

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Shepherd's Sacrifice for the Sake of the Gospel

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9-10

Code: SC19-4

You can open your Bible again to 1 Corinthians chapter 9. There is much on my heart to say tonight. I have asked the Lord to help me to allow the Holy Spirit to sort of edit along the way so that I don't belabor the points.

I read the passage earlier, starting in verse 19 and going to the end of the chapter. This whole passage is summed up in one statement, in verse 19 – I actually started reading back in verse 16, but the summary statement is at the end of verse 19 – “So that I may win more.” It's an amazing statement, especially for Calvinists. I think we underestimate the role that we play in the purposes of God, though they are sovereign, “that I may win more.”

Verse 20, “That I might win those who are under the Law.” Verse 21, “That I might win those who are without law.” And then that amazing statement, at the end of verse 22, “That I may by all means save some.” It almost sounds like we're violating our theology.

Surely the apostle Paul knew Daniel 12:3, “Those who lead many to righteousness, will shine brightly like the stars forever.” Surely he knew Malachi 2:6 which declared that a faithful priest would “turn many back from iniquity.” Surely he knew Jeremiah 23:22 which states that true prophets, sent by God, “would have turned the people back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.”

Surely Paul knew Proverbs 11:30, “He who wins souls is wise.” Surely he knew what was said about John the Baptist, Luke chapter 1, “He will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the research, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Surely he knew the words of Jesus, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save the lost.” This is the mission of all believers, as we've already heard this week. This is the purpose of the church in the world. Accomplishing that goal, being used by God to win more souls, requires two things. Number one, an external objective reality, and that is the gospel.

Paul says, in verse 16, “If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, I'm under compulsion; woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” If I don't preach the gospel, no one will be saved; I will win no one. And so, he is not ashamed of the gospel, as he says in Romans 1, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes – the Jew and the Greek.

The objective reality is to preach the gospel. Paul makes the gospel clear. He not only explains the gospel, he defends the gospel, and he pronounces curses on people who corrupt the gospel – damnation – Galatians 1.

But there's another reality besides the objective external gospel and its true content. There's an internal subjective reality. If we're going to win more and save some, there's an internal aspect. There has to be a certain attitude, a certain disposition, a certain motive that lies at the heart of this unbelievable opportunity, and that is what concerns the apostle in the text that I want to call to your attention.

We all know the true gospel. We've heard it reiterated again and again, and even this week articulated beautifully, and that's in place; that's not negotiable. It's written down; it's explicit; it's clear. But what concerns the apostle is not the objective gospel; it is the subjective attitude of the preachers. This is of grave concern to him.

The context here in 1 Corinthians is that the Corinthians were very interested in a particular issue. They were interested in freedom. Freedom. Back in chapter 8, verse 9, Paul says, "Take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak." The Corinthians were interested in freedom; that is an issue in chapter 8, and that is an issue in chapter 9.

A way to say that was, "How free are we to connect or stay connected with our pagan culture?"

Paul responds by saying, "You are asking the wrong question. The issue is not how free are you to connect with the world, but what freedoms must you give up to win some; how eager are you to sacrifice any freedom to reach the world with the gospel and to win them to Christ?" Mark this: immature, selfish, fleshly Christians are concerned with how much freedom they're entitled to. Mature, spiritual, godly, loving Christians are concerned with how many freedoms they may gladly set aside to make the gospel attractive.

Lord, help me to always set aside any freedom that hinders my witness. This is a commitment to unselfish sacrifice, and it runs pervasive and deep.

Go back to verse 19 for a moment. "For though I am free from all men" – in other words, I don't have to follow any traditions; I don't have to follow any non-moral expectations; I don't have to be involved in anything that is, by definition, of the world. I don't have to do anything. Not bound by God to do anything explicitly. Obviously he's not talking about sin and righteousness, but because of his love for the Lord and for lost sinners, he says an amazing thing, "I have made myself a slave to all that I might win more."

I mean this is a stunning statement, "I have made myself a slave to all." He would set aside freedoms, modify habits, eliminate preferences, set aside anything in his entire lifestyle if it could possibly, in any way, hinder someone from faith in Christ.

At the end of chapter 10, in verse 25, he says, "Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake" – don't worry if it was offered to idols or not – "the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains. If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake." Go eat meat offered to idols bought out of the idol marketplace. "But if anyone says to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake."

So, you're free to eat it unless there's somebody there who perhaps is coming out of idolatry or

maybe a new believer and is totally offended by that. So, you're in a home with a pagan guy. He serves you meat offered to idols. And maybe you brought a young Christian with you, and you've got a dilemma, "Do I offend the pagan, or do I offend the young Christian? If I eat the meat, he's offended – deeply offended because he's coming out of that kind of idolatry. If I don't eat the meat, I've insulted my host."

Paul's answer is, "Don't eat. Better to insult a pagan than to insult a brother. The pagan will conclude it's better to be a pagan than a brother." Set aside any and every freedom. "Whether you eat or drink" – verse 31 says – "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many so that they may be saved." And, by the way, chapter 11, verse 1, ought to be verse 34, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."

There are behaviors the Bible doesn't forbid. There are behaviors the Bible doesn't even speak about. And believers may be free in regard to such, if they have a clear conscience. But love will always limit that freedom. Everything in Paul's life was essentially negotiable. Everything was under the control of love: love for others – pagans, Jews, even brothers. Eagerly sacrifice for the sake of gospel witness.

And back to our text in chapter 9, he says, "I have made myself a slave to all" – *douloō* – I have enslaved myself; it's emphatic, "I have enslaved myself, and not only a slave to God, a slave to Christ, but I am a slave to everyone else."

In Mark chapter 10, verse 44, we read, "And whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." This whole idea of slavery is modeled in Christ who was a slave. This is a very strong word, by the way, used to describe Israel's 400-year bondage in Egypt, and that's in Acts 7. It's used to describe the marriage bond in 1 Corinthians 7. It's used to speak, in Titus 2, of addiction to alcohol. And in Romans 6, this term about enslaving yourself defines the soul's bondage to righteousness in the new life that Christ provides. I bind myself; I enslave myself. Why do you set aside freedoms? To win more, to save some.

So, the subject of internal attitude for useful gospel witness is this – here it comes – self-denial. Self-denial. Self-denial at the most abject level. And then to demonstrate his commitment to self-denial, he lays out three illustrations. Verse 20, "To the Jews I became as a Jew so that I might win Jews" – he says it another way – "to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law so that I might win those who are under the Law."

What is he saying? He's saying, "I didn't offend Jews purposely with my freedoms." Quite the contrary, if you go back – and we're going to move around a little bit, so get comfortable and have your Bible ready – in the 15th chapter of the book of Acts, the Jerusalem Council, verse 19, "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they should abstain from things contaminated by idols and fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses, from ancient generations, has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath." You are a converted Gentile. That's not license to offend Jews. You're not going to win them; you're going to cut off access with the offense.

In the 21st chapter of Acts, and verse 20, Paul tells about his ministry. “And when they heard it, they began glorifying God; and they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they’re all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads” – some kind of a Nazarite vow – “and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.’ Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.”

That’s amazing. There was no sin in that ordinance. Paul says, in the book of Romans, why he is so eager to do things like that and not offend the Jews. And you know what he says – Romans 9:1, I’m telling the truth in Christ, I’m lying not, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed” – damned – “separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites.” He could almost wish himself damned; that’s how much he cared about the Jews.

And again, in chapter 10, verse 1, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. They have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.” And Paul says, “Look, I don’t have to conform myself to any of those now obsolete ordinances and patterns of expression of Old Testament worship. I’m not bound by any of that. I’m not under the Law at all. But when I’m with those who are under the Law, I give respect to the Law.” And he’s not talking about the moral law; that hasn’t changed. He’s talking about the traditions. But he wouldn’t even use the freedom to violate a tradition that might offend a Jew that he wanted to reach. So, he’s very careful about that.

Back in chapter 8, verse 4, “Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know there’s no such thing as an idol in the world, and there’s no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, and indeed there are many gods and many lords, earnest for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

“However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, or better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”

You can’t go to dinner with a Gentile who’s just been converted out of idolatry and exercise the freedom of eating meat that was offered to idols. And then he says, in verse 22, “To the weak I became weak” – he means the lowest level of comprehension, the lowest level of understanding. “I took the gospel down to their level. I made it as simple as I possibly could. I made it as easy to

understand as I possibly could. I didn't complicate it.

Paul says a lot about the weak in Romans 14 and 15. But whether it was a Jew or a Gentile or just someone who was at a very low level of comprehension, he says, "I always, always seek to save some. So, I set aside whatever freedom of mine would offend them.

Verse 23, he says, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel" – I love this – "so that I may become a fellow partaker of it" – *sunkeinōnos*. So that I can embrace this person as a fellow partaker of the gospel. To bring people into the family of God, I do everything to add more voices to the Hallelujah Chorus in heaven.

Paul would never allow himself, or another Christian in his presence, to use his freedom in any manner that would offend a sinner. This is serious stuff, because this works toward – are you listening? – the salvation of people. If you're still asking the question of the immature – "What are my freedoms?" – you're going down the wrong path; you're going down the path toward uselessness.

You say, "Well, how do I live like this? How do I get to a point where I live self-imposed slavery rather than the self-indulgent freedoms that are not only sort of natural, but I am free after all?"

This is pandemic in evangelicalism today. Everybody chasing freedom as far as they can chase it. How do I go absolutely the opposite direction? It's not easy. Here's how, verse 24, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win." He doesn't state a spiritual truth; he just launches into an illustration.

Since the days of Alexander the Great, really, athletic games were wildly popular in the Mediterranean world, and the two most well-known would be the Olympic Games and the Isthmian Games which, as a matter of fact, were held in Corinth. I did a little reading on that, and it's fascinating to read some of the things that were required if you were going to participate in the games. Contestants had to give evidence of at least ten months of training. If you could prove that you had 10 months of training, you would be admitted to the candidacy for the games 30 days in front of the games. And for 30 days, before the games even began, all athletes who had qualified were required to attend daily exercises at the venue so that they could be monitored and watched every day for those 30 days. Only after all conditions of training were met could they participate.

During those 30 days, many were disqualified. It all came down to the event, and the event yielded one winner. No bronze medals, no silver medals, no trophies for everybody. One winner.

Obviously, in the Christian race, there are many winners. The prize here is not salvation, but usefulness in winning souls. Paul says to Timothy, in 2 Timothy – and you're very familiar with this, I just remind you of it – "Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work. Flee from youthful lusts, pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

We understand that. In the ancient world, there were two kinds of vessels in the house: clay pots were used to take out the waste. There was no sewage, and so clay pots were used to take out the

waste. The fine china was used to serve the food. So, the choice is between being a garbage can or being a plate on which food would be served.

But Paul, in talking to Timothy, is dealing with issues of morality and sin. Paul here is dealing with issues of freedom. He's saying, "Run to win." And only those who meet all the qualifications will run and win. Those who hold tightly to their liberties will not win.

In verse 25, he adds, "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things." The word for compete is *agōnizomai*. Everybody who agonizes exercises self-control. So, here we are facing the answer to our question, "How do you become a slave to all to win some?" Self-control. Selfish, indulgent freedom-lovers don't win. Neither do grace abusers who turn grace into lasciviousness as Jude said.

Now people in games do it to win a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. How amazing is that? It makes me think of Daniel 12:3 again, that "Those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever." That's the imperishable wreath. You don't want to turn grace into lasciviousness. You don't want to be a loser.

In the 6th chapter of 1 Corinthians – and while we're there, we might as well take a look at it – and verse 12, "All things are lawful for me" – that is all things that are not unlawful are lawful – "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by any." Just because something is lawful doesn't mean you should do it.

In chapter 10 and verse 23, very similar, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify." Hebrews 12:1, it's not the sin that easily besets us; it's the weights; it's the encumbrances; it's running the race in an overcoat, bulk: the Jews hanging onto Old Testament rituals, Gentiles hanging onto idol traditions. Because of what is offered as an eternal prize, we want to make sure that we run to win.

Verse 26, "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air." I run to win; I swing to hit the target. And as I do, verse 27, "I discipline my body and make it my slave so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be" – there's that terrible word DQ'd – "disqualified."

The price here is not salvation; the price here is being useful to win some, to win more. Only two possibilities: you win or you're disqualified. Disqualified is *adokimos*, tested and found wanting. *Adokimos* means worthless, corrupted. The fear is that though I have preached to others, after I have done that, I myself end up worthless.

At the end of the games, a herald would announce the competitors, after each event, and identify the winner. He would also call out those who had been disqualified. Paul did not want to be on the list of the disqualified.

So, again, the fleshly, immature, selfish Corinthians thought they could indulge their freedoms with no thought for others, while Paul, spiritually mature, thought only of how he could unselfishly sacrifice any freedom that would hinder the gospel witness.

Now, you might think that's the end of the sermon. That's just the introduction. Because now Paul has arrived at his main point. The main point is the word "disqualified." Mark that word. But here's how he defines disqualified. Go to chapter 10. Shouldn't really be a chapter break there.

Chapter 10, verse 1, begins with "For" – *gar*, moreover. That does not change the subject. "Moreover" – to help you understand how terrible disqualification is – "I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ." Listen to verse 5, "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were disqualified in the wilderness."

He had a whole generation of people going into Canaan to witness for the true and living God. Israel is a witness nation. They were going into Canaan to represent Him. They all had the same deliverance experience. The word "all" appears five times there. The whole nation that came out of Egypt without exception.

All the Jews received deliverance and the blessing that came with that deliverance. They were all under the cloud, the glory cloud, Exodus 13. They all went through the sea on dry land, Exodus 14. They all left Egypt. They were all delivered by blood. They were all chosen to be God's witness nation, to testify of the true and living God and His salvation to the pagans.

They were all called out of bondage; they were all set free; they were all commissioned to be monotheists; and they were all commissioned to speak of the true and living God when they stood up, sat down, were lying down along the way. They were to tell the world that there is one God.

They were all baptized into Moses. What does that mean? Presbyterians look at, "They were all under the cloud," and think they have sprinkling here. I hate to tell them it's a glory cloud. Baptists say, "Oh, no, they all passed through the sea," as if they were immersed. That doesn't work either; they went on dry land. This doesn't help anybody. The point is they left Egypt, delivered by blood, chosen to be God's witness nation to testify of the true and living God and His salvation, all called out of bondage, all united under one God-appointed leader.

When it says they were baptized into Moses, literally they were immersed into the leadership of God's appointed agent. They were externally identified with Moses, and thus, because Moses was God's appointed leader, they were externally identified with the Lord God and His work. Common deliverance from bondage, led by God in the cloud, miraculously delivered through the sea, all united in God's appointed agent Moses. They were all privileged people. You see the picture there of salvation.

Paul sees the parallel. As Christians, we've all been delivered from bondage to the world; we've all been saved from sin and death and judgment because the blood was applied on our behalf. We're all united in Christ. The Jews were led by Moses toward the Promised Land of blessing and reward as God's old covenant people. So, believers are led by Christ to the promised heavenly land as God's new covenant people. God granted them great privileges. They all saw the glory cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. They were all sustained by manna.

Look at verse 3, "They all ate the same spiritual food," divine provision. Verse 4, "All drank the same spiritual drink." God provided food and manna; God provided water for them in the wilderness. Continuous provision. Continuous provision.

In verse 4, it says, "They were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ." The word for rock is *petra*, a rocky mass, a cliff. Who was it? Christ was that rock. The supernatural presence of the angel of the Lord, supernatural presence of the pre-incarnate Christ, the Christophany in a sense, followed them in the wilderness and made sure they were fed, and made sure that they were watered. All those people who had been temporally redeemed were cared for by the one who redeemed them. Amazing deliverance. Ours so much greater. There's was a temporal deliverance; ours is an eternal deliverance.

Then comes the shocker in verse 5. "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased." With most of them God was not well-pleased? Yeah. All but Joshua and Caleb; they all died in the wilderness. Numbers 14:16 says, "Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to give to them, therefore" – listen to this – "He slaughtered them in the wilderness." He slaughtered them in the wilderness. Why? They were disqualified. Corpses all over the place.

Numbers 1:46 says that there were 603,550 of them who were soldiers. Would that be one in four or one in five of the Israelites? If that's the case, there's 2.5 million bodies in the desert rotting. Pretty vivid. Don't be a rotting corpse in the desert. Don't be disqualified from witness. You may have been delivered, and a far greater deliverance than Israel's, a spiritual deliverance, but you can be a rotting corpse in the wilderness, useless to the Lord to win more and save some.

What did they do? He tells us, verse 6, "Now these things happened as examples for us." Yeah, we don't want to be disqualified. "So, these things happened as examples for us so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved." Do you know what makes people run their freedoms to the edge? They're craving evil. Because if you're pursuing righteousness, you're going the other way. You're not trying to get as close to the corruption as you can; you're trying to get as far away from it as you can.

Here there are examples – *tupos* – a model, a figure, a picture. They lusted after the things in the world. They said, "Well, we want our freedom." But it wasn't really freedom they wanted; they wanted to get as close to those sins as they could.

He says, in verse 6, "So that we would not be longers" – or cravers – "after evil things." And you can go back in Numbers chapter 11 and they're characterized greedy. Greedy. Greedy for the pleasures that they left behind in Egypt. Greedy for living on the edge, being titillated and tantalized by worldly things. Listen to the words of that great Psalm 78, starting in verse 18, "In their heart they put God to the test by asking food according to their desire. Then they spoke against God; they said, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out, and streams were overflowing; can He give bread also? Will He provide meat for His people?'

"Therefore the Lord heard and was full of wrath; and a fire was kindled against Jacob and anger also mounted against Israel, because they didn't believe in God and didn't trust in His salvation. Yet He commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of heaven; he rained down manna upon them to eat and gave them food from heaven. Man did eat the bread of angels; He sent them food in

abundance. He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens and by His power He directed the south wind. When He rained manna upon them like the dust, even winged fowl like the sand of the seas, then He let them fall in the midst of their camp, round about their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, and their desire He gave to them.” He gave them what they wanted.

“Before they had satisfied their desire, while their food was still in their mouths, the anger of God rose against them and killed some of the stoutest ones, and subdued the choice men of Israel.” They had desires for things that God had removed from them. Somebody said they were sleeping too close to where they got in. They had been fed and led and cared for, ended up disqualified.

“Liberty can be a cloak of maliciousness,” Peter says. What were the specific sins? Four are mentioned here. Verse 7, “Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.’” This really hits the issue in Corinth. The Christians were saying this, “Hey, we can go to an idol feast. An idol is nothing. We can go to – I mean there’s no separation between church and state, or between religion and society; it’s just one huge, singular life. We can be a part of our culture, a part of our social events, ceremonies, celebrations. We’re all right; we’re free, and we can handle it.”

Israel was barely out of Egypt, barely enjoying the freedom to worship the true God before they fell back into Egyptian idolatry. “Some of them” – verse 7 – “Some of them were idolaters.” Exodus 32, look at it for a moment. I think we want to take a close look at this. You’re familiar with it – Exodus 32 – and we’ll just look at the beginning of the chapter. “The people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain; the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, ‘Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses’” – that’s disdain – “‘the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’

“Aaron said to them” – thanks a lot, Aaron – “‘Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’ Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.’” I don’t know if you get that, or if you’ve gotten it in the past; they weren’t worshipping a false god; they were worshipping their God in that form.

“And when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation saying, ‘Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.’” This is terrifyingly blasphemous. Making God in your own image is dangerous stuff.

And what you often want to ask these days, “Do you believe in God? What God? Do you believe in Jesus? What Jesus? The convenient one that you’ve made for yourself?”

“They sat down and they ate and drank” – idol festivities – “they rose up to play” – there’s the idea of illicit sexual behavior dancing in amusement, fertility rites. And your authorized version says, down in verse 25, “They were naked.” They were naked. Well, they paid for it. Verse 28 of chapter 32, “So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day.” A slaughter of 3,000 men. Paid dearly for the idol chaos.

And that’s the message that the apostle Paul wants to send you and me. God is dead serious about

that. He killed several million people in the wilderness. This is just one day; He took down 3,000 of them.

Essentially, this is what the Corinthians were doing. They were going back to idol behavior. And the thing was so complicated and so interwoven with their culture that in effect they were caught up in idol worship. Idolatry, of course, you know is libel on the character of God. It is worshiping God in the wrong way, in Exodus 32. It is deadly serious to God to do this. And I don't need to take you through all kinds of Old Testament passages, but some of them are just so dramatic it might be helpful for us to at least hear them read.

Deuteronomy 17:2, "If there is found in your midst, any of your towns, which he Lord your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord our God, by transgressing His covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded, and if it is told you and you have heard it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. Behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done, you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed to your gates, that is, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death." Purge the evil out of your midst.

You know, in Corinth, the same thing was happening. Are you back in 1 Corinthians? Verse 14, he says, "Flee from idolatry." Down in verse 19, he talks about idolatry being the sacrifice – in verse 20 – to demons and not to God. And then in verse 21, he says, "You can't possibly think you can drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?"

Going to an idol feast is inconsistent. It is demonic. It is offensive, and it could be deadly. The second thing he mentions in verse 8, "Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day." Twenty-three thousand in one day. Numbers 25 – I won't take you there – these are disqualified people who are just corpses, useless to God, lying in the desert.

The third sin is in verse 9. We understand how bad idolatry is; we understand how bad immorality is. Verse 9, "Let us – nor let us test the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents." Numbers 21 – you remember that, right? The serpents came out and killed them.

What do you mean test the Lord? Do you know how you test the Lord? By trying to get away with as much as you can. How far can you push God before He acts? Testing His grace, testing His patience. You get away with a little sin, and then you get a little more bold, and you talk about your freedoms, and you push them a little farther. And now you're looking at a movie you have no business seeing, and you're watching a program you have no business looking at, and nothing happened, and you were really good that Sunday. You push it further, and you're presuming on God.

And the fourth thing he mentions is complaining. My, that's a kind of popular sin to put in such a serious list. Complaining? "Nor grumble, as some of them did" – listen to this – "they were destroyed by the destroyer." Fourteen thousand, seven hundred people died for complaining. And it was a frightening death because God sent *Mash'chith*, the judgment angel. The rabbis called him *Mash'chith*. He slew the first-born in Egypt. He killed 70,000 because of the census of David in 2 Samuel 24. He, this killer angel, massacred the entire Assyrian army under Sennacherib in 2

Chronicles 32. And Sennacherib and his own sons were killed.

Death – send the death angel to the complainers. We need this reminder: idolatry, immorality, presumption, complaining – these are the kinds of sins that will leave you a corpse in the wilderness, disqualified. We stand warned, flirting with the world, its idols, its morals, pushing the patience of God. Complaining when you don't get what you want, when you want it, the way you want it could leave you useless.

So, verse 11 says, "These things happened to them as" – what? – "an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" – who are in the messianic and post-messianic part of redemptive history.

The history lesson is a lesson to say, "In the Old Testament, most of the people who were delivered to be testimonies to the true and living God – most of them – in fact, all but two and a few associates – millions of them were disqualified." The subtle, deceiving deception of freedom can take you over the edge, and you can be disqualified. We need to live in a healthy fear of that, do we not?

You say, "You know, I don't know if I can make it. I'm fighting battles now. I don't know if I can make it."

You can make it. I'm here. I'm really old, and I'm still preaching, and I'm not special. You can make it.

"How can you make it?"

You can make it because, verse 12, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed he doesn't fall." Understand the danger. Don't overestimate your spiritual strength. Don't ever overestimate your spiritual strength. You're not strong enough to take your freedom to the edge. You're not strong enough to live that way. Pursue holiness. Don't try to get as close to unholiness as you can. You may be a little more terrified even with that. So, here's the final good news: you can make it because, verse 13, "No" – what? – "No" – say it again – "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is" – what?

Response: Faithful.

You can be faithful because, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able." And I think that is not some kind of generic promise, but a personal one. He knows how much you can take. And always, "when the temptation comes, He will provide the way of escape also that you may be able to endure it." There's the good news, men. You don't have to fall; God's faithful. You will never be disqualified and be able to blame Him. He will never put you in a situation where you're facing something you can't deal with in His strength. If you crash and burn, you end up a corpse in the wilderness, it's not because God was unfaithful.

"He is God" – Deuteronomy 7:9 – "the faithful God." Psalm 36, "Your faithfulness reaches to the skies." First Thessalonians 5, "Faithful is He who calls you." You can get there; I'm living proof. I'm not special. I'm not super sanctified. I went through the exact same struggles you went through.

The Lord wants to use you to win souls. Right? Amazing. He wants to use you to save some people. I need to find an ending to this. Sorry. Psalm 124, “Had it not been the Lord who was on our side?”

Response: Yes.

“Let Israel now say, ‘Had it not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the waters would have engulfed us, the stream would have swept over our soul; then the raging waters would have swept over our soul.’

“Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us to be torn by their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; the snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Amen?

Response: Amen.

Wow, what a psalm, what a psalm. I prayed it earlier, and I’ll say it again, I pray that not one single person in this place will ever be disqualified. It doesn’t have to be. That the Lord will use you to win more, and win more, and win Jews, and win Gentiles, and win the weak, and save some. May God help us. Let’s pray.

Lord, we don’t want these truths to escape our conscience thought. May we never forget them. May we never think that we can stand, we’re strong enough to play on the edge. We don’t want to ever be disqualified. We want to be used by You. What a calling. We’ve been delivered from bondage. We’ve been baptized into the Son of God; we’re identified with Him; we’re one with Him. We’ve been led by You through the day and through the night. We’ve been fed the heavenly bread, and the heavenly bread is Christ. We have eaten His flesh and drunk His blood. We have been rescued from the bondage of sin, and we have been called to be Your witnesses, and we don’t want to be disqualified.

Lord, we see so many who are. The landscape even around us today is full of corpses of those who found other gods to worship, those who fell into immorality, those who pushed the edges of Your tolerance, and those who complained – and they were disqualified. Help us to run to win. Help us to discipline our body, to beat it into submission so that in preaching to others we will not be disqualified. That’s our prayer, and we pray it in the name of Christ. And everyone said –

Response: Amen. Amen.

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