

Week 10, 1 Corinthians 10

Hook



Main Point: Flee from idols and serve Christ fully.

Current Event: A 28-year-old Russian man brought a lawsuit against Bethesda Softworks for the damage its video game, *Fallout 4*, caused to his personal life. The young man claims that he became so involved with the game that he completely skipped work and ignored his friendships and wife; he holds Bethesda responsible for the loss of his job and his wife's severing of their marriage. He was quoted lamenting his decision to participate in the game:

"If I knew that this game could have become so addictive, I would have become a lot more wary of it"¹

Do you play videogames? Do you play games on your phone?

Have you ever played a game that you would consider addicting? What in your life suffered because of it?

What are some events/issues that have caused your spiritual life to be somewhat neglected in the past? What steps did you take to remedy the problem?

¹ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2015/12/27/man-sues-bethesda-because-fallout-4-is-too-addictive/#536ec2451fdc>

Week 10, 1 Corinthians 10

Book

Main Point: Flee from idols and serve Christ fully.

Text Summary: 1 Corinthians 10

After urging the Corinthians to continue the race and be disciplined, Paul warns them against idolatry. He warns them against losing focus and letting their eyes and hearts get the best of them. How does he do this? He reminds them of their history. He reminds them of their spiritual ancestors and the way God provided, delivered, and sustained them and how they fell and went their own way. This is the current state of the Christians in Corinth. Paul wants them to reflect and take a look in the mirror. They are not so different from Israel. God has done much for them in Christ. He has provided. He has delivered. And He has sent the Spirit to sustain. But they, now experiencing new life in Christ, still want to live in their old ways. Paul, encouraging them to stay the course and devote themselves to Christ, urges them to flee from their pride and lustful desires to serve Christ and have no other gods as well.

1 Corinthians 10:1–13 [Read]

Sub-point: Learn from the sin of those who have gone before you.

Paul wants the believers in Corinth to see the similarities in their story with those who have gone before them, to see how their predecessors responded in the face of temptation and cultural influence and how God responded as well. In the first 13 verses, he does this by way of reminding.

The first five verses look back to narrative of the Israelites. Paul gives many reminders. He reminds the Corinthians in verses 1–2 of the deliverance the Israelites experienced as God parted the Red Sea and how the cloud in Exodus 13 was a symbol of God's presence for them. When Paul uses the imagery of baptism, he does so for means of identification. Taylor explains, "Just as Israel identified with Moses in the event of the exodus, so too believers identify with their deliverer, Christ, in the new and greater exodus."²

Paul wants the Corinthians to see that God's presence is still with them. Moreover, as we will see, Paul wants the Corinthian believers to practice more discipline and spiritual focus than the Israelites. While God provided for the Israelites in the desert with spiritual food and physical food, He now provides the spiritual food through Christ to the Corinthians. And the demonstration of remembrance is the Lord's table.

² Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 227.

In verse 4, Paul mentions the Rock that followed them. It is natural for God to be described as a Rock, firm and strong, unmoving. There's also imagery here to Exodus 17 where Moses brings water out from the rock. For Israel, and for the Corinthians, Christ is the spiritual Rock that always replenishes. In doing this, "Not only does it show that Christ was the provision for the Israelites, but it shows that the same God that judged Israel will judge Corinth."³

Verse 5 brings to light the need for discipline by presenting the failure of the Israelites in the Wilderness Generation. Despite seeing God move in such miraculous ways, all but two of the people experienced God's discipline, were disqualified, and died in the desert. This failure should spur the readers on to self-discipline.⁴

Paul moves on in verses 6–10 to encourage the Corinthians not to act in the same hypocrisy that Israel did. Paul wants them to live lives representative of their beliefs. But the problem is idolatry. Paul quotes Exodus 32:6 and brings to mind the golden calf debacle, a failure of faith. While waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai, the Israelites became impatient, and they ate and drank while worshipping an idol, turning their backs on the God who rescued them and provided for them again and again.

This is the context of the Corinthian Christians. Paul continues to address eating and drinking at banquets centered around false gods. These Christians who think they are "strong" and think they have certain knowledge and certain freedoms continue to claim Christ but frequent the cultural dinners that involve idol worship.

Paul tells them not to attend such activities because he knows that it will lead to other sin. Vang writes, "The warning is not the spiritual nature of the meat, rather the context." There was much sinful activity at nights like this. All forms of idolatry took place, including sexual immorality.

Paul's reference in verse 8 recalls Numbers 25. Here, the Israelites intermarried with the Moabite women and in so doing, joined themselves to people who followed a false god. They yoked themselves together with idol worshippers, and God's judgment fell on them due to His anger. He desires allegiance, not divided hearts. Um writes, "Corinthian idolatry, much like Israelite idolatry, had to do with ordinary stuff."⁵ He goes on to explain that idolatry hinders us from fully enjoying life and God the way we should. It's not that we want other things instead of Christ, it's that we want Christ plus other things.⁶ That was the reality for these Corinthians. They wanted to still be in the public eye.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 526.

⁵ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 181.

⁶ Ibid., 183.

Verse 10 is an interesting one. Taylor encourages readers to “exercise caution in pressing the correspondence to Israel’s judgment to indicate a loss of salvation/regeneration.”⁷ God’s judgment is not always synonymous with eternal destruction. Taylor also argues that we must not assume that every Israelite rescued from Egypt was “saved” in the New Testament sense.⁸ The use of “destroyer” does not connect directly to an Old Testament passage, however some believe there is connection to the Passover account. Yes, the people were saved, but there was still wrath and judgment in their grumbling and disobedience.

The narrative of Israel was that of grumbling and complaining and false worship. If the Corinthians don’t listen, their story will be the same, Paul warns. Paul encourages them to use Israel’s history to inform their present. When Paul uses the phrase, “on whom the end of the ages has come” in verse 11, he is centering on the Christ event. Vang explains, “This event has now arrived and is the very event that called the Christ community in Corinth into being.”⁹ This is God’s new people, the Church.

Paul concluded urging these Christians to rely on the faithfulness of God, rather than on self-reliance. Just as He was faithful to Israel in provision, deliverance, and sustaining them, so, too, will He be to those who rely on Him in the hour of temptation. God is all powerful; man is not. It is dependence on Christ that keeps them safe, not mere identification. This is what happened to Israel. It’s relationship and covenant, not a reliance on spiritual ritual.¹⁰

Why did Paul describe Christ as the Rock?

What does it mean that the Israelites were baptized into Moses? How does this connect with those in Corinth?

In verse 11, what is the reference to the end of the ages?

Why is idolatry such an important issue for the life of the Christian?

1 Corinthians 10:14–22 [Read]

Sub-point: Leave behind other gods and turn to Christ.

Moving from his exhortation that Christ will help through trials and temptations, Paul urges the Corinthians to flee from idolatry. Don’t compromise your dedication to Christ by dividing loyalty. Serve Him only.

⁷ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 230.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 137.

¹⁰ Ibid., 138.

In his opening verses, Paul reminds them they are sensible; they are knowledgeable people. Paul wants them to see the irrationality behind joining themselves to other false gods while remaining joined to Christ. Paul brings to light the Lord's Supper in verses 16–17 because he wants them to see that the supper is an act of communion with Christ, a declaration that believers are part of Him. By doing this, Paul attempts to do what he has already done when arguing that one cannot join to a prostitute if they are joined to Christ. In the same way, one cannot participate in the supper and be involved in idol worship.

This is Paul's argument for the remaining verses in this section to verse 22. Eating meat offered to idols, participating in an idol banquet, is joining oneself to the sacrifice. By doing this, they partnered with what the banquet/dinner/altar stood for.¹¹ This is why Paul tries to show them the food isn't the issue, it's the idols connected to the food. Idol meat doesn't have evil powers, but "its celebration evokes the jealousy of God and blurs the testimony of exclusive devotion to Christ."¹² It's vital we understand why this was such a big deal for Paul. Yes, it was important because of believer's testimony about Christ and service to Him. But more importantly the table of the Lord is a celebration of the defeat of the powers celebrated at idol banquets. The Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's victory. Attending a banquet connected to the worship of a false god is belittling the victorious triumph of Christ!

These Christians in Corinth are encouraged to live for Christ alone. It's more than their piety. It's their relationships. It's their actions. Paul encourages them that it's their entire lives that matter. It's how they conduct themselves in every arena. Um writes, "Giving God glory is not simply vertical, between us and Him, but also horizontal, between us and our neighbors."¹³ Throughout Paul's letter, he has tried to get these believers to see the great benefit and command they have been given to give up rights for the sake of others. Strength does not come through freedom or knowledge, it comes through service. Strength comes from personal weakness in order that God's might would show through. "Rather than claim their rights, the strong should ask whether their actions are advantageous."¹⁴

In your own words, define idolatry.

What does a believer's activity in the Lord's Supper represent? Why is this meal significant for the church and its fidelity to Christ?

¹¹ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 243.

¹² Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 140.

¹³ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 188.

¹⁴ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 142.

1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 [Read]

Sub-point: Let your convictions encourage others toward Christ, not away from Him.

Again, Paul hits on the giving up of rights. Sure, we have liberty in Christ. But we don't live for ourselves. We, as Christ did for us, live for the building up and serving of one another. But Paul continues to connect this—and this is his conclusion—to meat sacrificed to idols.

While verses 25–30 might seem a bit confusing, Paul's main argument is getting at the heart of the people who believe they have freedom to do whatever they want, as well as convicting those who think they can't do anything because of the law and have no grace. These were the two groups of people, those who lived in ways that hurt the conscience of their neighbors, and those who live licentiously that confused their neighbors' conscience. Meaning, those that lived very strictly and those that lived very freely. Both ways can be contradictory to the way of the Gospel.

Paul explains that not all meat has been used in idol worship. But he wants these Corinthians to know that food is important because what it stands for. First of all, in quoting the Psalms, Paul says food is given by God. Eat it. And thank Him. But food, food that God has given, that has been used to honor a false deity, is not to be eaten. Then Paul says don't be disrespectful and dishonor Christ by refusing meat in another's home, but if it's brought up by the host, don't bring confusion to the unbeliever concerning Christ and eat it. In essence, don't be rude. But also, don't be hypocritical if you do know the meat has been sacrificed to other gods and partake. This would be leading the host astray, thinking that one can worship Christ and eat meat offered to other false gods. God is jealous for His people's worship. The Christian's freedom must not be a stumbling block for the salvation of one's neighbor. The Christian's life should be "focused on God's saving purposes in all they do."¹⁵ Loving those around us is necessary for the Christian, but not at the expense of Christ's glory.

Why shouldn't Christians eat meat sacrificed to idols?

How does this apply to the Christian context we live in today?

How could living too strictly and living too freely both be contradictions to the Gospel?

¹⁵ Ibid., 143.

Week 10, 1 Corinthians 10

Took



Main Point: Flee from idols and serve Christ fully.

Current Event: In Russia there is a saying: *The wise man learns from someone else's mistakes, the smart man learns from his own, and the stupid one never learns.*¹⁶ The lesson today encourages us to learn from the mistakes of others. If we want to make an impact and be used in a mighty way in the kingdom, we must refuse to divide our affections between God and the idols we make for ourselves.

What parallels do you see between your spiritual walk and those who waited at the foot of Mount Sinai? What idols, either in your past or present, have lured you to unfaithfulness?

What spiritual lessons have you learned from the lives of others that you have put into practice in your own life?

Lesson Conclusion: Those in any era aren't very different from those that have lived before them. This is the story of the Corinthian Christians. They are connected to Israel in more ways than they believe. Paul warns them to stay faithful and don't drift into the same idolatrous behavior that the Israelites did. Both had the presence of God. Both have been provided for through God's gracious provision. Paul issues a warning to stay true to Christ and not drift toward worshipping other gods. Continue in the race and discipline yourselves, Paul says. Don't let the faith be compromised. And all this applies to the context of cultural engagement for the Corinthians. How the Christians live and act in public is a direct indication of their personal spiritual commitment to Christ. This is why the idol feasts were of importance. Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to live out their dedication to Christ in all arenas.

Challenge

Don't forget those who have trusted Christ before you and those who have lived serving Him in years past. The history of God is important. Learn from the mistakes of those who have lived,

¹⁶ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2011/01/11/burj-khalifa-wise-men-learn-from-mistakes-of-others/#222df4df725b>

but also learn from the victories in their lives as well. Spend time with older generations and glean from them and their walks with Christ. Look to the Scriptures to be encouraged by those whom God was in the midst of, acting on their behalf. Learn to trust Him in ways they didn't and ways they did.

Invite accountability into your life. Those around us can be powerful agents of conviction and accountability to make sure we are truly encouraging those around us toward Christ and not away from Him. It's hard to see the sin we are blind to. Don't be like the Corinthians and think all freedom is beneficial. Let others speak into your life in order to bring the most glory to Christ.

Refuse to compartmentalize Christ. Everything we do is important, as well as how we do it. This was Paul's charge, live all of life in a way that gives honor and glory to Christ. Don't be led to believe that Christ only belongs at church. His mission is that we go forth into the world and take Him with us. Everything we do is under His lordship.