

The Danger of Overconfidence, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Code: 1838

First Corinthians chapter 10 is a very, very important chapter, and we'll find as we go through this entire chapter that what it has to say is very, very interesting. And we're going to attempt, this morning, to just begin to look at the chapter. In fact, I originally had wanted to go through verse 13 as a unit because I think that's a paragraph in the mind of the Apostle, but we really only got into verse 6 for this morning and so we'll just introduce this beginning section of chapter 10. For our visitors, we remind you, as we always do, that we're looking through a book and we're finding ourselves week by week progressing through the revelation of God. And here we are in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 as we study this wonderful letter. It deals with practical problems in the church.

One of the problems the church of Corinth was facing was the problem of how to determine what they should do in the areas of life and living that the Bible doesn't speak about. It says a lot of things are right in the Bible, it says a lot of things are wrong...you should do this, you shouldn't do that...but it doesn't say anything about a whole lot of other things. And how does a Christian know whether or not he has the right to do certain things that are not mentioned in the Bible? We call them gray area, between the black and the white of the bad and the good. And so, from chapter 8 through the first verse of chapter 11, that whole section, Paul is discussing the answer to that question. And you're going to be a little bit behind by coming in at this point and I trust that you'll be able to gain specifics out of this message without knowing all of the background that we've been discussing for the last several weeks.

In chapter 8, Paul set out a principle. And the principle is this, in the gray area, you're free. That is, as a Christian you have liberty. If it isn't wrong, you have the technical and the moral right to do it. But, there are two things basically that should determine whether you do or not. Number one, even though it is technically right, how will it effect others? That's his point in chapter 9. Number two, even though it's right, morally or technically, how will it effect you if you do it? So, there are two considerations when you're talking about something the Bible doesn't forbid. How will it effect others if you do it and how will it effect you if you do it?

In chapter 9, he dealt in great detail with how it would effect others. And he used an illustration of his own life. In chapter 10 he will deal in detail with how it will effect you and he uses an illustration from the life of the nation Israel to show how misuse of liberty will effect you and bring you into temptation and into sin and ultimately disqualify you from service for Christ.

Now this is a very important subject because it is such a broad subject, it has so much application in our lives. And we're going to take our time so that you'll understand it and you'll have to get part of it today and part of it next time to get a grip on the first 13 verses. I want to entitle the section "The danger of overconfidence...the danger of overconfidence." In the Corinthians' case, they were saying, "Hey, we're saved, we're baptized, we're instructed, we're mature, we come behind in no gifts. We've seen many things in our spiritual lives. We're free. We can go about and do all these things and they're not going to have any effect on us, we're too far along to get trapped. We're not concerned.

But the weaker Christians in the Corinthian church were saying, "But wait a minute. Some of the things you feel free to do and not be tempted, I can't do." Like maybe he's just been saved out of some idolatrous worship, and the more mature Corinthian goes to that particular thing and just eats the meal there with his friends and talks and has a little social time and ignores the idolatry going on around him. But the weaker Christian just saved, if he was to go would find himself so attached to that former way of life from which he has just emerged that it becomes a stumbling block to him, that it becomes a hindrance. And he looks at that other mature Christian and says, "How can you be a part of this? How can you have anything to do with this terrible idolatry?" And this other fellow is saying, "I ignore the idolatry, I just eat the food." But the weaker Christian can't separate the two. And so, Paul has said in chapter 9 you've got to consider that man. And what you might be able to handle, he--taking your example and attending--might not be able to handle.

And you might think that in our society today. You might see some form of entertainment of some kind of activity or indulgence that you can handle, but a weaker Christian just saved out of that seeing you doing it and then going ahead to do it thinking it's right would find himself terribly compromised and think less of you as a Christian and never understand how you could do it. That's his point. How's it going to effect others?

But now in chapter 10 his point is how is it going to effect you? You think you can handle it, but can you? Can you live on the thin edge of your liberty without falling?

Look at verse 27 of chapter 9 and let's get a running start. "I keep under my body and I bring it into subjection lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." In other words, he says, you know, I could be a preacher and be active and be serving God and if I don't discipline myself and bring my body into subjection, I could become disqualified in the misuse of my liberty...I could run my liberty out to where I'm flirting on the thin edge of liberty and I could fall into temptation and sin and be disqualified from serving Christ. And you know, many people in Christian service who have been disqualified...many. In serving Jesus Christ and using their liberty and abusing their liberty, they render themselves useless and disqualified.

So, Paul in this passage is saying you can't run your liberty out to all of its extremities without noting the danger of falling into sin yourself. That smug Corinthian who goes to the festival and says, "I'm only going there for the food, after all, it's the only social contact I have, it's what everybody else is doing. I meet my friends there. I ignore whatever worship of a false god, or whatever orgy may be going on, I just ignore it," Paul says to that man, "O do you really? Are you able to flirt on the thin line there and really make it, or would you not be better off to avoid all appearance of evil and not have to face the temptation that comes?"

It all boils down to the problem of overconfidence. When a Christian gets to the place where he's so confident of his maturity and so confident of his strength that he thinks he can handle anything, he's really in a very precarious position. Notice verse 12, that's the sum of the first 13 verses. This is the germ of it. This is the heart of it. Verse 12, "Wherefore," that means based on the eleven verses just proceeding, on this basis, "let him that thinks he stand take heed...what?...lest he fall." It's just when you think everything is fine that you're in bad shape.

Now the Bible warns, and I want to back up a little bit from the text and I want to show you something of what the Bible says about overconfidence. As Christians, you can be mature. I can be mature and strong. But at the same time, I have to be careful what I do with my liberty because I too can be tempted and fall into sin and such sin as could disqualify me from service..and you as well. The Bible says a lot about this because God is very concerned about it. And over and over in the Bible, God humbles the proud, over and over again. In Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction and a proud spirit before a fall." In fact, in Proverbs 29:23 it says, "A man's pride shall bring him low." That's paradoxical but it's true.

Let me show you some illustrations of pride and how God dealt with it, some illustrations of overconfidence. Look at Esther chapter 6. Esther is a fascinating book. Esther was a Jewish lady who was very beautiful. She was living in a Persian kingdom. The Persian king got very upset at his wife because he was drunk one night, King Ahasuerus or Xerxes, he was drunk and he says, "Bring me my wife." And there was a party going on, he says, "I want everybody to see how beautiful she is." So...or something like that. So, so...they sent for his wife, Vashti was her name. And she says, "Nothing doing, I'm not coming in there, he just wants to put me on display." He probably wanted possibly even to disrobe her in front of everybody. And she was right in the sense that she didn't come. So she says, "No, I'm not coming."

So, the wise men in the land said, "We're in trouble because your wife will not come." And he says, "She is out as queen. She is deposed. If we don't do that then every woman in this kingdom won't come when her husband wants her...because everybody does what the queen does." And so they deposed her and he said, "Now I want to find me a queen." And he found one...Esther, she happened to be Jewish. Well, that became a problem because there was some anti-Semitic people

in the country, namely one man named Haman who decided that he would plot to kill all the Jews. He even built a gallows at his house to use in hanging one particular Jew named Mordecai.

And so Haman had this whole plot all worked out and Esther did become the queen. And the king heard about the plot. And he was going to honor Mordecai the Jew. And in chapter 6, it tells us in verse 4, "And the king said, Who is in the court? And Haman was come to the outer court of the king's house to speak to the king to hang Mordecai." Here comes Haman, we're going to hang Mordecai. All the time the king's thinking about honoring Mordecai, see. Well, Haman wants to get rid of him.

"Then the king's servants said to him, Behold, Haman stands in the court. And the king said, Tell him to come in. And Haman came in. And the king said to him, What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" Haman, help me out, I've got a problem. I want to honor this man and I'd like to know, what do you think we should do to really just give this guy the red carpet. "Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself? It must be me he has in mind." And, man, he really laid it on. "Get him the royal apparel," you know, the whole bit. See, he thought it was going to be him. "The noble princes and parade him through town on horseback and proclaim him..." Boy, just really laid it on. Got all done and said, "Wonderful, that's what I'll do with Mordecai."

Well, to make a long story short, what happened in the end when the king heard about the plot is recorded in chapter 7 verse 10. Haman was going to kill Mordecai and Esther and everybody else who was Jewish. So they hanged Haman on his own gallows. That's the danger of overconfidence.

Isaiah chapter 37 verse 10, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, is bragging about his accomplishments, how invincible he is. He says, "You tell Hezekiah, king of Judah, this," verse 10, "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee saying, Jerusalem shall not be given to the hand of the king of Assyria." Don't let your God fool you. "Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly and shalt thou be delivered?" You think when we're so powerful we've knocked everybody else off that you're going to get away? "Have the gods of the nation delivered them that my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the children of Eden who were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath and the king of Arphad and the king of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivah?"

Well, they're all wiped out. You think you can handle us? Sennacherib says, "You're in trouble." So Hezekiah had a prayer meeting, said, "Lord, I'm in trouble. You've got to help me." Verse 36, "Then the angel of the Lord went forth," this angel we studied in the last couple of weeks on Sunday night series, "and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185 thousand. And when men arose early in the morning, behold these were dead." Sennacherib bragging, invincible, overconfident. Woke up in the morning and found 185,000 of his men dead. And later in verse 38, his own sons, Adrammelech and

Sharezer, killed him. And his other son, Esar-haddon, reigned in his stead. Overconfidence.

In Daniel chapter 4, another illustration that's very graphic is an illustration of the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. And Nebuchadnezzar felt himself to be invincible. It says, verse 28, "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar," here it comes, "at the end of twelve months, he walked in the palace in the kingdom of Babylon." He's walking in the palace. "The king spoke and said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of MY power and for the honor of My majesty?" Look what I've done, it's incredible how mighty I am.

"While the words were in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee." You're a little overconfident, that's the end. "And they shall drive thee from men." And they did, the Medes and the Persians. "And thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, they shall make thee eat grass like an oxen, seven times shall pass over thee until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth to whomsoever He will. And the same hour was the thing fulfilled on Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from men, did eat grass like oxen, his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers and his nails like bird claws." Became a raving maniac, sleeping in the grass and eating it like an animal. Proud.

Obadiah, don't try to find it, just listen, I'll read it to you. Obadiah is a prophecy against Edom. Edom was a southern area east and south of the nation of Israel, across the Dead Sea and to the south extent. And the great city in Edom was the city of Petra. Petra was a city carved out of the cliffs in a canyon. And you can ride in there, been there a couple of times, on horseback. You can ride right into Petra. It's a fantastic experience. There's an area there where only one person can pass and so it's fortified incredibly, just a single man, for all intents and purposes, can block the entrance. And there is no other way in.

And so, Edom was very self-confident that they were invincible. In verse 3, "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock." They all live in the caves...they lived in the caves carved out of the rocks and they're so proud that they were invincible. "In their heart they said, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself like the eagle and though thou set thy nest among the stars, from there will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." And He did. That city of Petra was destroyed and today animals and birds occupy that place and that's all. Overconfidence.

In Matthew chapter 26, we have a New Testament illustration that gets very personal of overconfidence. Matthew 26:30, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives." This is just after the Lord had communion with the disciples the night before His death. "And then said Jesus to them," Matthew 26:31, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." You're all

going to be offended by what's going to happen and you're going to scatter. That's Zechariah's prophecy. "But after I am raised up again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said to Him, Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." I'm there, Lord...everybody else may go, I'm in...count on me. "Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you, that this night before the cock crows, you will deny Me three times." Overconfidence.

There was a church in Asia Minor at the city of Laodicea, right near Colossae. This is what the Laodiceans felt. Revelation 3:17, "Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing..." overconfident..."and know not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

You see, the Bible again and again and again and again and again hits that issue of overconfidence. When you think you stand, you are the closest to falling that you will ever be. It's like Aesop's fables, same thing, the tortoise and the hare. And you all know who won the race. Now this is the message of 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verses 1 to 13. Let's look at it now and consider what it says.

The Corinthians--smug, proud, confident of their spiritual maturity--felt they could do whatever they wanted. They could eat meat offered to idols. They could attend idol feasts. They could go to the festivals and it wouldn't bother them at all. They didn't care about anybody else. They didn't care about offending others. And they felt they could handle it themselves. So Paul really hits the issue. In this whole section he says there's two things wrong with indulging your liberty to access. One, it offends others. Two, it's going to bring you to the brink of sin and wind up disqualifying you from service to Christ. There must be self-denial. There must be self-control and discipline, as he says in verse 27, keeping that body in subjection, discipline and denial, maybe of some things you have a right to do. Like an athlete who denies himself the things he has a right to because he trains to win a race. Paul says in verse 24, I'm in a race and I'm going to run to win the prize. And I know that if I'm going to do that, I have to be temperate, that means I have to be self-controlled. And I'm going to have to say no to some things that I have a right to in order to discipline myself to win the race.

And what's the prize? The prize is to win people to Christ. The prize is to mature saints. That's the prize that I'm after. And it takes self-discipline to reach that goal. And he's not talking about salvation, he's talking about service. The Christian who's going to be effective in service is the one who is self-disciplined who sets his liberties aside, if need be, so he doesn't offend a brother or another person who is even unsaved and so that he doesn't put himself on the brink of temptation.

People say, "Well, I'm free, man, I can handle anything. I'm so mature. You know, once and a while a shady immoral 'R' movie, it doesn't bother me, I just pick out the philosophy of it. I just study the human interest factor. I can handle it."

"Oh, I know those office parties are wild but I go because I just...I have a 7-Up and sit in the corner and I can make it. I'm mature."

"I know it's kind of a mad celebration, but that's all right. Oh yeah, I can have a few drinks with the boys, it doesn't bother me, just a...I can handle it. Little exposure to that kind of thing kind of keeps you in touch. I'm mature. You've got to be where they are, you can't win them."

You know what Paul's saying here, he's saying, "Yeah, yeah, maybe those things fit...maybe. Maybe they fit into a category that you haven't thought about. Maybe what you are in your mind justifying as the right of your liberty is nothing but pandering your lust in thinking it's all right."

You see, that was Israel's problem. Let's look at the illustration beginning in chapter 10. He says here's a perfect illustration of a whole nation of people that all became castaways because they couldn't handle their liberty. And they took their liberty and put it right on the thin edge of sin and they fell into the pond, as it were. They couldn't stand on the precipice, they fell. And he has three movements that we'll look at, and just briefly: the assets of liberty, the abuse of liberty and then the application. And we won't get to all of it, but just the beginning.

He shows how Israel experienced God's blessing, experienced God's privilege and yet all perished and all died in the wilderness, useless to God. They were all disqualified, the whole pile of them, from service. It doesn't mean they all lost their salvation, that's not the issue. It's service that he's talking about. The race he's running here is the race to win people to Christ, the race to mature the saints, the race to live a disciplined Christian life. They all lost the race and God just chucked them all and started with a new group and took a whole new generation into the promised land.

Let's look beginning with then at the five verses that begin the chapter, the assets of liberty, we'll call it...the assets of liberty. And he begins with the things that the Israelites enjoyed because they are a parallel to the Christian. Now notice verse 1, "Moreover," that's just the Greek word gar, it's just a transitional word, it shows that this whole section is based on verse 27 on this idea of being disqualified. Your Bible may say castaway, it means disqualified. "But, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant." In other words, I don't want you to forget this. This is a strong statement here. I want you to know this, please do not forget this. Forget what? "That all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea."

Now you say, "What are you talking about?" Well, what was this occasion in the life of Israel when they all passed through the sea and under the cloud? Listen, it was the Exodus, wasn't it not? For over 400 years, Israel had been in bondage in Egypt. Now this is a fascinating section here, so hang in there and you'll see some really fascinating things. Israel was in bondage for over 400 years in Egypt. They were not their own people. They did not have their own national identity. They were mish- mashed into a society. The society dominated them. The society called all the shots. They

had no identity. They were in abject kind of slavery and from that platform, there was little or no hope that they would ever be a witness to the world.

But finally God said it's time for you to be established as a witnessing community and I'm going to set you free. And God did that. God parted the Red Sea and they walked through on dry land. And God has His cloud and His cloud led them.

What verse 1 is talking about is the liberation of Israel. It was the cloud and the sea that symbolized Israel's freedom from bondage. That became the touchstone of the Jewish religion and it still is. When a Jew wants to go back to identify the fact that he is part of God's elect people, then he goes back to the Exodus. That's where God called Israel out and separated them from any other nation and gave them an identity independent of any other. So, don't be ignorant that all our fathers, and they are our fathers as Christians in the sense of faith. We are not the racial decent of Abraham, but Galatians 3:29 says we're his seed by faith. So they are in a sense our spiritual forefathers who living by faith and living as God's people are related to us who live by faith and as God's people, although we are not Jewish racially.

And so, he says all of them came out. All of them were set free. All of them were protected by divine provision in the cloud and in the sea rolling back so that they might pass. What a fantastic...God freed His people. Their election, now notice, people, this is important, their election out of Egypt was to be a national witness. And that is precisely what he is referring to here. Notice this...

This is not a picture of the salvation of Israel. It isn't the fact that when everybody left, they all got instantly saved. If you get saved by walking through the Red Sea, we better charter a flight. That is not how you get saved. You believe God. And some of those Israelites were saved while they were in Egypt. They believed God even there, right?

I believe Moses was truly a believer, a righteous man before He ever let them out. And there were many others. Some of them were regenerated by faith in the wilderness. Later on, some of them were regenerated by faith, as it were, in the promised land. So whether they were in Egypt or the wilderness or Canaan, they were believing personally for righteousness sake. It never was national. It wasn't, "All right, everybody out of Egypt and into the Kingdom." No, it wasn't a universal salvation, act, it was calling out a witnessing community. It was taking a people who were subjugated and from a vantage point where they couldn't set a pattern for the world to see of what godliness is. It was calling them out and setting them up as an independent, self-identified, connected-to-God community that the world could look at and say, "That's what the people of the Lord are like." And so, God is calling them out as a witnessing community.

And that perfectly fits Paul's point. God has called the church as a witnessing community. We have been taken out of bondage and set free in the world to be a communicating community, to share the

truth, to be a witnessing nation. And the danger is that what happened to Israel would happen to some of us because what happened to some of them was this, they died in the wilderness, disqualified from being a part of that witnessing community because of sin. It doesn't mean they lost their salvation, they became useless and God had to get some more people to be the witnessing community that He wanted.

And so, they were called as a national witness, to receive, to preserve and to pass on the Word of God and prepare the way for Messiah's coming. So each Israelite, in addition to his personal faith, had that marvelous privilege of being a part of a nation that was God's witness nation. But when they all left, believe me, they all weren't believers. They never have been, In fact, in Romans 9:6, Paul said, "Not all Israel is really Israel." That is, not all racial Israel is true Israel by faith.

So the point of the passage then, listen, is not loss of salvation. That is not what it's saying. And some people who want to make leaving Egypt synonymous with salvation, got a whole bunch of people losing their salvation in the desert when they die...and other people want to say, no, Israel left the land and when they entered Canaan, that was salvation. Well, then a whole bunch of them never entered Canaan either, cause they died. Don't push that allegory totally on this. All we have here are people, some of whom believed and some of whom did not when they were in Egypt, some of whom believed in the desert, some of whom did not, but all of them became disqualified for service because whether they were...whether they were really saved Israelites or not, they were unfaithful in their service and they fell into sin.

So, here comes the whole group out and verse 1 is just talking about that liberation...I didn't mean to take so long. Have to hurry now. Verse 2, now this gets to be very touchy cause many people have been confused by this verse, and that's understandable. Let me give you what I think to be the understanding of it, and there are others who would disagree with me and that's fine, and I'll go ahead and defend my viewpoint and you can make your own judgment.

Verse 2, "And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Now that is strange, you have to admit that. That's a very strange statement. All were baptized. Now immediately when I say the word "baptized," without even asking I know exactly what you all think about...depending on whether you're Presbyterian or Baptist...I know exact...immediately the word "baptism" only means one thing, sprinkling or dunking people, or maybe pouring. And what we have done is what we do so often, we get stuck on the symbol. We have a hard time getting pass the symbol to the reality.

Well, let's look at it. Now there are some who say they were baptized is referring to their physical baptism, when they went through the sea they were baptized. And that's what the Baptists say, of course, they were dunked when they went through the sea. And the Presbyterians say, no, they actually went under the cloud and it rained on them, so they were sprinkled. And that which is a great verse for conciliating since both of them are there, the Baptist Israelites were dunked in the sea and

the Presbyterian Israelites were sprinkled by the cloud, see.

Well, I hate to tell you this but neither is true. You say, "What do you mean? It says they were baptized in the cloud and the sea." You're right, but let me remind you of something. They couldn't have been baptized in that sea because it was parted and they walked through on what? Dry land. Somebody says, well actually the north part of the sea was very shallow and they actually...wasn't any miracle, they walked through on six-inches of water. And one little kid said, "I can understand that but how did Pharaoh's whole army drown in six inches of water?" So what you have here is the go through on dry land, so that doesn't work. And secondly, that is not a rain cloud, my friends, that is the Shekinah cloud. That's not full of water, it's full of God's presence. At night it turned into what? A pillar of fire and it would be tough to maintain itself as a rain cloud under those conditions. So that is not what it is talking about. It is not talking about sprinkling or baptizing physically.

You say, "What is it talking about?" All right, let's get behind the act of involving the water and get to the symbol. Baptism...and this is the--this is the understanding that Paul would have and the Corinthians...baptism signifies to the Christian mind identification. The real baptism that is most important in the life of a person is that he be baptized into Christ, right? That he be baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. And that means to be in union, identified with Christ. We have been buried with Him by baptism. When you believe, beloved, when you believed in Jesus Christ, you were baptized into Christ. You died with Him, you rose with Him, you live and His life lives through you. Baptism simply means identification. It is union. It is he that is joined to the Lord is what? One spirit. When you were saved, you were identified with Christ. We say that when people are baptized in this baptistery over here, they are saying in a public demonstration "I am identifying my life in union with Jesus Christ." Baptism is the symbol of that union. Baptism is the symbol of that identification...water baptism.

Now that is precisely what you have here. As Christians, we are baptized spiritually into Christ in a unique and beautiful identification. We are one with Him. Every other Christian is one with Him, so we are one with every other Christian, all right? He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Who is joined to the Lord? Every Christian. So we who are one with Him are one with everybody else who is one with Him. So we are all identified together in a corporate community under the headship of Christ. That's what baptism means. We're all a body. In baptism, the head is Christ. We are all identified with each other, Christ is the leader. That's precisely what he's saying here.

In the act of coming out of Egypt and in the act of together all...notice "all" is five times, "all" in verse 10, "all" in verse 2, "all" in verse 3, "all" in verse 4...I think it's twice in verse 1. So you have ALL of them coming out...ALL of them under the cloud...ALL of them through the sea. What does this mean? This means you have a corporate community. As they ALL together, they ALL identified with Moses. They ALL followed his headship. They ALL followed his leadership. They ALL identified with him. And that's precisely what he is saying. Entry into the church is by baptism of the spirit.

Entry into the assembly of the wilderness was by ALL coming through the sea, ALL being under the cloud, accepting Moses as the leader, as the Christian accepts Christ as the head. They were in identification as a nation, as a community, as a fellowship, as a believing witnessing group under the headship of Moses. That's what it's saying.

So, they were all identified with Moses. One corporate witnessing community. And as baptism brings us under the leadership of Christ, so did participation in the great events of the exodus bring them under the leadership of Moses. Anybody who wanted to could have said, "Hey, Moses, I'm not going through that deal. I'm staying right here." And he would have cut himself off from that corporate community that was under the leadership of Moses. Now that's the first thing, God liberated them and then God identified them as a witnessing community. It's tantamount to the Christian being called by God to serve and united with the other believers who are the witnessing community in this age.

Now notice there's a third blessing area, verse 3, "And all did eat the same spiritual food." You say, "What is spiritual food?" That's the first question I asked. Spiritual food does not mean that it's sort of ethereal and you can't really see it. That's not talking about the essence of it, it's talking about, notice this, the source of it. Spiritual food is food that is coming from the Spirit of God. And when they were in the wilderness, who gave them their food? God did, by His Spirit God delivered their food. They were sustained by manna. It is called spiritual food not because its essence is spiritual, it was physical, but because its source was spiritual, the Spirit of God. So, they were all sustained. They were all given food and nourishment.

And that also is like the Corinthians and like Christians. We have received the sustenance. "My God shall supply all your needs." We are supplied by Him. "He that eats this bread shall never hunger. He that drinks this water, said Jesus, shall...what?...never thirst." We are sustained. So the parallel again is there. They all ate the same spiritual food, verse 4, and all drank the same spiritual drink...that is water that was provided from the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it came out of a rock, sometimes there was a stream or a brook, sometimes there was a well, but in many ways, God provided.

Now the verbs in those two are imperfect verbs. That doesn't mean they're less than perfect. That means they do not know completion. The word "perfect" means completion. So they are without completion which means anything in the imperfect tense has successive continuity. They were continually being fed. There wasn't any completion. There wasn't any end to it. They were continually being given water by the Spirit. All through their wandering, all through their life, sustained by God.

So, you have a picture here of the believer who is called as a part of the corporate community, identified by baptism into that corporate community, and then sustained by God with all the resources

necessary. Now that's the assets of liberty. A pretty good position to be in.

But there's more. Verse 4 has a very interesting phrase that is not easy to understand. "They all did drink the same spiritual drink," now this, he adds this footnote and it would have been a lot easier on a lot of folks if we had just left it out because it's difficult, but we'll do our best to show you what we think it means. "For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ."

Now there have been amazing explanations of this, but let's just get down to what really, I think, is the safest way to explain this. They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ. In the first place, what just thrills me about that statement is that it proves the preexistence of Jesus Christ, right? Christ is following Israel through the wilderness. Second, the rock is Christ and the rock is God in the Old Testament which makes Christ equal to...to God. Tremendous statement.

But look what its meaning is. What are they saying? The rock that followed them? Do you know the Jews had an interesting legend, and I think that's where this comes from. It was a legend that was in existence still at the time of Paul. This is what they thought. The old Jewish legend said that originally in Exodus 17, I think it is, remember when God said I'm going to give you water out of the rock, Moses, take your rod and strike the rock? And he did and it just gushed out water and satisfied the thirst of...there must have been a million or better people. And so that rock, according to the old Jewish legend, took off from there and rolled behind Israel for the rest of the 40 years. Wherever they went, the rolling boulder was there, just following them along. And they'd stop and the rolling rock would be there and whatever speaking or hitting, gush out water. The old Jewish legend that the rolling rock accompanied them for 40 years, always yielding its water.

I think that Paul, in a sense, is giving a little allusion to that legend which was very popular. But he does something beautiful. He uses a different word. The word for a boulder or a rock that could roll along would be petras, a masculine form of the noun. But he doesn't use that word. And that I think is a play on the legend. He uses petra which means a massive cliff. And a massive cliff can't roll along behind the children of Israel. But what he says is this, you think that Israel's water according to the legend, some think that Israel's water was supplied by a rolling boulder, but I'll tell you, they were drinking from the spiritual rocky mass, the rocky cliff...and that which followed them was Christ. Listen, he says, you know what sustained Israel in the wilderness? It wasn't a rolling boulder, it was Christ. That's what he's saying. It was the Messiah.

You say, "You mean the Messiah was identified with His people even before His death?" Of course. They were His people then. The supernatural rock that never allowed Israel to perish, wasn't a rolling boulder, it was Christ Himself, accompanying His people through the wilderness. And here you see what Paul is saying is, "Look, they had what you have. They had the sustaining presence of the Messiah." People say, "Well, the Old Testament people didn't have the indwelling Spirit." You're right, they didn't, but they had the sustaining presence of the Messiah. In those days He was often

called the angel of what? Of the Lord...the angel of Jehovah, but He was there. He was there sustaining His people. He was there caring for His people. He was there fulfilling His people's needs. Beautiful. Preexistent Christ was there.

And so he's saying to the Corinthians, you have it, too. You've been set free as a witnessing community. You've been identified in that community under the headship of Jesus Christ. You are all feeding on the same spiritual food in the same Spirit-given drink. And you are being sustained in it all by Christ. And they had those same privileges.

You say, "What's the point, Paul?" The point is verse 5, and it comes like a shock. "But with many of them, God was not well pleased and they were overthrown in the wilderness." You see it? What a shocker. All those resources, liberated, called as a witnessing community, sustained and guided, sustained by God's provision, guided by God's cloud. They all had it and even Christ Himself was giving them those benefits.

Do you notice verse 5, "with many of them?" The literal Greek is "most of them." With most of them, God was not well pleased. You say, "How many?" Listen to this, of the entire generation that left Egypt, do you know how many entered the promised land? Two...Joshua and Caleb, that's all. Most of them means most of them. Numbers 14:16 says, "Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to give unto them, therefore He slain them in the wilderness." And that's...look at the word "overthrown," it means strewn, it means strewn all over everywhere. Their corpses were strewn all over the desert.

"But, John, what are you saying? That they lost their salvation?" That isn't the issue. Some of them were regenerated in personal faith and some of them were not, and there's no way. That isn't the point. The point of the illustration is God called them to be a witnessing community but because of sin, they were disqualified to establish that witnessing community, they were set aside and a whole new group went into that land of Canaan. And the point is this, they had everything. They had all of the privileges and they were smug and they were self-sufficient and they were self-confident and they griped their way through the wilderness and they abused their liberty. And we're going to see how they did that next week. And they did just about what they wanted to do in their liberty, always flirting on the thin edge and they fell into sin and God let them all go and they died in the wilderness. Some of those Israelites will be in heaven because they were really believers. But they were disqualified. You can be a believer and be disqualified from service.

Listen, even in the church, according to 2 Timothy 2, there are vessels unto honor and dishonor, right? If you purge yourself, you will be a vessel unto honor, fit for what? The Master's use. God has to depend upon a minority of Christians to do His ministry because so many of them fail to be qualified. How many people like Israel, how many Christians do you know of who start out in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and find themselves fall into temptation, they fall into sin and they are

disqualified from serving Christ? Oh, they're going to go to heaven, going to be regenerated because they have been, but they're useless. And in fact, according to 1 John 5, some of them God just killed.

First Corinthians chapter 11, we're going to find out, you want to see something interesting? Look at verse 30 of 1 Corinthians 11, "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep...many are dead." The Lord had to allow some of the Corinthians to be strewn in the desert. Some of the Corinthian corpses should have been living testimony to disqualification in the service of the Lord because of sin. And you know why they got disqualified? You know why some of those Corinthians failed? You know why some of those Corinthians died? Because they lived on the thin edge of their liberty, they ran their liberty right out to its extremity and they got into temptation they couldn't handle, fell into sin and were disqualified for service.

Look at verse 6, and I'll just introduce point 2 and we'll get into it next time. The abuses of liberty...verse 6, we saw the assets in the first five, the abuses begin in verse 6. And it says, "Now these things were our examples." Paul says I'm telling you the story to be a tupos. Tupos means a model, a type, a pattern. I want you to see an example here. And the example is this, "We should not lust after evil things as they lusted." There they were out there enjoying their liberty and it turned into lust. In Numbers chapter 11, it's really incredible, they were out there, God was supplying every single thing they needed. Then verse 4 it says, "They wept and they said, Who will give us flesh to eat?" We want meat. We're not vegetarians. We remember...they didn't like the manna. Manna, manna, manna, all we get. Verse 6, "Our soul is dried away, nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes."

I'm reminded when I was a little kid, I used to go to some friends house and they kid me even to this day that I always said the same thing cause this dear lady always gave me the same thing every time I'd go there for lunch. Oh, I stayed with them one whole summer, every day I got the same thing. And I was a little guy and I...every time I see them they always say the same thing, "Hello, John, remember when you used to say `Soup and sandmiches, soup and sandmiches, all we ever have here is soup and sandmiches."

Well, that's what they essentially were saying here. All we ever get is manna...manna, manna, manna. I mean, enough is enough. So verse 5, "We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers...." and their mouths were..."and the melons and the leeks and the onion and the garlic." And I've often thought with a diet of fish and cucumbers and leeks and onions and garlic, I'd like to keep my distance from that many people. And it says in verse 34, you know what happened? "And God killed those that lusted."

You know, it's so easy in the Christian life when you take your liberty to its extremity, to start looking back over the bank at what you used to have and starting to lust after the old life. That's what he's

saying. You Corinthians who are running your liberty right out to its limits are going to face the old patterns and be drawn into those old patterns. And that's what happened to Israel. Let it be an example that when you take your liberties and run them out to their extremes on to that thin edge between what is your right to do and what is sin, you're going to get tempted to fall into old patterns of life..the thing that God redeemed you out of. Let that be a perpetual warning against indulgence of lust for the forbidden objects of the former life.

Listen to Psalm 78:27, "He rained flesh on them like dust and feather fowls like the sand of the sea." You know, they said, "We want...we want flesh, we want..." So you know what He did? He gave them so much flesh that He said, it came down like dust. They about drowned in it. And feathered fowls like the sand of the sea. I mean, they just got bombed out of heaven. And He let it fall everywhere. And so they ate and got fat and He gave them their desire. Listen to this, "While their food was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them and slew the fattest and smote down the chosen men of Israel. For all this, they sinned still and believed not in His wondrous works. Therefore their days that He consume in vanity and their years in trouble."

You see what they did? They wanted what they wanted so He gave them what they wanted and then He took the fattest of them and took their lives. Why? Because He had to purge that kind of thing out of the witnessing community. And that's just the reason some believers may die and go to be with the Lord. Same thing. Because they're more of a problem in the witnessing community than they are an asset. The abuse of liberty leads to a disqualification for ministry and can lead to death.

What is this saying to us? Just this, beware of overconfidence. Let's pray.

Father, we know that as we see ourselves, we've been delivered, freed, called as a corporate testimony, blessed, sustained by the provision of God, kept by Christ and yet how easily could we become disqualified by the abuse of our freedoms. Teach us self-control. Teach us self-discipline. Teach us to be willing to set aside what might be our right for the sake of another to win him and for the sake of our ownelves that we would not be put in a place of temptation. Thank You for speaking this morning to us in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).