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

The Danger of Overconfidence, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:7-10
Code: 1839

This morning we're looking at 1 Corinthians Chapter 10, and I had intended to finish this study of verses 1-13, but got all wrapped up so I don't know where we're going to end. But we'll finish it next time, Lord wiling. Talking about 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. I was being interviewed this week by a young man and he asked me what was the first thing that I did in preparing a sermon. And I said the first thing I do is become familiar with the text. Read it, reread it, read it again, read it over again, and again maybe ten, 15, sometimes 20 times just reading and reading and reading and reading till I really have a grip on the text. Maybe reading it in various versions. Maybe reading it in the Greek whatever it takes.

And the second thing I then do is to determine what the key to the whole passage is. Every passage falls into a unit and there is a key to that unit and everything in that unit explains that key concept. And that's what I look for in the study of this Scripture. What is the one key here and what goes to build to that one key. And as I mentioned to you last time, the key to the first 13 verses of 1 Corinthians 10 is verse 12. Verse 12 is the point that all of the other verses are trying to establish. "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The danger of over-confidence. When you think you stand you are the most vulnerable for a fall. That's the idea that Paul is dealing with in these 13 verses. This first paragraph of Chapter 10. He shifts a little bit in the next paragraph beginning at verse 14 which we'll see in a couple of weeks and goes into another them.

But for this one, it is theme of the danger of over-confidence. Now these are not isolated themes as they come in paragraphs and books, but they weave together very well and yet each one has a distinct identity all its own. Now the principle of verse 12 is a much repeated Bible principle. Pride comes before a fall, we saw last time, the Proverbs tell us. And so we need to understand what the whole passage is about. The second thing that we need to do and this will be the third thing in my procedure and study would be to determine how this particular paragraph with this particular theme fits into the total of the passage.

In other words, the broader context. Why does he discuss this here at the end of Chapter 9 and before the rest of the verses of Chapter 10? Why does it and how does it fit into this place? And from our last study, you'll remember that we told you how it fits in. This discussion in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 is a discussion of Christian liberty. And this point is very important in the area of Christian liberty. That the Christian in his freedom not get too over-confident. And that he realized that there are limits that he has to impose on himself even in his liberty. And that's where it fits and we'll see

that as we develop it a little further. Now the New Testament teaches a lot about Christian liberty. And that's his theme in Chapters 8,9, and 10 of this letter.

He teaches a lot about it. Let me just give you the major points that identify Christian liberty. Christian liberty and I want you to understand what it is and you will when I'm done, if you don't already. Christian liberty, number one, is granted by God. God gives to the believer freedom. In John 8, "If the Son shall make you free," and it indicates that Christ is the agent of freedom. Galatians 5:1 says, "For freedom, Christ has set us free." In Colossians 1:13, "God has delivered us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son." In 2 Corinthians 3:17, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom or liberty."

So you have God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit all tied in to the liberty concept. Where does Christian freedom come from? It comes from the Trinity. It comes from God, the Godhead. How is it received? How do you get free? How are you made free? John 8, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be really free." It comes when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. John 8:30, "Many believed on His name." John 8:31, "And He said if you continue in my word, then are you my disciples and you shall be free if the Son make you free, you shall be free for real." So we believe, we follow on to believe and therein is our liberty.

So Christian freedom then is granted by God at the time when we receive Jesus Christ. When we put faith in Christ, we are set free. Now what is this freedom? What does the New Testament say it is? Number one, it is freedom from law. We no longer need to keep ceremonial laws. We no longer are subscribed to ritual and tradition. There is now an internal guideline, the Holy Spirit, no longer external rules and regulations. We don't have to earn the favor of God. We're free from the law as a way to God, as a way to please God, as a way to fulfill God's desires for us. And by that, I mean the ceremonial law.

Secondly, our freedom is freedom from the curse. The people who break the law are cursed. God says we're free from that because Christ has paid the curse, right? "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree," Galatians 3 says. And Christ was cursed for us. He became a curse for us that we might not be cursed or condemned or judged or damned or doomed. So our freedom is freedom from the law, that is from keeping a ritual. It is freedom from the curse, that is paying the penalty for our own sin. Then it is freedom also in Hebrews Chapter 2 and verse 15 from the fear of death. We are free from the fear of death. It says in Hebrews 2:15 "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Christ delivers us from the fear of death. And one thing a Christian should have is no fear of death. We may fear the pain and we may fear the disease and the illness, but not death itself. Because that simply ushers us into the presence of God.

Another thing the Bible says about our freedom is in Romans 6:7 it says we are free from sin. And what it means is that we are free from the condemnation of sin. Sin cannot require anything of us,

because its penalty has been paid. It also tells us in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 9:19, which we studied a few weeks ago, that we are free from all men. And what Paul means is free from the rules and the traditions of men. Free from manmade religious rules. And in Galatians 4:3 and Colossians 2:20 it says we're free from Jewish ordinances.

So what is our freedom? It's freedom from the law, pleasing God by externals. It's free from the curse, having to pay the terrible curse of God for our sin because it's already been taken care of. Free from the fear of death. Free from what sin can do to us. Free from human regulations of religion and free from Jewish ordinances. We are free from all of those areas. Paul calls it the glorious liberty of the children of God. Now another thing about it. It not only comes from God, and I defined it for you, but another thing about our freedom, it belongs to all Christians. There are not some Christians more free than others. In Galatians Chapter 5, in verse 13, Paul says "For brethren you have been called unto liberty." All Christians are called with a view toward freedom. Called with a view toward liberty.

Now another thought about the New Testament teaches is, in our freedom we are to hold on to it. Enjoy your freedom people. Hang on to it, don't give it up. Don't let anybody circumscribe you to outward ritual. Don't let anybody substitute ritual for reality. Don't let anybody drag you into forums. You hold onto your liberty and you enjoy your freedom. You say boy, that's good news. That's right. You say, where'd you get that out of the Bible? Galatians 5:1, "Standfast," it says or "for freedom Christ has set us free, therefore, standfast and don't be entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Stay within your liberty, enjoy your freedom. Galatians 2:4 is a good illustration of it. Paul was always hounded by the Judaisers who wanted him to keep the law and get circumcised and circumcise all the Gentiles and make the Gentiles keep the ceremonies of Moses. So in Galatians 2:4, "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in who came in secretly to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus that they might bring us into bondage." Here came the Judaisers, they were looking over the Gentile Christians and they were spying out their liberty. What that really means is they were looking for weak points in the enemy's position like scouts, you know. They were trying to find where they were abusing liberty or where the liberty wasn't working so they could force them back into bondage.

But verse 4, "To whom we gave place by subjection? No, not for an hour." We didn't let them take away our liberty. Man we were free from Jewish ceremonialism, and we weren't about to subscribe to it. Not for an hour did we do that. Why Paul? "That the truth of the gospel might continue with you." Listen, if you give up your liberty all the time, needlessly giving up your liberty to ritual and form and ceremony and tradition, people will confuse that with the truth of the gospel. If you identify your Christianity by all the things you don't do, then people will think that's what Christianity is.

Hold on to your liberty. You say but wait a minute. When the apostle Paul went to Jerusalem and they told him to go take a Jewish vow, he did it. How comes he's willing in one place to keep the ceremony of Moses and he's not willing in another place? That's a fair question. Let me give you the answer. He only gave up his liberty when it was necessary to reach the people he was dealing with. Listen, when the Judaisers tried to hassle Paul to circumcise the Gentiles, He says forget it. The Gentiles don't even believe in circumcision anyway. That's no problem with them. But when it came to working with the Jews if circumcision was going to make Timothy better able to work with the Jews, he would circumcise Timothy. Do you see what the point is?

You never give up your liberty needlessly or people confuse the gospel with what you do or don't do. But you will relinquish your liberty when in a society that you're in it would offend somebody. That's the difference. It's one thing to be a Jew unto the Jews, it's something else to turn all the Gentiles into Jews. Paul says not for a minute. So your liberty comes from God. It is received to the gospel. It is defined as freedom from the law, the curse and all those things I mentioned. It belongs to all Christians. You're to hold on to it. And one other point and that's the point that gets into 1 Corinthians 10. You're not to abuse it.

Just because you're holding on to it and just because you have it, you can't abuse it. Now here's the tension. On the one hand, see you're holding...I'm holding my liberty. This is my right. On the other hand, you don't want to offend anybody. You don't want to abuse your liberty. Now there are two ways to abuse your freedom. I'm going to give you these two. We've covered one, we're covering another one. Here they are. There are two ways to abuse your freedom. Number one, by doing things that offend other people. By doing things that offend other people. And that will vary from culture to culture, year to year, age to age. Paul says look if I'm among Jews, yes, I will keep some mosaic ceremonies. I want to reach them. But if I'm among the Gentiles man, I'm not going to make them all do the Jewish laws which they don't even understand anyway. That would just be to relinquish my liberty needlessly and confuse them. So he says in Chapter 9, he went into a great detail. One way to abuse your liberty is to do things that offend others. Say I'm free in Christ, man I can do whatever I want. I'll go out and do what I want. I don't care what anybody thinks.

I was talking to missionaries recently who were in Europe. They were in a little village, small area, and the women there did not shave their legs. That was just...and that's true in a lot of places in the world, but this particular place they didn't do it. Only one kind of woman would shave her legs and that was a prostitute. That was the custom. And when the missionary ladies arrived with their legs shaved, it caused a lot of problems. The people did not understand that. And they had to relinquish their liberty, at that point, because they didn't want to be offensive because of the identification. Now that's principle number one.

You're abusing your liberty when you're needlessly harming someone else when you could relinquish it. Principle two, the second way you abuse your liberty is by doing things that could disqualify you

from service. In other words, when you run your liberty out to its limits and you're playing on a thin edge...I think of the little boy who climbed in the bunkbed one night, in the middle of the night there was a tremendous crash and he fell out and hit the floor with a thud and his father came running in and he was crying on the floor. And said, "Well, what happened? How did you ever do that?" He says, "I think I fell asleep to close to where I got in."

You know, I think there's a lot of Christians who fall asleep to close to where they got in and they're always flirting on the borderline. They've got their liberty, they're running their liberty right out to the sheer edge. Paul says there are two dangers in the abuse of liberty. One, that you would offend somebody else. Two, that you would get yourself in a position to be tempted to fall into sin and get disqualified from service. These two things make up Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians.

The first point of offending another is in Chapter 9. The second point of getting yourself in trouble is in Chapter 10. And he uses in Chapter 10, verse 1-13 an illustration of Israel to make his point. Israel fell asleep too close to where they got in and got in a lot of trouble. This is a powerful illustration. It kind of comes out of verses 24-27 of Chapter 9, notice it. Paul says in 24, "We're all in a race. We can potentially receive the prize. So run to win." Now what is the prize? To win people to Christ. To be a soul winner. To be somebody who is used of God to win people to Christ. And he says if you're going to do that, you're going to have to be, verse 25, "temperate" or self-controlled.

So he says that's the way I run in verse 26, "and I keep my body and bring it into subjection unless I myself should become disqualified." Now Paul says look, the Christian life is like a race. We're all Christians. We're in the race, but some of us could get disqualified. It doesn't mean your salvation. No, no, it means you could be disqualified out of usefulness. He's talking about service, winning people to Christ, reaching people. And he says in order for me to really reach people, I have to bring my body into subjection. I have to be under self-control. I can't just let my body do whatever it wants. I've got to be careful about my liberties. I've got to be careful about what I allow for myself or I'll run myself run out onto the shear edge. I'll get tempted and off I'll go and be disqualified and set out of service.

And with that concept he moves into verses 1-13 of Chapter 10 and he says this is exactly what happened to Israel. Because of a failure to limit their liberty, because of failure to really deal with their bodies, to really exercise self-control, they lost out. Two million of them, according to John Davis, two million of them probably is the number that died in the wilderness. With their corpses strewn all over the wilderness. Now we went into verses 1-5 last time in detail, the assets of liberty. And it just describes this nation Israel. Elected by God as a witnessing community to receive, to preserve, to pass on his revelation and to prepare the way for Messiah.

They were freed he says in verse 1. Guided under the cloud and through the sea. Identified with Moses. They all at the same spiritual food. They were sustained by God and sustained in water

according to verse 4. They were free, guided, identified, sustained as a witnessing community under the leadership of God's man Moses. And the parallel is obvious people. The Christian is God's called out witnessing community, freed, guided, sustained and union with Christ who is the head and leader. And so he's making a comparison. Israel was in a race. The prize was to be a witnessing community that could reach the world, but two million of them failed. Two million of them had the carcasses strewn all over the wilderness and God had to start with a new generation because they were disqualified.

Why were they disqualified? Because they abused their liberty, because they pushed their freedom too far and they didn't put any restraints on it. They just kept pushing and pushing and pushing until finally they fell. And that brings us to today. Let's look at the abuses of liberty from verses 6-10. Their assets of liberty are listed in the first five verses and how did they abuse it. Look at verse 6, "Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." This whole passage is written as an example. Verse 11 says the same thing. It says, "All these things happen unto them for examples."

Now Israel is an example of somebody who has freedom. They've been freed, they've been identified with God, their sustained and guided into the wilderness and the misuse of their freedom results in their disqualification. Perfect illustration of his second way to abuse liberty by falling into temptation and sin because you're not careful. Now what we're...what was going on? Well, the whole overall thing is simply in verse 6, they lusted after evil things. Now you can do two things with your body. Verse 27 of Chapter 9, "You can bring your body under control," or verse 6 of Chapter 10, "you can just let your body go wild and lust."

If you bring your body under control, you're useful to God. If you bring your flesh under control, you're useful to God. If you're controlled by the Holy Spirit, if you're controlled by God, you're useful. If you're lusting after things and your body is in control in calling the shots you are useless. If you are under control, you are qualified. If you are out of control you are disqualified from usefulness. Now specifically, what were the sins that Israel was committing? What ways did the flesh manifest itself? All right, here we go. Number one in verse 7, idolatry. "Neither be ye idolaters as were some of them as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." And he's going to make reference to a whole group of Old Testament incidents with wondering Israel.

First of all, don't be idolaters. Now Israel was idolatrists. And this really hits the issue at Corinth, because the Corinthians were living in a very potentially devastating society. As I told you several weeks ago, the Corinthian society was totally overwrought with demons, manifesting themselves behind these different idols. And idolatry was a part of everything, I mean everything. There couldn't be any kind of public occasion or anything else that wasn't connected with idols. That was their entire society just multiple gods and everything they did practically within the social framework of the Corinthian society had idols in it.

And so the mature Christians, the Corinthian Christians, you know, who were the smug confident, ones who had been around a while, they were saying this, hey look, we're in the society, we're mature, we've been well taught, apostle Paul's taught us, we've studied under him for 18 months, we know our way around. Look, we've got to be a part of our society. We can go to the festivals, the social occasions, the ceremonies and we can attend the celebrations of our society. We can get involved in all of those things and we really don't have to fear, because we're so confident, we're so mature that that stuff just doesn't really bother us. And if we have to eat idol meat, meat offered to idols, that's really no problem. We're able to resist the temptation and even if there is an orgy there, why we'll just sit in the corner and discuss theology. We're not going to really get involved and we'll be strong enough to handle it.

And so everywhere these mature, smug, confident Corinthians went, they were exposing themselves to the whole gamut of idolatry that was around them and trying to stay separated. But could they? Look at Israel, Paul says. Look at them, hardly out of Egypt. And out in the desert there weren't even any idols around, but the first opportunity they had, the first time their leader was gone, they reverted back to Egyptian idolatry. And here were the Corinthians not like Israel in the wilderness, but living in the middle of idolatry.

And if the Corinthians continually expose themselves to idolatry, they were constantly being a part of it. Believe me, it would creep right in. Look at the morality of our day. The morality of the church has changed dramatically and the reason it's changed so dramatically is because we have been slowly brainwashed. Like 50 years ago, the morality of Christianity was much tighter, much more rigid, much more confined to the Scripture and now, little by little the morality of even "Christianity" begins to dissipate. And the reason is because we're in a society that is destroying all morality that is wiping out all morality and consequently we find ourselves buying the bag.

Just subliminally it approaches our minds and before we know it we've got a watered down morality. And some of the things we would do, some of the places we would go wouldn't even have been conceived of by Christians 50 years ago. The reason is we have slowly been brainwashed by the media. Paul is, in a sense, saying to the Corinthians, you can't set yourself up as somebody who thinks he stands without potentially falling and especially you'll never be able to just waltz around your whole with idolatry and not have it affect you.

You're going to come up with a syncretism. You're going to come up with a wedding between idolatry and true worship. Now verse 7, "Neither be idolaters as were some of them," notes that not all Israel worshipped at the golden calf. Some of them did. It was an individual thing. Again, in dealing with Israel in the wilderness, remember, everything that occurred was an individual thing. And so in Corinth the same thing was true. Look at Chapter 5, verse 11. Some Corinthian Christians were idolatrists. They had already made this wedding of Christianity to idol worship.

Verse 11, "I've written unto you not to company if any man that is called a brother." Now he's talking about Christians. "Anybody called a brother or at least called himself a Christian be a fornicator, sexually evil, a covetous, or an," what, "idolater, don't have anything to do with him." But apparently within the congregation of the Corinthian believers there were some worshipping idols. You see by fooling around with that, they couldn't keep separated.

It slowly creeps in. It insidiously comes in. You can't continue to expose yourself to that and not have it affect your theology and find a place there. The line gets blurred folks. It just gets blurred he said. And idolatry suddenly creeps in when freedom is abused by getting too close to the contact. Now look at Exodus 32, and I want to point out what I think to be a very fascinating truth. Exodus 32 is the reference that Paul has in mind when he talks about the idolatry of Israel. They were wandering in the wilderness. They had just passed through the sea and under the cloud, been given provision of God. And out there in the wilderness, Moses went up Mount Sinai to get the law. While he's up there, the people had a little idolatry going on.

But I think something here, I want to point it out to you. "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mountain, the people gathered themselves unto Aaron and said unto him, up" get with it Aaron, do it, go, hop to it, whatever. Moses had been gone for a while. "Make us elohiym." That is the Hebrew word for God and I think it should be capital G, a singular. That's the name of God. "Make us God which shall go before us for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of him." We haven't seen Moses in a long time. We don't know where he is, but since he is not here to represent God, let's make another representation of God.

Make us God. You say, John, why do you think that they're talking about God the true God? How could they possibly do this? Let me show you why. "And Aaron said break off the gold earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons and your daughters and bring them to me." Maybe Aaron hoped they wouldn't want to do that and this was kind of a stupid attempt to stop the process by making them provide the gold themselves, but they were willing. He underestimated their idolatrist desires perhaps.

"And the people did break off the gold earrings in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And they received them at their hands and fashioned it with an engraving tool after he made it a melted calf." And that is an Egyptian deity form. "And they said, listen, "These are thy god." The representation of elohiym is what I think that they were making. This is God. God is now a golden calf. You say that's blasphemous. You're absolutely right. But why do you think it should be God instead of Gods? Look at the next line. "Which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Did they know who brought them out of the land of Egypt? Of course they did. Who was it? Jehovah. This was an image to the God who brought them out of the Egypt, Jehovah. They had made an idol to Jehovah. And what Aaron

saw, he built an altar before it and Aaron made a proclamation and said listen, tomorrow is a feast to Jehovah.

They were actually worshipping Jehovah in the form of a golden calf. And they rose up early in the next day and offered, here it comes again, these are traditional offerings to Jehovah. A burnt offering and a peace offering, and the people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play. Now listen to me people, this is unbelievable. You know what this is? Again, this is religious syncretism. Israel has taken the worship of the true God and translated it into the form of pagan worship. You say how did it happen? So many years when they were engulfed in Egypt over 400 years and seeing pagan worship had left such an impression on them that the first time they were without a leader, they reverted back to pagan idolatry and tried to connect the true God with it. And that makes the point people. You can't expose yourself to idolatry without having it at some point interfere with your theology.

That's what Paul is saying, a feast to Jehovah. And they carried out a typical pagan feast. They sat down to eat and drink and rose up to have sex. That's what the word play means. It's the same word used in Genesis 26 when it says Isaac was having conjugal caresses with Rebecca. That's a very mild way to say it. It means...you know what it means. That's what they did. They sat down, ate, got drunk, and then got up and had sex relationships with everybody in the crowd, an orgy. What a ghastly deal. What a terrible marriage of God to an idol.

And they got...they were naked. Verse 25, "Moses saw the people were naked." Moses came down, they were all stark naked, running around having an orgy. Now that could get...that would be something folks. I don't know how many of the two million were involved, but what a mess. God was not happy, verse 28. "Children of Israel did according to the word of Moses and fell that day three thousand men." They were slain. You say that's not very many. Yeah, but the whole nation bore the guilt and later on the whole pile of them died.

Now you see, those liberated people abused their freedom and they fell off because they went to sleep too close to where they got in. They never did let go of Egypt. The Corinthians were doing the same thing. They had become Christians, but they never had let go of the old life and they wanted to hang on to false gods. And you know what happened to the Corinthians? Look at 1 Corinthians 10:20. Just a little further over in the 10th Chapter. "But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrificed, they sacrificed to demons and not to God." You know, there may have been somebody around who is arguing that what the Gentiles were doing was maybe to the true God. Paul says that's ridiculous. They're sacrificing to demons. And I don't want you to have fellowship with demons. You can't drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You can't be partaker of the Lord's table and the table of demons. You see what they were doing? Same thing Israel was doing.

They go over to the Lord's table, have a time. They're all down at the Lord's table, go over to the table of demons have a feast in the pagan temple. They were marrying the two again. Same thing Israel was doing. You say yeah, you have liberty. You have freedom in Christ. You have your right to go and to do those kind of things and to sit there if you want to and to eat that idol meat, but if you do that and you keep doing it one, you will offend a weaker brother and two, you'll put yourself in a position to get engulfed in pagan idolatry. Be a lot smarter if you avoid it.

Well, Paul warns Israel was disqualified from usefulness as a witness by idolatry and you will be too and he says it to us today. You say, but John, we don't have any idols in our land. How does this apply? Is this irrelevant? Oh, listen, I think we've got idols. In our society we have idols. Let me give you just some illustrations. And I say this as kindly and lovingly as I can and yet this is what I believe. For example, I believe we have idols today in Romanism. Traditionally, Romanism venerates Mary, worships Mary. Venerates to worship the saints, venerates and worships angels. That's idolatry.

And at the same time, I really believe that many Roman Catholics have come to know Jesus Christ and I'm thankful, many priests have. And that's super, thrilling. I praise God for that. But I'll tell you something, when you come to know Jesus Christ and stay in that environment, an environment that fosters improper worship and worship of the wrong person and the wrong personality, you can't stay there. You're pushing your liberty to the edge where you're going to have that affect your theology. Ultimately, you're going to come up with some kind of a syncretism, some kind of a union.

I had a lady...well, I mentioned something about it a few weeks ago and I got a letter from a dear lady and she was very conscientious and very concerned and also very angry. And she wrote me about six pages of, boy you know, it was just going up and down on the desk. You know, it just really was...and she was saying why...how can you attack the church of Jesus Christ and how can you attack...I've never attacked the church of Jesus Christ believe me. But how can you say that against those that are truly Christians. And she said I want you to know that I am a Christian, that I am a Roman Catholic, and I am a Christian, but I know the truth. I do not believe in the worship of Mary. I do believe in the worship of the saints and the veneration of angels and I do not believe in the actual sacrifice of Christ in the mass. And I do not believe this and I do not believe this. And you know, I wrote back and said you are no Catholic. You are a Christian. Thank God. What are you doing in there? If you stay there long enough, all that stuff is going to stay.

The same thing is true in Protestantism. There are people who sit in a Protestant church where they know they're not hearing the truth and idolatry is to think anything less of God than He is worthy of, right? And people will sit in a church year after year after year in a Protestant church and here untrue things about God and wonder why they have an emaciated Christian experience. They're going to allow that stuff to infiltrate their true understanding of God and Christ and salvation until finally the whole thing gets confused and the same kind of syncretism that existed in Corinth and existed in Israel.

There are other Gods in our society. For example, there's the God of fame, of ego, money, education, position, sex, golf, tennis, clothes, cars, and on and on and on and on. And there are plenty of people bowing down to those idols and that becomes a wedded thing. And there are people who have their Christianity, but they've married it to something else that they worship. Plenty of idols. Ezekiel, I think, hits the nail on the head in Chapter 14, verses 3-4 in his indictment of Israel he says here's the problem. "Son of man these men have set up their idols in their heart." That's the problem. It isn't that you've got a stone God or that you've got a metal idol or a wooden totem pole, they've got idols in their heart.

Verse 4, "Every man of the house of Israel that sets up his idols in heart." Verse 5, "That I may take the house of Israel in their heart because they are estranged from me through their idols." And that's the thing He's after. They had worshipped things in their hearts. There can be false servants. Anything untrue about God is idol worship. Anything other than God which we worship is idolatry and if you don't believe it, but you hang around it long enough it'll water you down.

Israel couldn't even get away from Egypt. The Corinthians couldn't get away from the problem as long as they hung around the idol feasts and the same thing is true today. As long as you'll hang around those kinds of problems you're never going to get rid of them. I remember a guy who was a minister who used to enjoy golf and he said I love golf. I play golf, etc., etc. so many times a week and I thought boy that's a lot. You probably shouldn't play that much, you can really get kind of tied down to it. Oh no, he really enjoyed it and he played it and finally he played it and then he gambled a little bit, a little bit more, and a little bit more and finally he was losing $500.00 to $1,000.00, $1,500.00, $2,000.00, $2,500.00, $3,000.00 on a game. Wiped out his whole ministry, went out of the ministry in disgrace. He had an idol and as long as he courted that idol, there was no way he would divorce it.

He had the freedom to play. I have the freedom to play golf. I have the freedom to play golf today, did you know that? This isn't the Sabbath. I have the freedom to play golf tonight instead of preaching, did you know that? Because I'm not under the law to do that. I'm not going to do that. You come. I enjoy preaching, but golf disturbs me. But you see if that thing becomes a God, then I can't divorce the two and then I'm trouble. Israel fell, Corinth was falling, and so might we if we have idols.

Look at verse 8, second factor in the fall of Israel, the second thing that led to their disqualification as a witnessing community and having been set aside, verse 8 says, "Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed and fell in one day, three and twenty thousand." When anybody asks me how God feels about sexual sin, this is what I always think of. People say well, what is God's attitude toward pre-marital sex or extra-marital sex? I always say well, His attitude is probably best expressed in the fact that there was a group of people who committed extra-marital sex and 23,000 of

them He killed in one day. Does that give you an idea?

That's His attitude. Now idolatry and sex have always been related. In Numbers 25:1 there's an interesting statement. It says in relation to Israel and they were always fooling around the Moabites and this was a result of Balaam and his activity. But in 25:1 I think it is of Numbers, "The people of Israel began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab." First of all sexual activity, here it comes, "And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods and the people did eat and bow down to their gods and Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor." That's the god Baal associated with Mount Peor, a local deity. "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel."

So you have harlotry in verse 1 and idolatry in verse 2. They go together, sexual immorality and idol worship. In Corinth the principle temple in the city was the temple to Venus. It was run by prostitutes and orgies occurred all the time and the Corinthians were saying well, we're alright, we'll go up there and enjoy the feasts. We don't have to get into the orgy. And the apostle Paul is saying look, Israel couldn't divorce themselves from sexual immorality and in one day God slew 23,000 of them for it. Interesting footnote here is that in Numbers 25:9, which describes later on in that same passage I read you, describes what God did to those that committed sexual immorality with Moab. And it says that 24,000 died. Here it says 23,000. You say is that contradiction in the Bible? Well, it could be a copying error. There are some numerical terms in the Bible that could be copious error where you have a difference in the number. And which to me goes to prove the fantastic accuracy of Scripture, because the variation is always so minute and the only variations we can ever find are minuscule things like that which is incredible when you think how that book as been passed down through the centuries.

So it could be a copious error. On the other hand, some say it's round figures. That the number was between 23 and 24. One writer took 23 and the other writer took 24 and the truth is the middle and very often the Hebrews spoke in round figures. That's perhaps true. But there's another thought too that might be right. He says 24,000 in total died in Numbers 25:9. Here it says 23,000 fell in one day. There may have been a 1,000 who just lived passed midnight. So maybe both are correct. Or 23,000 in one day and 24,000 total if you take it that way were disqualified from being a part of God's witnessing community because of immorality.

Now listen, the Corinthians were already into this. They were saying why we can attend all these things and do what we want. And you know what happens in Chapter 5? One guy's already having sex with his father's wife and it could have occurred at an idol feast. In Chapter 6 verse 18, he says, "you better flee from sexual immorality," and the implication is they were already doing it. "Don't you know you're bodies of the members of Christ," verse 15. Verse 16, "Don't you know that if you join yourself to a harlot, you drag Christ into that thing."

Chapter 11 tells us some of the Corinthians had died because of sin. So flaunting their freedom and fooling around with idol worship, they had fallen into a syncretistic religion and they also had fallen into sexual evil. And I'll tell you something people, you say well, I'm a Christian I can handle it. I can go here and do that and go here and do that. You know, young people, it's amazing, young people always thing they're in control of everything. Well, you know, I can go out and park and you know, I can handle it. I'm a Christian. We just get so far and then we just start quoting Bible verses, you know.

Yeah, we got a little program worked out, you know. Yeah, sure. Or listen, it's no problem for me. I can handle the girls in the office, no problem. I can have lunch with them and dinner with them. It doesn't bother me a bit. Uh-huh, famous last words. Oh yeah, pastor says oh counseling women no problem at all. No, none at all. I just heard of a pastor who lost his pulpit because there were multiple dozens of women who had had sexual relations with him in counseling. I mean multiple dozens, folks. You can handle it? You better not push your freedom too far. Many Christians today have been rendered useless because they couldn't handle sex. They're out of the race to win people to Christ. Shelved.

There was a third thing that caused the fall of Israel from a place of usefulness and that was tempting God. And this is very interesting, verse 9. Tempting God, "Neither let us put Christ to the test as some of them also tested Him and were destroyed by snakes." Now do you remember in Numbers 21? That again covers Israel in the wilderness from which all of these illustrations here are taken. But Numbers 21, let me read you verse 5, "And the people spoke against God," and that's bad when you do that as soon as it starts with that, you know we're in a lot of trouble. They started speaking against God and Moses. You say, "wherefore have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness." What'd you bring us here for? Just so we could die?

Now listen, "For there isn't any bread and there isn't any water and we hate this manna. And the Lord send fiery snakes among the people and the bit the people and many of them died." The Lord said I don't like that. I do not like it. You're pushing me too far. We want this, we want this, we want this and they kept pushing and pushing and pushing and griping and God finally said that's it. They pushed to see how far God would go. How much could they force God to do. We don't like what you're giving us. We want this and we want this and we want that.

What would God allow? You know there are some Christians if we can just extrapolate out of that, here's the point he's making. There are some Christians who want to push God to the limits all the time. Their whole view of the Christian life is not what can I do to please God, but how far can I go and get away with it. How long a rope does God have around me? When do I get the yank? How far can I go? Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5, they thought they could play along with the Holy Spirit, string Him out. Peter said unto them in Acts 5:9, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?"

Look there goes your husband's feet and yours are going right after them. Both of them dropped dead. You think you can test the Holy Spirit? How far are you going to push God? Satan says "why don't you dive off the pinnacle of the temple? The Scripture says he shall give his angels charge of thee to keep thee, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone," etc. Jesus said, "You shall not," what, "tempt the Lord your God." Don't force God to do something. Don't get yourself in a situation and then force God to get you out of it.

That's pushing, don't push God. And here were the Corinthians just, you know, we want the old life, we want the goodies we used to have. Why are we so restricted? It isn't fair. How come we can't have any fun? So they were pushing the edges of their liberty running as close to the old life as possible and demanding to have what they once enjoyed. They weren't willing to cut off the old life and accept the new life. And the Corinthians were having the same thing. They were saying yes, we're Christians but we're going to do everything we used to do and God will take care of it. Why this is the age of grace. God is so wonderfully forgiving. And Paul reminds them, you know what happened to Israel when they just pushed God as far as He would go and just took His grace as far as it could go, God just took one day at stock and then He said, I think I'll deliver a little group of snakes down there and bit them and they died all over the place.

Now Corinthians that's something for you to think about. Let it be an example. And you know some of the Corinthians had already died because of this? They had pushed God too far. Come in to the communion table with sin in their lives, going through the communion and God says that's pushing me too far, bang you're dead. Some of them were sick, some of them were weak, just because they were pushing God too far. This is grace people. And I thank God for it and I'm glad I'm in the age of grace, but let's remember that there is a place at which God doesn't get pushed any further.

Fourth, and the last thing that he mentions in terms of the evil things that brought about the demise of Israel, quickly. Complaining. Oh you say, how did that get in there with all those horrible things? Verse 10, "Neither murmur as some of them murmured and were destroyed by the destroyer." You say who's the destroyer? That is the destroying judgment angel. The same one that slew the firstborn in Egypt. The one that was ready to slay the people in Jerusalem and David's time in 2 Samuel 24. The one involved in the destruction of the Assyrians in 2 Chronicles 32, the death angel if you will.

You know God slew people with the death angel for griping? Oh no. Hallelujah for the age of grace. Well, I'm with you. You say what does this mean? What does this translate to? The Corinthians, well, Lord we don't like to live a restricted life. We don't like to not be able to do what we want to do. We don't like to be set aside. We don't like to have this...listen, people for us, this is what it says. Murmuring is a failure to be satisfied with God's will for your life.

Did you get that? Failure to be satisfied with God's will for your life. Don't do that. There are a whole lot of carcasses strewn all over the desert, the carcasses of people who weren't satisfied with God's choices for them. God had them there. He wanted them there. Discontent, Paul says I've learned one thing, Philippians 4:10, "In whatsoever state I am," what, "therewith to be content." Christians today are guilty of complaining. That's dangerous. Well, why does God...why do I have to be here? Why can't I be doing that? Well, how come he gets all...why did I have to be married to her? Why did God do this?

I wanted to be a missionary. Or I wanted to be...why I am over here punching the clock. I never seem to be able to get ahead in life. Why isn't that my bills are never paid? Now you start griping and murmuring about the things that God has chosen for your life and your murmuring and that's problematic. The Old Testament folks, they were fairly afraid to do that, you see. You know there was a little rebellion in Numbers 16 and that's what he has in mind here. "And Korah and Dathan, Moses says come I want to talk to you." And they said forget it. We're not interested in talking to you, you phony. All you do is lead us out in the wilderness so you can play prince, so you can be a big hero. You got what you wanted and the rest of us are going to die out here. He says I don't like your rebellion. And God says I don't either. I'll take care of it. And God slew 14,700 of them and 250 of them He opened a hole in the ground and it swallowed them up.

Numbers 16, and the rest of the people said it is not good to murmur. And you know for the most part, the Old Testament people from time to time had to be taught that lesson. And I say to you, it is not good to murmur. So Paul warns the Corinthians that a lack of self-denial, a lack of self-control in their privileges is going to lead to abuse and they will fall into idolatry, into sex, into pushing God too far, into complaining and griping because they think God is always so gracious and forgiving and they start bellyaching about their lot in life and they start complaining all the time and ultimately, they will be tempted. They will fall into sin and they will be rendered disqualified for the service of God.

Listen to me people, the continual fooling around with things that are questionable reveals a lack of self-control and is a potential for disqualification. You flirt with the old lifestyle, you test God to see how far His patience goes, you complain about His choices for this life and you're going to be a rebellion. And disqualification is potential. Look at verse 11 and we'll close. "Now all these things happen unto them for examples that are written for our instruction or admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come." That is we're the last generation. We're the last dispensation. And everything that happened to them is to teach us so that we don't fall into the same trap that they did and wind up disqualified. God help us to be useful to Him as a witnessing community because we enjoy our liberty to its limits with two things in mind. You don't abuse it by offending someone else. You don't abuse it by living so close to where you got in that you fall.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for our study this morning. Practical, straightforward. Thank You for how the Holy Spirit applies it to every life. I want to say thank You, Father, for the faithfulness of these precious people and how thrilling it is to me and how I marvel at it, week after week that they come so faithfully and in anticipation and excitement to expose themselves to the Holy Spirit and the truth of God. Father, that says something, something exciting. It says there's something real here. There's something genuine in these people. They want to know Your truth and they want to be exposed by it and they want to deal with the sin in their lives and they want to grapple with it and they want to be what You want them to be and I thank You for that.

And I pray that You'll bring into our pray those who need us to help them in their struggle. Those who need us to show them how they can know You. How they can have peace and forgiveness. Amen.

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