

The Danger of Spiritual Privilege

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

80-2

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bible with me to I Corinthians chapter 10. Paul's epistle to the Corinthian church chapter 10. As you know, we've been studying the gospel of Matthew, but because we have these special events on us...next week a special sermon, the following week our Shepherd's Conference and a special message and then a couple of weeks with me gone...I didn't want to get into chapter 26 of Matthew and start and then have to wait a long time. So we'll wait until all of this is finished and then we'll look at the 26th chapter of Matthew and get into the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord.

But for today, I want us to look at I Corinthians chapter 10. I've been writing...actually have now finished the commentary on I Corinthians and in the process, of course, went back through the book and over every thought that the Lord would give me as I studied it. And time and again I was drawn to the impact of this tenth chapter. And as I was meditating last week on what I might share with you, I began to read it again and it just impressed itself so much on my mind. And I want you to look with me at the first 13 verses of Chapter 10. I'll read them and then we'll see what the spirit of God has to say.

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And all did eat the same spiritual food; And all did drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them," literally the text says, "most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

"Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. 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. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day 23,000. Neither let us put Christ to the test, as some of them also tested Him, and were destroyed by serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

"Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make the way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Now, that is a powerful and dramatic passage. It relates to us an historical setting and then ties it in to the Corinthian scene and then pushes beyond that to speak to us today. It tells about a whole nation of people who were blessed by God, who enjoyed exceedingly abundant privilege, who

received from God magnanimous gifts of his love and grace but who were destroyed in judgment. If we were to title the passage, we could title it, "The Danger of Spiritual Privilege." "The Danger of Spiritual Privilege."

The key thought to the passage of course is Verse 12, "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall." The point here is that the most privileged person or the most privileged group of people can end up in the greatest disaster.

In fact, this whole thing in chapter 10 springs out of the thought in chapter 9, verse 27. Look at it. In chapter 9, verse 27, Paul speaking personally says, "I keep my body under." That is, "I keep my body under control; I bring it into subjection to my mind and my will lest that by any means or through any cause, or any act of my body, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" is what the word means. Paul says, "I keep my body in control, lest in preaching to others, I could be disqualified."

He knows a very important thing. He is a man of great privilege. I mean he is a man who probably from the spiritual standpoint had the equal or superior privilege to any other believer that ever lived. He had three personal post resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ to him. That's pretty unique. He was stoned and left for dead and raised from that rubble miraculously by the power of God. He became blind and was made to see. He became the greatest apostle and preacher and articulator of the Christian faith apart from Christ that ever lived. He was the founder of church after church after church, the discipler of leader after leader after leader, the builder of men. He was caught up into the third heaven and saw things too marvelous, too incredible, too amazing, too supernatural to even be discussed he tells us. And in terms of being an apostle, nobody outranked him, he said. He was a man of amazing privilege, amazing privilege. He was given the revelation for 13 separate New Testament books. The Spirit of God flooded that man's life with truth, privilege, opportunity, ministry, wisdom, knowledge. Profoundly enriched.

And yet, with all of that expanse of spiritual privilege, he had the fear that in the exercise of his ministry, by failing to control his own body, he could be disqualified from service to Christ. And every believer ought to have that same idea. We have to live with that reality, that none of us is invincible. And a massive amount of privilege does not guarantee that we can live any way we want without consequence. I think that some people have assumed that because they have experienced so much blessing from God, they can live any way they want without any kind of judgment. Classic illustration: Israel. So blessed, so privileged, so abundantly the recipients of God's grace, mercy, loving-kindness that they actually learned how to abuse His grace. They pushed to the limits of God's tolerance and they lived on the danger edge until finally disaster came.

You see, one of the things you have to deal with as a Christian is freedom. One of the things you have to deal with as a Christian is privilege. But you must deal with it in the way that Paul did, and he dealt with it by trying to control with his renewed mind the body which tends to want to lead us into sin. And so in verse 27 of chapter 9, he thinks about the danger of spiritual privilege personally. And in chapter 10, he thinks about it corporately. And that's the way we must think about it, in that same duality.

I must look at my own life and say, "John you have received great privilege." I have; I have received great privilege. Great privilege. I have had the privilege not only of learning from great and gifted men but of having great opportunity. I have the privilege of having great people around me who pour their

life into me, who minister along side of me, of having a marvelous congregation of people of whom God has poured out blessing. And that blessing spills back on me. I am privileged to be able to reach even beyond this church in ministry, and I need to be very much aware that because God has blessed me so much does not cause me to live loosely and abuse that, but to live all the more tightly so that I would never to anything to be disqualified. And I live in that, that sense of pressure, if you will, that Paul understand.

And our church must too. This church has been singularly blessed by God. And it's all by his sovereignty. It has nothing to do with anything really other than His sovereignty and we, wanting to work by the Scripture, have put ourselves in a place so that His sovereignty could be maximized to us. But it's His choice. And we have been greatly privileged, greatly privileged. But that does not remove the element of danger.

Great privilege does not mean God is looking at us and saying, "Well, I'm just going to give you everything because I like you better than anybody else. So feel free to do what you want." You've got to deal with this with your children, don't you? Sometimes you're so good to them and so kind and so gracious that they go too far. And you need to discipline to bring them back in. And so it is in the spiritual dimension.

The Corinthians, frankly, were overconfident. They were abusing their liberty because they thought they had everything. God must really like them. Boy, He gave them everything. I mean, there were born out of a marvelous ministry of the apostle Paul himself. Read it in the book of Acts, a tremendous event. The 18th chapter of Acts...he came; he preached; great things happened. The Gospel was received by the Gentiles. A church was born. He stayed there, taught them for 18 months. I mean he gave them 18 months of his life, the apostle Paul. They must have been under the teaching of Christ then, Cephus and Appollus also because they themselves were saying, "I'm of Appollus, I'm of Cephus, I'm of Paul, I'm of Christ." They were exposed to the best of teachers. You can't get any better than Christ, Appollus, Paul and Peter. That's the tops. They were highly privileged. It was to them that Paul wrote two epistles. Two long epistles, pouring out his heart. Great privilege.

In fact, they were very smug about it. In I Corinthians, chapter 4, Paul rather sarcastically indicts their smugness. In verse 8 he says, "Now you are full. Now you are rich. You have reigned as kings without us." Very sarcastic, "Aren't you something?" They thought themselves to be invincible. They were abusing everything, every privilege they had. They had cliques going on of Paul, of Appollus, Cephus, Christ. They were suing each other. There was immorality in the church. There was disdain of the Lord's Table. They were eating meat offered to idols; they were fooling around with pagan festivals. They thought that they could just about do anything they wanted to do.

God had given them so much they traded on His grace. And he says, "So, you're full, are you? So, you're really kings; you are really rich; you have really arrived." And then he said, "I would to God, you did reign. It isn't true." In verse 18 of the fourth chapter he said, "Some of you are puffed up and proud.". It's easy to get that way. It's easy to say to yourself, "Boy we're really the blessed. Look at us, God's just pouring out everything on us, we're special," and get proud about that. And then you start to play with your freedoms, and you start moving out to the edge of God's tolerance, and you could be disqualified and so could this whole church.

I've been across this country in my life long enough to know there are a lot of buildings standing that

once were filled with people and nothing now is there but a stone quarry, just a hole with a bunch of rock around it. Maybe a few people huddled in the middle trying to hold it all together. I've seen God disqualify individuals, and I've seen God disqualify congregations. And I guess as you look at your life and your ministry and as I look at what God is doing here, the greatest anxiety I would have personally for me is that I would do something that would disqualify me, or this church would begin to fall into patterns of life that would disqualify it. What a frightening thought.

And so Paul says, "I have to warn you people, and I warn you by giving you a history lesson," and he moves into a marvelous insightful look at the history of Israel. And I want you to look at it. There are four movements of thought. Four movements of thought, you want to jot them down. It will take you right through the text: the assets, the abuses, the admonition and the advantage.

First of all, the assets. Look at verse 1. Moreover, that is going from a personal illustration in chapter 9, verse 27 of the fact that privilege doesn't mean that you can live any way you want, but rather you have to control yourself lest you be disqualified. Going from the personal to the corporate, brethren, I don't want you to be ignorant and here's the illustration. And the key word is all. It's used five times. "All our fathers were under the cloud. All passed through the sea. All were baptized into Moses. All did eat the same spiritual food. All did drink the same spiritual drink." That's the key term.

What he is saying is that without exception, the Israelites received the blessing of God. They all received it. Everybody was a beneficiary. God bestowed on them mighty power. Great blessing. I mean they lived to see God work in mighty ways. There they were in Egypt. And they saw God come in power and literally bring to its knees the greatest empire of the day, the Egyptian empire, through the plagues. And then they say God take them through the Red Sea, and they saw God lead them by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They saw God pour out manna from heaven. And they saw God lead them in the wilderness. And they saw the mighty hand of God's judgment. And they saw God carve out tables of stone to give His law of love on Mt. Sinai. I mean, they saw God. This is no second-hand generation folks. They knew God. They saw God. They felt God. They were involved in His miraculous and mighty power. They were all there.

Look what he says. First of all, "All our fathers were under the cloud." "Fathers" is the term just to designate a prior generation. And they are not only the fathers of the Jews racially, but they are the fathers, in a sense, of all those who are the faithful. They are the fathers of all the people of God in the sense that they were the original people of God. So he's looking back and saying, "Our fathers, our Jewish fathers who really, in a sense, are our forebears of faith as well, they were all under the cloud." What does he mean by that? The cloud was what led them, the glory cloud, the Chichina cloud. It led them. They experienced divine guidance; that's the issue. They experience divine guidance, miraculous leading by God.

In Exodus 13:21 it says that, "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them." I mean, they were led by God Himself. Some man wasn't up there saying, "I think I know what God wants. I think He wants us to go over there." No, there wasn't any of that. They just looked up, and they were led by God. And they looked up again, and they were led by God. I mean, this is direct, hands-on leadership. I mean, that would really simplify life wouldn't it? If you just had a little cloud, and when you get up in the morning it was there, and it went over here, and then it went over there. And you just said, "The Lord is leading, and I'm just going." See? That's what they experienced.

You want to know something? I think we've experienced that too. Not with a little cloud but believe

me people, we have seen God lead here. I mean when this church began with some couples and a prayer time who wanted to see this Valley reached for Christ over 25 years ago. They never dreamed this would happen, but God led to this. We have seen the leading of God. I could tell you millions of ways in which we've seen God lead directly that could never be explained in any human way.

One just comes to mind. Down the street we own four acres, and you're going to hear the wonderful exciting reality next week about what we're going to do with them. You'll be excited when you hear about it. But anyway we have that four acres down the street. It's down beyond the parking lot over there; it's directly across from the parking lot on this side. Four acres, we own that. How did we get that? The Lord led. One day our treasurer came into the elders' meeting and said, "Gentlemen, we have a \$300,000 surplus." And we all picked ourselves back up off the floor and said, "What? How did this happen?" "We don't know. We've gone through the books and there's \$300,000 we didn't know we had." "What should we do? What does the Lord want us to do?"

Well, with that invitation, they said there's only one piece of property left on Roscoe Boulevard, and it's right down the street from our church. The Lord must want us to have that. At that time it was on both sides. We've now turned one part of it into a parking lot, the other is still vacant. And so they said, "Let's find out who owns it, and immediately let's put a bid on it." And we had no thought of doing that before. So we did, and they accepted it. It was owned by a large food corporation, and they accepted our offer of \$300,000 I think. The next day, a better offer came in from a developer. We had no way to know that. We were one day ahead of that. And a few days later the treasurer called the elders together and said, "We made a mistake; we don't have that money." It's exactly right. So if you're worried about us, don't worry about us. Even when we do wrong, the Lord overrules it. This is His church. We have that property based on our own stupidity and the sovereignty of God. This is His church. We have experienced that. Listen, I'm as sure that that was the leading of God as I would've been if I was a Jew walking through the desert following a pillar of cloud. That's God. And we've seen it again and again and again. We've experienced that.

And then he says not only will all under the cloud, but "all passed through the sea." Now, you remember that, don't you? The sea parted, and they walked across on dry land. That's divine deliverance. That's divine deliverance. There was divine leading, and there was divine deliverance. They were taken out of Egypt, crossed that Red Sea on dry land, miraculously called out to serve God, delivered to be His special servants. And we've experienced that here. I mean, not only have I experienced it, and you, having been delivered from the bondage of sin into the freedom of grace, but we've experienced it as a church, having been delivered, as it were, out of the world and become an assembly of God's redeemed people like an island in the midst of a sea of paganism. We've been delivered. God has redeemed us as a corporate people as well as individuals. So thankful are we for Him and for what He's done for us.

And then notice further verse 2, "And all were immersed into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." By being led by the cloud and led through the sea by the human representative Moses, they were all immersed into Moses. Now, it's not talking about actual baptism. Presbyterians have sometimes interpreted this verse, "They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud" means they were sprinkled because the cloud dropped rain on them. And the Baptists say, "No, they went through the sea. They were all wet, head to toe." Both are wrong, it's the cloud of glory not a rain cloud, and when they went through the sea they went through on what? Dry land. There's not any water here. What it's saying here is the word baptized is a word for immersed. Like we say a person is immersed in Bible

Study or this person is immersed in the teaching of John Calvin, or he's immersed in the leadership of his pastor or whatever, or whatever, or whatever. That's the idea.

The Jews, by coming together behind the leadership of Moses became immersed into him. He became in a sense their head and their leader, of God's man. What it's saying is that they had a divine identity. They came together as a common assembly, a common group of people under the leadership of Moses. They were one assembly, one redeemed people called out, divinely led and divinely constituted with an identity as the people of God under the leadership of Moses. That's solidarity, to use a contemporary term. I believe we've had that. We are a unique people, aren't we? Under the leadership of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, under the direction of those who preach and teach the Word of God in this place. We have become one people, haven't we? With a common understanding of the Word of God, with common burdens and common fellowship and common phrase and common life and common ministry and common sharing, common investment in the kingdom, common rejoicing because God has blended us together as His church in this place. We have that same great privilege, and what a privilege it is. You should talk to some of the people visiting us for the Bible conference who come from places where they can't find a place where God's people come together around God's word like we do, where their hearts are hungry for that. We are people of privilege. We really are. We have had the unique and divine identity that God gives to a redeemed assembly in a community.

And then look at verse 3. As he looks back at Israel he said, "They all ate the same spiritual food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink." The food was manna; the water that they drank was water from a rock and water that God provided in the wilderness. Why is it called spiritual? Is it spiritual food in the sense that it's some kind of a supernatural kind of thing like the truth of God, whatever? No. Spiritual food in the sense that it was come from the Spirit. It wasn't provided by any earthly means. Manna from where? From heaven. Water out of rock is not normal; that's God intervening. So, what it means is it was spiritual food and spiritual drink in the sense that it came from the Spirit, not that it was spiritual in terms of its nature. It was spiritual in terms of its source.

So they all had a miraculous provision of God. They were sustained by the miraculous God who fed them and watered them. Divine provision for their needs, for their sustenance. We, too, are the beneficiaries of that. Oh, how God has graciously provided for us as a church. He says they drank all the same spiritual drink, verse 4, and then he throws in this great truth, "For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ." And that's what he's saying.

What he means by "spiritual water" is that the source of it was the spiritual rock, not the rock that Moses struck. The real source was a spiritual rock who was Christ. What does that mean? Listen, Christ was alive then, as He is now. This is a great indication in the Scripture that Christ's life didn't begin at His birth. He is alive in the Old Testament as much as in the New and He is caring for His people in the Old Testament as much as He is in the New. He is ever and always the Redeemer of an old covenant saint and the new covenant saint. And He is ever and always the Shepherd of His people in the old covenant as well as the new. And so as He provides for us now, He provided for them then. And the real source of water was not a rock; the real source of water was the Rock providing that for them. So they had all this provision. And we too have had that. And we have had provision from Christ Himself on our behalf, blessed with all spiritual blessings beyond description.

And so they are privileged, and the Corinthians were privileged and we are privileged. And then comes the shocker in Verse 5, "But with most of them God was not well pleased." What a statement.

He was not well pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness, literally strewn like corpses all over the desert. Why? How could people with such privilege wind up in such disaster? With most of them...in fact, you could just about narrow it down to Joshua and Caleb were the only ones He was well pleased with. The whole generation had to die in the wilderness, didn't they? And it wasn't just in one fell swoop; they were constantly being disciplined with death. Great spiritual privilege put them in great danger. Jesus said, "To whom much is given, much is required." And the greater the spiritual privilege, the greater the disaster of wasted privilege, violated privilege, abused privilege.

And in Numbers 14:16, it says, "Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to give to them, therefore, he has slain them in the wilderness." It's tragic to think about it, corpses all over the desert. People with the greatest spiritual privilege that any people on earth had ever experienced, great privilege, and they thought because we have so much, God just keeps pouring it out, they must be special and God must be especially tolerant of them, and so they begin to cross the line between's God grace and His wrath. And they paid the price; they were disqualified for service as a nation, as a people. That generation was disqualified and the Lord had to raise up another.

Paul had the same thought in chapter 9, verse 27, as I said, the fear that in having so much privilege you would get so comfortable in God's blessing that you would fail in the area of self control. Specifically, what went wrong? To go from the assets to the abuses? What went wrong? Here it is, verse 6 says, now, these things were our examples, our toupass, our types, figures, patterns, moral patterns. In other words this is an example for us folks, he says. And here's the key to the whole thing to interpret what he means by that, just this: If our sins correspond to their sins, our judgment will correspond to their judgment. That's the point. This is a pattern. This is a pattern. This is something that you can trace out. It'll be this way with you as it was with them. If your sins correspond to that, your fate will correspond to theirs. So, this is a pattern for us.

And what were their sins? First, that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. Literally, that we should not be longers after evil things. I guess we could call this worldliness. This is the desire for that which belongs to the world. This is wanting what the world has. This is a half-hearted...James calls it a double-minded approach. Listen to Numbers 11:4, "And the mixed multitude that were among them fell to lusting." And it isn't that they're talking about immorality here. But, rather, the children of Israel also wept. They started to cry, "Ooh, she'll give us flesh to eat." See, they were lusting after food. Well, what do you mean? Well, they were tired of the manna. They'd had manna, manna, manna, manna, manna. And now, they were complaining.

"We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt, freely. The cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions and the garlic." And I never read that without wondering what they must've smelled like, to be honest with you. "But, now, it's our soul dried away. We've had it with the same stuff everyday. We want what we had in Egypt." In verse 34 it says, "And the Lord called the name of the place Kibroth Hattaavah because there they buried the people that lusted." You mean God killed a bunch of people for wanting cucumbers? Melons? No, God slew people who were discontent with his provisions. God slew people who, in their hearts, wanted the old life with its luxury. They didn't want the barren life of obedience. They wanted everything the world had to offer, all the stuff. Boy, it's hard to sort yourself out from all of that isn't it? Hard for all of us.

God is just serious about this. I don't know if you remember Psalms 78...frightening. It says, "They tempted God," verse 18, "by asking food according to their desire." They didn't want what God

wanted to give them, they wanted what they want. They spoke against God. They literally..."Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? What kind of God have we got? He can't put on a decent banquet. Behold, he smote the rock, and water gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people?" This is mocking God.

They wanted their old stuff. They wanted the fancy stuff, the comfort, the fancy food, the whole thing. So, the Lord heard it, and he was angry. What did he do? Verse 24, "He had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them the grain of Heaven. And man did eat angel's food." You see, it wasn't a question of whether manna was good. You wanna know something? I believe manna was the best stuff, ever. I mean, if the Lord's gonna give you food, it's gotta be good. Right? I mean, it's great stuff, but they wanted the old lifestyle. It was the world they never cut themselves off from. So, they said, "We want flesh. We want what we used to have." So, "He caused an east wind to blow," Psalms 78:26, "and by His power, He brought in the south wind, and He rained flesh all over them like dust." Can you imagine that? They got a bird storm. Listen, Alfred Hitchcock wasn't the first one to come up with this idea.

God literally drowned them in a pile of birds. They had 'em everyplace. And he let it all fall in the middle of their camp, everywhere around their habitations. So, they did eat. I mean, they went for it. And they were well-filled. And He gave them their own desire. They were not even estranged from their desire; it never changed their desire, at all. And while the food was still in their mouth, the wrath of God came on them and slew the fattest of them, and cut down the chosen men of Israel. For all this, they sin, still, and believe not in his wondrous works. He started them with the food in their mouth. God had made his provisions and said, "I want to feed you what I want to feed you." They said, "We want what the world has." That's the first thing. God help us as individuals not to lust after the things that the world has. To be content. To seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

And it isn't always a question of what you have. It's a question of what you want. Some people have nothing, and they look like their just living for the Kingdom. And their lusting for all the stuff they can't afford. Some people have things, like God's grace. And they can accept them as gifts and not lust after them. But, that's a tough thing to do. Worldliness. Worldliness will disqualify a church, just like it'll disqualify an individual. When you hanker more for the stuff of the world than you do for the things that God gives to feed the soul.

Second, idolatry. Verse 7, "To be idolaters," as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." You remember Exodus 32; they build a golden calf, didn't they? And I believe if you study that text, you will find out that that golden calf was supposed to represent...shock, but true, Jehovah God. It was not a false God; it was Jehovah they were representing. Because, it says, "Let us make a feast to Jehovah" in verse 5 of Exodus 32. Verse 4 says, "To the God who brought us out of Egypt." They had reduced the true God to an idol. What a confusion of Paganism and the worship of Jehovah.

And in that same chapter it says, "They were naked." So, they were having an orgy there. They had taken Pagan orgiastic Canaanite Baal worship, and they had mingled it with the true worship of Jehovah. The mishmash came out worshipping a golden calf in the name of El Ahim and doing it in an orgy. And Aaron is there with a silly grin on his face, watching it all happen. In fact, he was in charge of collecting the gold to melt down to make the calf. And Moses was up getting the Law of God. Idolatry.

Here is God's man wanting to bring his people the Word of the Living God. And they're down here, and all they want is to fill themselves with their own idols of their own making. And what they wanted was the kind of idol that would allow them to have an orgy. See, people want to create the kind of God's that are tolerant Gods. Don't they? They wanna have the kind of Jesus who doesn't mind what they do. See?

I see that happen in so many churches. We just teach love. If you saw the Donohue show this weekend, there was a girl on there who wants to be married by her pastor, and then she posed in a pornographic pose in Playboy magazine. And he refused to marry her to this guy. And so she wanted to go...and she went on the Donohue show to tell the whole world what this pastor had done to her. She said, "It's none of his business. It's my right if I want to," she used the word fornicate "with my boyfriend for several years, and if I wanna pose in Playboy. Jesus would never condemn me for that." She said. "Jesus loves me. I believe in Jesus. I'm a Christian. I believe in his death and resurrection." She went on to say all that. "Jesus would never condemn me for that, and I don't think it's right for him to condemn me."

Listen, if you could have a Jesus like that, people will line up to sign up or that Jesus. The whole place applauded like mad when the girl said that. Oh, you can preach that kind of Christianity and stack 'em in. Because people love a religion that doesn't put any compunctions on their immorality. And to...that's exactly where the Israelites were. Hey, they wanted to worship God, only they wanted to reduce God to a form where he would tolerate their orgies. See? This is the kind of idol men create. And a church can come to the point where it restructures God to be the kind of God that tolerates all their excesses. And they've got an idol, not the true God. And it's that kind of idolatry that begins to destroy and disqualify.

I'll promise you, as long as I have life and breath, as long as God keeps me in this place, Grace Church will never have a God other than the true God. Never an idol in this place. An idol who tolerate evil or tolerates sin or requalifies who God is or redefines who Jesus Christ is or what the Gospel or what the Bible teaches. We cannot create another God, as so many have...so many have. The namby-pamby milk-toast God of tolerance is not the God of Scripture.

There's no place for idols, and we have a lot of idols in our society, even beyond recreating God, a lot of idols: fame, money, sports, education, entertainment, music, food, clothes, cars, houses, comfort and any combination of the above. And we bow down so often, God help us. Ezekiel 14:3, I think it is, says, "They have set up idols in their hearts." It can be done so easily, and it's a disqualifier. It'll destroy the church.

Third sin is listed in verse 8. Just briefly to mention it because - oh, I might comment on the end of verse 7. It says there, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." That's a very interesting quote out of Exodus 32:6. When they had the golden calf built, they had a big feast. They wanted to gorge themselves and eat, and so they had this big feast. And everybody sat down and ate and drank. It was not the way it ought to have been. They were gluttonous and, no doubt, drunken. They ate and drank. And then it says, "They rose up to play," and the word "play" is the word used for the conjugal caress in Genesis 26 when Isaac was caressing Rebecca. And the old King James says he was "sporting" with her. But that's a conjugal caress. They were in an orgy. And later in the chapter, it says they were naked. So when they rose up to play, they rose up to play that way, in an illicit, orgiastic manner.

They had a god, finally, who would allow them to live any way they wanted to live. They redefined God. Then, in verse 8, it says, "Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed, and in one day, 23,000 were slain." That's right. Numbers 25:9 says the total was 24,000...23,000 one day and 1,000 more the next day. And they were disqualified from their usefulness because they were living pornographically. They were living pornea, fornication, sexual sin. And that word is so big, it means sex with women, sex with men, sex with beasts, anything. It's very broad, any kind of sexual immorality.

Boy, we live in a day when that is rampant. It's rampant. Imagine somebody standing on national television saying, "I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ. And if I want to fornicate with my boyfriend, that's my privilege." There was a day not long ago when people would no more say that than any kind of evil thing. I mean, you wouldn't think of saying such a thing. But now, you can say it and say you're a Christian, so accepted. And when you say it, and it's true about you, you're disqualified. 23,000 people died in one day.

And the Corinthians were into this. Back in chapter 5, it says they had gone so far as some of them were having sexual relationships with their father's wife, probably a step-mother. In chapter 6, they were joining themselves to harlots. Remember that? He says, "You're joining yourself to a harlot, and you're a Christian. Therefore, you're one with Christ. So when you join to a harlot, you join Christ to a harlot, unspeakable thought."

And I don't care what privilege you've had - and I've seen it happen to individuals, greatly privileged individuals, greatly privileged in the ministry, men called and gifted by God who longed after the world and became drunken. I know one man went right out of the ministry because he wanted to pay golf more than he wanted to do anything else. Got to gambling for big amounts on the golf course, was utterly disqualified from spiritual service and died in disgrace. The world can attack us many ways, and immorality is one that is just rampant in the area of disqualification. And if a church ever tolerates that kind of thing, it will become as disqualified as the individual who does it. And so immorality.

There's a fourth abuse in verse 9: "Neither let us put Christ to the test as some of them also tested and were destroyed by serpents." Serpents. It's kind of an interesting thought. What does it mean to put Him to the test? It means to push as hard as you can against the edges of your liberty and see how much God'll tolerate. Just keep doing it and keep doing it. "Well, I've gotten away with it. I've gotten away with it." And just keep pushing and pushing on the walls. And, ultimately, you will be disqualified for service. That's a disqualifier. That's what he's saying. It'll disqualify an individual. It'll disqualify a church, an assembly of people. And you remember, they did that. In Numbers 21, they kept complaining and complaining and complaining. And they kept pushing and pushing and pushing with their complaint and their complaint and their complaint until finally God just sent fiery snakes and bit 'em, and they started to die all over the place. You can only pick up God's tolerance so far.

You see, the question you ask is not, "How much can we get away with?" It's, "How much can we be like Christ?" Isn't that right? And when you've had great privilege, that doesn't give you great latitude. That ought to give you great constriction. It's a very opposite thing. So they pushed and pushed, and God sent snakes. And they died all over the place.

And there's a final sin, kind of remarkable. Verse 10: "Neither murmur ye as some of them, also, murmured and were destroyed by the Destroyer." This is complaining. You see, I can understand worldliness, idolatry, immorality and testing God, or presumption, but how in the world do you get complaining in here? That seems like just your average normal-day duty. That's just pretty routine stuff. You know what's so serious about complaining? Complaining says, "God, stop doing what you're doing and do what I tell you. I don't like the circumstances. I don't like the program. I don't like the way this is working out. I don't like the one situation you've put me in. I want another one. I don't like what you're feeding me. I want this. I don't like where I am. I wanna be there." That is a blow struck against the purpose of God. Do you see that? It isn't just a minimal deal; it is maximal. It is giving audible expression to unwarranted dissatisfaction, complaining about what God is doing, complaining about where God has placed you.

In Numbers 16, they did that and 14,700 people died. Corah is a Coathite. His job was to carry the Ark of the Covenant. That's all. He wasn't to do the rest of the priestly functions; he was Coathite, just carry the Ark. He started a rebellion. He said, "It isn't right. We're all holy to the Lord. We all have a right to come to the Lord. We should all be priests. And you Moses, and you Aaron, you're just taking all the authority for yourself, and you don't want anybody else messing with that priesthood because you wanna control everybody. But we all ought to be priests, and we all ought to be equal with you. So Moses said, "Good. You bring your little sensor, and we'll all show up, and we'll all have our little sensors, and we'll all come before the Lord, and we'll all act like priests, and we'll see who God accepts." And Corah and his buddies showed up, and the ground opened and swallowed them up, end of discussion.

They complained. They complained. They griped. They murmured. They wanted more authority. They wanted more power. They had as much right as anybody else. They didn't like the lot that was given to them. And they weren't alone. The rebellion ended in almost 15,000 people being killed. And who killed 'em? Verse 10 says the Destroyer. Who's that? The rabbis used to call that Mashif, that is the destroyer angel, the judgment angel. It's the same angel that slew the first born in Egypt in Exodus 12, the same angel ready to slay in the plagues of Jerusalem, 2 Samuel 24, the same angel who destroyed the Assyrians in 2 Chronicles 32. He is the angel of God who goes out to execute. Death to the complainers.

Well, we could develop each of these so much. What is Paul saying to the Corinthians? "Look, you who have received maximal privilege, that does not give you the right to abuse that grace. You better bring yourself into control by the power of the Spirit, and you better not abuse that privilege by worldliness, by idolatry, by immorality, by presumption or by complaining." Flirting with the world and all of its idols and its morals and pushing the patience of God to its limits and complaining when we don't get what we want when we want it can only result in disqualification of an individual or disqualification of a church.

People, because we have been so privileged, we have tremendous responsibility. We go from assets to abuses to an admonition. The admonition in verse 11: "Now, all these things happened unto them for examples and are written for our admonition, to admonition us, or rather, exhort us upon whom the ends of the ages are come." The ends of ages simply means the Messianic time. That designates the period from the first coming of Christ to His kingdom. We're living in that time. All of those things happened as examples to us.

And what are they supposed to teach? What is the admonition? It's right in verse 12. Here it is: "Let

him that thinks he stands take heed," what, "lest he fall." Just when you thought you're invulnerable, you're really in a fatal situation. When you thought you can let go of everything and live any way you want and push it all away to the edge and get away with it, you are really in a serious situation. And that brings us to the last.

You say, "John, but it's so hard to fight off these temptations. I'm just a victim. I can't help it. The world's heavy on me. And the pressure's great. And I'm not responsible. I'm just a human person. I'm just a sinner. And the world's all around me. And I can't handle it. And you can't blame me for it. That's just the way it is. It happens to, oh, it seems like so many groups. And everybody tends to fall under the same kinds of patterns, so I just can't accept the responsibility." Wait a minute.

Verse 13 is the advantage. And this is the end. "There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." Now, what does that mean? That is, it is on a human level. It is not so superhuman that you can't deal with it." That's what he says. It is not so powerful coming from a supernatural source that it is beyond you. It is something that is normal for men. "But God is faithful, who will not allow you, ever, to be tempted above what you're able to handle. He would never allow you to be blasted by supernatural satanic forces to a degree that you couldn't handle but will always, along with the temptation, make what? The way to escape that you may be able to endure." That's the advantage.

This is the climax to everything people. Look. We have great privilege. We stand in great danger. But if we fall, whose fault is it? It's ours because we have the advantage. What is the advantage? No temptation coming to us is ever more than we can bear. And in every one of those, God is faithful and able to make what? The way of escape. And so we have the resource we need for victory. There's no reason, then, for an individual to be a castaway, to be disqualified, and there's no reason for a church, either. God help us to make the most of our spiritual privilege.

Shall we bow in prayer? Just silently in your own heart, I want you to pray. In just the minute before we close, I want you to ask the Lord to help you in your own personal life to find the way of escape when these temptations come to you. I want you to pray right now for your own self that you would not become disqualified. And then that you would pray for this church the same thing.

That's our prayer, Father, for each of us, for all of us together who live in the danger of spiritual privilege, who are tempted to lean on the God who is faithful, who will always make a way of escape. Thank you for that promise. May we use our advantage rather than letting the enemy have an advantage over us by our unbelief, our failure to appropriate the power that's in us (technical difficulty).

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