only *two* individuals in that generation who made it into the promised land. That means "most" was 99.999999999999%. Ok, let's put this back with the context of Corinth. Paul doesn't want to be found to be a counterfeit. He doesn't want Corinth to be counterfeits as well. Then he gives an example of national Israel, who from an external perspective, were the "people of God," but internally, how many were genuine *people of God*? The same application comes to Corinth. How many of those in Corinth were genuine? They gathered with the church. They had the knowledge of the Christ and were blessed with the knowledge of God's new covenant in Jesus. But how many actually, in the heart, embraced Jesus? The question is the same for us. God's grace is often revealed externally, but how many people in the church, and in our church, who profess Christ actually possess Christ?

Is this where Paul's going? Actually, yes. Let's read verses 6-10 now: ⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil 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 rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.⁴

Verse 6 reveals that Paul is going to reveal certain things that are intended to be interpreted as *examples* for us. While Israel had blessings from God, **Israel's heart craved idolatry**. The word for "example" in verse 6, in the Greek, relates to the idea of a "mold." How interesting the idea of "counterfeit" comes up in the previous chapter, and "mold" comes up here. As Christians, our mold for life is God's Word – not culture. And for those of us who have been melted and moved by Jesus' love in the gospel, we seek to understand rightly how to understand and live.

Paul gives us teaching that should mold us. The essential truth is that through these examples, we shouldn't desire evil as Israel did. This word for "desire" is the word "crave." With this verbiage, we know Paul is getting to our hearts. What do you genuinely desire? That's why in verse 7, Paul then commands the Corinthians to not be idolaters. When you think of this command to not commit idolatry, you could think, "Phew, I'm safe! I have no idols in my house." Idolatry isn't just carving an item. Idolatry is valuing anything at the level of God or above. One Christian in the 1500's wrote that **"The evil in our desires typically does not lie in what we want, but that we want it too much" (Calvin)**. We'll see this in the examples Paul gives with Israel. Was it evil to want to eat meat? Was it evil to drink? Is sex necessarily sinful? No. It's our desires that take these things too far and then lead us to defame God and dishonor his name. So, what about you? What are idols in your life? Things you long for and crave for? A good test of idolatry is to ask yourself this, "What can I not live without?" Or, if God were not to give you _____ (or take away), how would you respond? For me, my physical health and my "right" to be

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:5.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:6–10.

well has been an idol the Lord revealed to me. It's it wrong to be healthy? No. It is wrong to be angry at God and to say "I can't live for your glory without this?" Yes. What are some of your idols?

In the next few verses, we see that Israel's actions to reveal their cravings. And he's doing this in order to get the Corinthian Christian's hearts out in the open. They could say, "I just want to eat in the temple. No big deal." But where's their heart? Here we have examples that can evaluate Corinth and us as well. So, here are examples of inordinate desire that is idolatry:

Enjoyment. The people sat down to eat, drink and rise up to play. Moses is up on the mountain. They're waiting. What's going on? Decide to have a party. They create an image and then say that this image represents the God who brought them out of Egypt! Would it be right for anyone to participate in this? Let's say Joshua didn't agree with the image, but said, "But it's ok to eat the food!" No. What's being communicated at this point in time. The same is true for us. I can say to myself, "I'm not participating in that thing, I just want to have fun." In our culture, where ease and enjoyment are huge, we can justify our idol of enjoyment by saying, "I'm free to do this or that," but your freedom is a freedom that ought to lead you to boast in Christ – not give a message that is for another idol.

Sexual immorality. In verse 8, Paul gets more specific. ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.⁵ Is sex wrong? Not as God intended. It's a good gift of God. But, like Israel, Corinth seemed to be potentially ok with sexual relations with others, maybe even at the temple. God punished thousands in one day. Has God's standard changed? What about you? Do you pursue sexual sin? If marriage is intended to be the great display of Jesus' gospel love, then sexual sin distorts the message of the gospel to the world. Your clicks on the internet and sexual flirtations dishonor God and the Christ who has blessed you!

Testing Christ. The pursuit of pleasure and sexual immorality leads Paul to say that Israel tested Christ. Verse 9 says, ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents. . .⁶ When did they test Christ? Numbers 21. They complained about their food. This actually fits with the idea of verse 10, too. Testing Christ is revealed in *grumbling*. In verse 10, Paul writes, "nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer."⁷ What's this scenario? Numbers 14, and they even wished they went back to Egypt. It's like a Christian saying, "I liked it better as an unbeliever. I wish I would have never known Jesus." It's someone who is at a point of rejecting the Lord when he has actually provided rescue.

The verse 9 scenario is interesting to me because Paul continues to pick up on food illustrations in the Old Testament to apply to Corinth. You think food doesn't matter? It's not just about whether something is ok to eat or not ok. Our question ought always to be, "Where's my heart?" God isn't just giving checklists to mark. He's probing our hearts because if our hearts love the Lord, we will then want to follow his commands. Instead, they tested the Rescuer when they complained about his provisions. What about you? Do you test Jesus when you complain about life? He's given all. He endured the eternity of Hell on the cross in the place of sinners. You have found rescue in his grace and love, and then you are discontent and angry about what?

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:8.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:9.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:10.

I know I've often judged the Israelites and thought they were so foolish, but I've also thought, "What would I do if I had the same food *every single day*? Yet, they weren't trusting God's providential care. By complaining about food, they forgot the purpose of their existence. The same for us. In complaining about this or that – and getting angry at God about what he has or hasn't given us – reveals we've forgotten God's glory. Therefore, Paul says Israel was destroyed by serpents. People literally died! Why? It's not just that they complained, but it's that their hearts were against God. They had counterfeit hearts. Is that you?

Now, as you hear all of this, what should your response be? Many of you may feel like how I've felt before in reading texts like this: ashamed and feeling in trouble. Even if I try my best, I know I'm going to fail, and I've done some of these things this past week. So, either I'm bound for Hell or I try again and hope for the best. Years ago when I struggled greatly with my assurance of salvation, I'd have times of being angry at what I thought the Scriptures was saying and I would say something like, "Fine! Give an impossible standard. I'll do my best and hope it's enough." If you feel any of this or if you're just sitting there thinking, "I can't do this!"

There's hope in verses 11-13. You might have been feeling Paul was saying, "Prove to God that you're real and try harder. Just pull your bootstraps up and show you love God." Instead we read that the difference between a counterfeit and a genuine believer is the difference between pride and humility. Most of Israel was prideful. They thought they could accomplish things. They lived with God as though they had rights and freedoms they deserved. They modified their actions as long as it fit their desires. All the while, they had many external blessings which made it seem they were genuine. But that didn't prove anything other than that they were prideful. So, what's God after? A heart dependent on him. Read verses 11-13 with me: ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ 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. ⁸

Needy Christian: The Genuine Believer (vv. 11-13)

Paul again affirms that this was all written as a mold for us, but for what purpose? In order to instruct. Instruct includes teaching for the purpose of application. This doesn't mean, "Teaching so that you can simply have a lot of knowledge." We cannot be content with simply knowing information. Information is to spur us on to reveal God's glory in our works and words. This is what Paul has been emphasizing over the last several chapters! And he says that on us the end of the ages has come. It's an interesting phraseology. The end has come. And the Greek tense reveals it's continuing. Usually when something is the end, it's the end. Timeline has stopped. But the New Testament writers reveal that the age of the church is the beginning of the end. We're the last stretch before Jesus returns! And, as ones who live in the end, who know Jesus is the Messiah, we are blessed to be able to understand all the instruction in the Scriptures, Old and New Testament! But this knowledge shouldn't puff up. If we are not guided by Christ, we will become prideful in our smarts and information. We'll be like Corinth who had preferred teachers and preferred gifts of the Spirit and preferred roles in the church. But if we're guided by Christ, this knowledge should lead elsewhere. The knowledge of Christ should lead us downward in humility.

Why does Paul say in verse 12, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall?" Because the Corinthian were trying to live their lives in a way to secure themselves spiritually – to be

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 10:11–13.

super-spiritual. But in all of this they weren't looking to Christ, and they were walking hypocrites that led to Paul's confrontation of them. If they live thinking this way, they'll fall. And "fall" here refers to being condemned in the judgment. Those who think they have it all together are those who are condemned.

What does all of this mean for you and me today? It means that if you have heard Paul's teaching and you've felt like you just have to try harder, you went to the wrong point. The "therefore" of Paul in verse 12 communicates a conclusion of some of his teaching here. Therefore, if you think you have it all together, think again. If you think you can order life in such a way to be secure, think again. If you think you can hear all these commands and say, "Ok, I'll do it," you're wrong! You will *never* secure yourself. You will actually end up falling again if you live this way.

So then what's the right response? Look at verse 13, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful." What's the temptation he's talking about? It's the temptation to idolatry and to live for self and the culture instead of God. How can you overcome all these temptations that you feel everyday? Only God. God is faithful. You aren't. You read the words of Paul, and you can either say, "Ok, I got this," or you can say, "No. Only God's got this!"

Because of God, Paul says that God will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape. This needs to be qualified. First, sometimes people say, "God doesn't give you more than you can handle." They then cite this verse. But the reason why our temptations and trials aren't beyond our ability is because GOD is faithful – not because I have the innate strength. I actually think that all trials are beyond our natural, fleshly ability to endure. So, if you feel God has given you too much, you're feeling something true. The only way you can endure is if you cling to God. But if you cling to self, you're living in pride and you will die in your sinfulness. Isn't it glorious that your acceptance isn't based on whether or not you can handle something on your own? Isn't it amazing that God desires and delights in showing his faithfulness to you?

But finally, you may say, "But I've trusted God and I'm still going through hardship." This verse was immensely encouraging to me in years of greater trial for me. I used to think that if I looked to God, then he'd give me an escape hatch to get immediately out of temptation. That's not what this verse says. It says that he provides a way of escape so that you can *endure*. In this world we will have tribulation, and we must endure through various ups and downs until we see our Savior face-to-face. But God will give all of his children the strength to endure. Every single one!

So, let's get back to the Corinthian context. They could say, "What if I don't go eat at the temple? Why can't I just eat there?" Or, we can say, "Why can't I just do this or that?" Or, "I'm feeling such pressure and maybe it's not that big of a deal?" In those moments you are tempted to not trust God. But is he best? Is he most glorious? Are his ways superior? Is God faithful? Then you can (and ought to) trust him! Therefore, Paul goes on into verse 14 and says, "Flee idolatry!" And how do we flee? By going to the Lord and saying, "I can't. You can. I need You, Jesus!" And, I guarantee the Lord will respond continuously to the person who cries this out to him. Why? Because as Paul has said earlier, the cross is the wisdom of God.

In God's wisdom, he designed to set people free through Jesus, the Son, coming in the flesh, being a representative for humanity. He lived the perfect life you and I could never live, and he laid down his rights and freedoms so that we could have greater freedom – relationship with God and forgiveness of all our sins (past, present and future). If God so loved us then, we have the confidence his loves continues for eternity! So, we don't need to impress God. We don't need to prove ourselves. Instead,

let's go back to God confessing our weaknesses and sins. **Are you genuine or counterfeit?** Are you prideful or humble? Do you think you have it all together or do you look to Jesus as your sole salvation and hope? If you have never trusted in Jesus, I pray you would today! Seek his grace and mercy. For all of us, I pray we'd say, **"Lord, prove yourself in and through me. You are the faithful God. I turn to you! May I, by your grace, flee the idolatry that still resides in my life."**

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