

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

Surviving the Danger of Blessing

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:1-6

Code: 80-212

We have been studying the Gospel of Luke, and it seemed to me that every week has been a high point in the series. If you ask me what has been the favorite message through the Gospel of Luke, I would be totally unable to pick one. I feel like every Sunday is like an Everest of truth. But this morning we are going to set Luke aside, because this is the Lord's table, and I'm gonna talk to you just a little more personally from the heart. I may be more the pastor than I have been sort of playing the role of the preacher and the prophet the last few weeks as we've gone through Luke. This gives me an opportunity to speak personally my concerns as we come to the Lord's table, and I certainly welcome that.

It's always a challenge when I know we're gonna have the Lord's table to try to discern what is the best word to bring you from the Lord. And as I was realizing it was coming up, the Lord planted something in my experience that really provided all that I needed by way of direction.

Last week, we had a pastor's conference here of Russian pastors, Russian pastors who are now in the United States. As you know, we've ministered over there in Russia and countries of the former Soviet Union for years. But many of those people have come to the United States. And many, many pastors are over here pastoring the groups of Russians that are setting up communities in many places. And we had 170 of these pastors with us last week for a conference. Some of them have been here a few years. Some of them have been here a few weeks. And it was all translated through electronics. It was a great, great conference.

One of the things that Russian pastors love to do is ask questions. I've learned through the years that you have to be ready to answer all kinds of questions. I have spent literally uncounted hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of answering questions all over the former Soviet Union as they pour out their queries about the meaning of Scripture and ministry and the work of God and so forth. It's...it's such a rich and wonderful, wonderful time to do that with 'em.

Well, it was no different with the Russian pastors who were here last week. They wanted time for questions, and they did it the same way they do it in Russia. They write it on all kinds of bits and pieces of paper, and the paper comes floating up from the...the pews. If there are balconies in the church, the whole time you're preaching and teaching, paper is...is falling out of the balcony like wounded moths...just sort of tumbling down, and it lands on somebody's shoulder, and up it comes. And by the time you're finished, there's a...a pile, you know, eight inches to ten inches deep all over

the table. And so as we were having the question and answer time last week, the paper started coming, and it...it gets to be more than you can ever answer.

So there's a certain sense of which you hope the Lord directs the selection process so you can get at the important questions. Well, as we were going through the questions, a question came up, and this was the question: "What are you doing to ensure the future...consistency and stability in ministry of Grace Community Church after you're gone?"

Now that's a fair question...and I...I think at the time I understood the question. Well, I mean I understood the simple surface of the question, but I think I also understood the motivation for the question. Those Russian pastors know my name. They knew me by name, because so many books have been translated into Russian, so they know who John MacArthur is. And they've read the books, and they've read the commentary, so many of them in their own language, of course, that probably they have many times preached the material that they found in the books. So they're very familiar with me.

What they were not familiar with was the church. They had not been to the church. We had never had a conference for these...these folks. They had never been here. What really, I think, overwhelmed them was what they found when they arrived here. They found not just me, but they found a whole church. They found a college. They found a seminary. They found a staff, pastors and elders and lay people, who were gifted and capable of instructing them and helping them and assisting them and strengthening them and answering their questions. They found a...a resource for answers for the growth of their church, for the teaching of the Word of God. They literally discovered a treasure house here.

And the question really was framed by that motivation. They were looking at me and saying, "Okay, you're getting old. What guarantee do we have that, when you're gone, this place will still be able to minister to us?" That's really what they were asking. Because I believe they...they know that our theology is compatible. They know we're serious about loving God and loving Christ and honoring His word. And they are, too, and they feel this kindred spirit with us, just as I've told you many, many times they do over there, when they've never been here. But once they've been here, it's intensified.

And so the question is, "What are you doing to secure the future of this church so that when you're gone we can still depend on this place?" That's a good question...and I suppose the question could be answered a number of ways. I...I mean I...I...I talk a little bit about the fact that we have strong leadership and strong pastoral staff and elders. And we have a strong doctrinal statement. And the people in leadership understand that. And that our people understand it. That you are well taught in the Word of God and etc., etc., and go through all of that. But I think we know all those things. And those things are pretty obvious.

As I began to sit back and really assess what is the greatest threat to this church, I don't really think the greatest threat to this church is the fact that it won't be able to find somebody else to preach the Bible. I don't think the great threat to this church is that somehow the leadership is weak. It's not. Not even the congregation is weak. We...we know what our doctrine is. We've been at it a long time. We've been in this groove for a while. We...we understand the Biblical philosophy of ministry, of Biblical theology. We have a Biblical worldview. We are pretty well focused. We've got strong leadership on all fronts. I'm...I'm not so concerned about those areas. I'm...I'm...I'm not really concerned about persecution. Because, if persecution comes, that'll probably make the church even stronger. As it boiled down in my mind, I came to one conclusion. That the thing I fear most is the danger of blessing. The danger of blessing.

Now most people would agree with the axiom, "Too much of a good thing can be bad," right? I mean we all understand that. Too much money makes somebody indulgent, irresponsible, crass, materialistic. Too much popularity makes one proud, selfish. Too much power makes one implacable, compassionless, invincible, abusive...Too much blessing, that's a problem, too.

You know, wisdom tells us, I mean just plain human wisdom, tells us that a measure of self-denial is healthy. That a measure of deprivation is beneficial. That it's good to have some needs that you can't immediately and easily meet. That it's very beneficial for your character to be faced with some weaknesses which you cannot easily overcome. Even being resented, even being resisted, even being...rejected, even being hated, even being persecuted can be beneficial. What is really hard to handle is to have all you want of what you want when you want it. That's really hard to handle, because then self-control, self-denial, and discipline disappear. And where a person lives in undisciplined freedom, they live on the edge of self-destruction...

Now, amazingly, this can happen in the Kingdom of God. It really can. It has. Turn in your Bible for a moment to the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 6...Children of Israel had been in Egypt for 400 years. They, in Egypt, were slaves...in the truest sense of the word - the ancient kind of slavery. They basically had very little. They existed as one step above beasts of burden, animals. They...they lived in poverty and deprivation and weakness and need and abuse. All of that in Egypt. Four hundred years. And then God, in a mighty display of power, brought a man by the name...name of Moses to a place of usefulness and ordained Moses to lead Israel out of the land of Egypt. Two million slaves, two million strong, leaving a country. Can you imagine such an exodus? Against the will of the country.

In order to do that, God had to bring a series of ten deadly plagues, the likes of which the world had never and has never seen. Through the process of those horrible plagues, loosened the death grip that the Egyptian monarchy had on the children of Israel, and they were allowed to begin to leave. You remember the final, culminating miracle was that God sent the death angel to execute the first-

born. But for every Jewish family that sprinkled the Passover blood on the door, the death angel passed by and spared that first-born. And in that great miracle of judgment, there was also a miracle of deliverance, and that was all that Egypt could take. And they said, "Get out of...get out of this country. We can't take anymore devastation from your God." And so the children of Israel were released. It wasn't long, however, before pharaoh pursued them with his army. You know the great miracle. The Red Sea opened. They walked across on dry land. Pharaoh tried to follow, and the whole army was drowned. They were then led into the wilderness as a result of these massive liberating miracles.

After wandering the wilderness, were given the privilege, 40 years of wandering. But after the wandering time was over, they were given the privilege of going into the land of Canaan. When they went into the land of Canaan, they went into the land of milk and honey, the land which is the most fruitful piece of earth there is, a wonderfully fruitful agriculturally. And, of course, the original land extended as far east as all the Arab oil fields. A very, very wealthy piece of earth. God gave them the best that He had, and they went into the land.

The Canaanites had built the land. The Canaanites had flourished in the land. They went, literally, and took over the land from the Canaanites, and it was the best place.

In Deuteronomy chapter 6, God recognizes this and there comes a warning. Verse 10, "So it shall be when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things which you did not fill, hewn out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, when you have eaten and are full, then beware lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage."

You see, that was the great fear. That was God's warning to them the danger of blessing. You stepped into a land. You didn't build the cities. They were there. Great, magnificent cities built by a very advanced civilization in the ancient world, the Canaanites. You moved into homes, and you lived in homes and houses that you didn't build, and they were filled with all kinds of instruments and implements and artifacts and whatever, and you didn't make any of those. And then you went out to get water from wells you never dug, and you plucked grapes from vines you never planted, and harvested wonderful olives from trees that you never planted.

I mean this is abundance. This is God, generous God, pouring out all good things on His beloved nation, Israel. And He says, "And so you're gonna be living in the danger of blessing." The danger is you're gonna forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And so in verse 13, He says, "You shall fear the Lord your God, and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name." That is, you need to make covenants and promises to God to be faithful. "You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you, for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you. Lest

the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth."

Well, this is serious language. Here He is in one breath talking about blessing and blessing and blessing and blessing. And in another breath, He's talking about destruction. That is the danger of blessing. The danger of blessing.

Now the New Testament presents to us another gripping illustration of this, and I wanna have you look at it with me this morning for just a few moments as we prepare for the Lord's table. First Corinthians chapter 10, 1 Corinthians chapter 10. I sadly report to you that God's fears were justified, because just exactly what God warned them not to do is exactly what they did. In fact, they enjoyed all the Canaanite cities. They enjoyed all of the homes and all of the things that were in them. They enjoyed the wells and the water. They enjoyed the vineyards. They enjoyed the olive trees. They enjoyed everything that was in the land flowing with milk and honey. And they, in spite of all of that, turned to idols. The kingdom split. The northern kingdom was taken into captivity and destroyed in 722 B.C. The southern kingdom went into captivity 586 B.C. and taken to Babylon, and God did bring destruction on that land. It was a sad, sad disregard of a very clear warning of the danger of blessing.

You have a similar situation in 1 Corinthians. The Apostle Paul is writing to a very blessed church. They are...in many ways, a favorite of his. And that's because he spent nearly two years with them. Only in Ephesus did he spend any longer time, three years. And so he's come to love these people, and he's interacted with them. He's made a second visit to them. He overall writes them four letters, two in Scripture and two in not. Very familiar with these people. And they are very beloved to him. They have his heart. He...he can be heartbroken over them. He can be depressed over them. He can rejoice over them, because they really have his heart...

In introducing us to these Corinthians in chapter 1 and verse 4, Paul says, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which is given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him." Now that just sorta sets the stage. You have it all. You were enriched in everything by Him. This was an amazing group. They were a church planted by Paul. You can't get any better than that. Probably the greatest preacher ever next to Jesus. So they had Paul as their founding pastor. They have been exposed to the teaching of Peter. They have exposed to the teaching of the great Old Testament scholar Pollus. They...they had it all. They had everything God could possibly give. The best of everything.

In chapter 1 verse 7, he says, "You come short in no gift. You lack nothing. You have had all the teaching, all the instruction, all the blessings, all the treasures, everything, and you lack no gift. You've got it all. It's all there." In fact, in chapter 4 verse 8, he says, "You're full. You're filled to the brim. There is nothing lacking."...

One of the things in a situation like that is, when you get everything, when you have the best teacher, and when you have the best other teachers, and you've heard the teaching of Peter and Pollus, in addition to the teaching of Paul. And when you have all the gifted people and the gifted leaders and...and when your church has been born in an explosion of divine power and...and when your theology is right, and your leadership is strong, and all everything is going the way you...you think it should go, and God just continues to pour out blessing on you, you are living in a situ...situation very similar to Deuteronomy 6. You are in the danger of...of compromising because you have so much blessing.

In chapters 8 to 9, 8 and 9, Paul addresses the issue of...of freedom. That's one of the blessings you have, is freedom. Freedom to enjoy all God's good gifts. Freedom from the law as your taskmaster. Freedom from the ceremonies and rituals and routines that were part of the shadow that preceded the substance who is Christ. You're free from the fear of death, because Christ has died your death. You're free from the punishment of sin, because Christ has borne your punishment. You're free from the curse of the law, because Christ became accursed for you. And so here we are enjoying all this Christian freedom. Here is this church, blessed to the max, blessed to the full, enjoying all the riches that Christ can dispense, all the best teachers and teaching, and all the fullness of freedom that comes in Christ...That's a very dangerous situation to be in.

And I would suggest to you its not at all unlike our situation. Here we are a church that's really had the best of everything, and that in the purposes and sovereignty of God, and many of you, most of you have come here, and you didn't build this place, and you didn't dig these wells. But you live in this place, and you drink the water from these wells, and you pluck the fruit from the vines and the olives from the trees. And you enjoy all the fullness of the wealth of teaching and instruction and leadership and ministry that goes on from the cradle to the grave here in so many dimensions. And so you, like the Corinthians, like the people of Israel, live in the danger of blessing. And I guess if I have a concern, that probably would be the one I wanted to pick because of its subtlety. Other things can be more obvious than this one. The danger of blessing. Here is this blessed group.

Well, at the end of chapter 9, Paul says something I think is very important to them. In the midst of everything they have, in the midst of all the blessing of God, he reminds them, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize." You know, it would be easy to conclude that they're not in a race at all. They're in an easy chair. This is the opposite of a race. Who's running? We're...we're so comfortable. This is great. We come, and we get the best of teaching, the best of everything. God has granted to us so many good things. We live in a flourishing economy, as the Corinthians did, and life is just very, very good. This was a busy city, a trade city. There was a measure of wealth, a wonderful part of the world. The area of Greece where things grow wonderfully well, especially vineyards and olive trees. And we have it all. What do we need?

And Paul has to remind them that the spiritual life is not to try to find the most comfortable place and settle in. The place that you have to be is in the midst of a race, running a race to win the prize. It's not enough to just say, "I don't care about the prize. I just...I'm just happy to sit in the easy chair until it arrives in heaven." There's something more than that. There are...there are crowns. There are rewards for those who run. So Paul says, "You gotta remember this is a race. You have to run in such a way that you may win the prize." You...and then in verse 25 he says, "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate." And he introduces the idea of moderation here. There's a limitation on what you can indulge yourself in. You have so much. I mean here we are living in really a garden spot on the face of the earth in southern California. We live in a nation which provides for us what we can't provide for ourselves. The only people in our society who go wanting are people who aren't sober or on drugs or who chose to run from the law. I mean for almost everybody in our society, there is some provision for the necessities of life and more. We have the best of everything, and here we, in our church, have the best of everything that God can dispense to His beloved church.

And we can easily forget that this is a race. I mean where does persecution come in? Where does self-denial come in? Self-deprivation? When are we confronted with our weakness? We...we hear the word "need." That's an interesting word. What does that mean?...

And so he says you've gotta realize that, if you're gonna run, you gotta be temperate. You've gotta be moderate. There is a place for self-denial. You can't just take your freedoms and run them to the limits and beyond...And in order to accomplish this, in verse 27, skipping down, he says, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection." The word for discipline here is usually translated buffet, right? I buffet my body. That's the old King...King James, and that was original like in some other translations. I buffet my body. By the way, that's spelled the same as buffet, but it's a very different concept.

Paul is not saying, "I buffet my body." He's saying, "I buffet my body." The actual Greek word means to...to deliver a punch below the eye. That's a knockout punch...that's the knockout punch. I...I have to literally fight, first of all, I'm like a runner who has to run to win a prize. I'm like a boxer who has to box, not as somebody who beats the air, not a shadow boxer. I have to deliver a blow. And interestingly enough, the blow has to be on me. I literally have to deliver a knockout punch to my otherwise...hankering flesh, bodily desire...

So Paul says, "Look, I have everything. You have everything. We all have everything. We are the richest." In fact, in chapter 4, he talks about, "Now you are full. Now you are rich. You reign as kings. You have it all. There's nothing more that could be given. God has given it all to you. And unless you're serious about self-denial, moderation, submission, and delivering a knockout punch to your flesh, you are going to become...end of verse 27...disqualified." Ah documas, tested and found

flawed...

You see, that's exactly what can happen in a church like this. What can happen in a church like this is you have everything, and so out the window goes self-denial, self-discipline, deprivation, moderation, submission, and self-control, self-discipline, self-denial...

Those things, by the way, are not virtues in themselves. They're only virtued...virtues when they're exercised toward those things that are destructive. When you deny yourself, you deny yourself sinful things. But you can become so comfortable in your life that sin subtly sneaks in, and you become materialistic without even knowing it. And you become worldly without even knowing it. And you become immoral without even knowing it. You stop short of the actual act of adultery, but you fill your mind with all the garbage in the world. I mean there's so many subtle ways that, if you're not in a defensive mode, if you're not competing, if you're not running the race, if you're not ready to deliver the knockout punch to your bodily desires, you're gonna be drawn into this. And my great concern for the...for the Grace Church of the future when I'm gone is that it would be all that it is now and far more, by God's wondrous grace. But I know that can only happen if we maintain a measure of strength, a measure of self-discipline, self-denial, and self-control in the midst of immense blessing...

You know, if you're living in Russia, if you're living in Siberia, if you're living in Samara where Kevin is going, out there where you can hardly get your next meal, where there's a certain level of desperation to get your next breath, where you have no money, and the...the economy's crumbling around you, where there are only so many resources available to you, even in the church, where life is very simple and very one-dimensional. There's not much there, there's a level of dependency that exists there just by virtue of the fact that you can't survive any other way. Self-denial is almost imposed upon you there, because you don't have much to choose from. When you go to a market, as I did a few months ago when I was there, and you walk in, and essentially you take home whatever is there, and that's all there is. And when you took what you got, there wasn't something for the next person. That's a different kind of life...That you train yourself for self-denial in that kind of environment. We don't do well at that in America...

Now, to make his point even more strongly, come to chapter 10, 1 Corinthians 10. I'll make this brief. Paul uses an illustration. He's already used an illustration, just a sort of worldly illustration from boxing and running. Now he's gonna use a Biblical illustration. Chapter 10 verse 1, "Moreover, brethren...that is, moreover, I'm continuing on the same subject here...I don't want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud. All passed through the sea. All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. All ate the same spiritual food. All drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them. That rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well-pleased, for their bodies, their carcasses, their corpses were scattered in the desert or the wilderness."

That's a very interesting little five-verse section there. Paul says, "You know what I'm concerned? I'm concerned about the danger of blessing. I'm concerned about you being rich, having everything, coming behind in no gift. I'm concerned about you enjoying all these liberties and all these freedoms that are yours in Christ. And this grace upon grace upon grace upon grace, all your sins are forgiven, and you're not under the law, etc., etc., and I'm concerned that you're not gonna discipline your body. You're not gonna strike a...a knockout punch against your otherwise hankering flesh. I'm concerned about all of that. So lemme remind you about Israel. Lemme remind you about Israel.

"Let's go back...he says...let's go back to...to Israel. Let's go back to when they came out of Egypt." They all came out, oh, the word "all" is used five times in those verses, and he's looking at the solidarity of the nation. He's looking at everybody's. This is paralleling the church. They all had it. They, he says, "All our fathers," meaning our forefathers, our...our ancestors. "All of our fathers were under the cloud." What does that mean? The glory cloud, the Shechinah cloud that led Israel when they wandered in the wilderness. They came out of Egypt. You remember they were led by a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud by day.

So he says, "They were all under the cloud. They all experienced divine direction, divine leadership, divine guidance. And...he says...they all passed through the sea. The whole nation went through the Red Sea. They all experienced divine deliverance...divine rescue, miraculous." So this is a people who are used to miracles. They had seen ten miracles take place, miracles of judgment in Egypt. And then the great miracle of being led out of Egypt, being led by a Shechinah glory cloud, the very presence of God in visible form. And then the divine miracle of deliverance when the sea opened, and they walked through, and it closed to drown pharaoh's entire army.

Then verse 2 says, "All were literally immersed into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." That's an interesting statement. Lemme tell you, it simple means this: immersed, not in the sense of getting wet, but of being merged. In other words, you were all literally one with your leader. There were no factions. There were no divisions. There were no separated groups. There were no cultic offshoots. They came out as one mass of people, all together under one man's leadership, the man that God had appointed, the man Moses.

So they knew solidarity in leadership. They experienced divine, miraculous leading, divine, miraculous deliverance, and divine, miraculous leadership under Moses. One great God-given leader who led them through all those experiences of following the cloud and passing through the sea. Then they were given divine provision. They all ate the same spiritual food, the same manna, the same birds that God provided. God provided. You remember their food. They wanted meat, He gave them bird flesh to eat. They...they were otherwise given manna, which God provided for them on a regular, routine basis, so they all experienced not only divine direction, divine care in delivering them from Egypt, divine rescue, a divine leader, solidarity with that leader, namely Moses, but divine provision of

food and water. They all drank the same spiritual drink. And the spiritual drink was the drink provided by the spiritual source who is God.

And I've been in that desert out there a number of times, and you could go a long time without finding water out there. But God made sure the two million people wandering for 40 years always had water. And sometimes it even came out of a...a rock. I mean this is a people who have had God's best. What more can God do than miraculously provide all of this for them? They literally lived their whole lives in a miraculous environment. Miracle upon miracle upon miracle by which God cared for His people. And actually, it tells us in verse 4, the spiritual rock that followed them was Christ. This is a wonderful, wonderful little play on words. This is the pre-incarnate Christ, before He was born in Bethlehem, He existed eternally as God the Son, the second member of the Trinity. And, of course, He ministered to Israel. He would be Israel's Savior. There would come a time, as we all know, when He would die for the sins of Israel.

But before the incarnation, He literally was with them, following them in their wilderness wanderings so that the...the very Christ Himself was in the midst of His people. We could say it this way: They had been given divine care and guidance out of Egypt. They had been given divine deliverance, miraculous deliverance through the Red Sea. They had been given divine provision of food and water. And they had been given a divine Savior, whose presence was with them at all times. They were always under the special care of the rock who is Christ who followed them, who was really the source of all the miracles that met their needs.

It's a very different way to view Christ than the incarnate way. We look at Him in His incarnation, and we see a Man. We look at Him in His pre-incarnation ministry to Israel, and we see Him as God.

Well, that's very much like Corinthian church. The Corinthian church had been led out of paganism. The Corinthian church had been rescued and delivered from the...from death and judgment. The Corinthian church had been given spiritual food and spiritual drink. The Corinthian church had the presence of the glorified risen Christ in their midst, and the same for us, the same for you. You've been led out of the land of paganism. You have been led through and out the other side of judgment unscathed. You have been provided the water of life and the bread of life through the Word of God, that you have lived with the Savior in your midst, in your presence, as He moves in your life and dwells within you. You have all these privileges. This is all the best that God can give. And the sad reality of verse 5 is, in spite of that, with most of them, God was not well-pleased, and their corpses were scattered all over the desert.

That's pretty shocking...I mean Israel...that whole generation, two million, died in the desert, never went in. From the first generation that came out, only two people went into the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb. The rest of the first generation died out. And it was the second generation with Joshua and Caleb that went into the Promised Land. So when it says, "With most of them, God was

not well-pleased," it was a lot of people. A whole two million...God wasn't pleased.

It's a sad story of the danger of blessing, isn't it? But what were the things that caused this...tragedy? Verse 6, and I'll look at them just briefly. First of all, he says, "These things became our examples." This is not just history. This is example. "To the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." First problem, they started to desire the things of the world. They wanted what they had in Egypt. They wanted what other people had. This is worldliness. This is...this is craving. Literally, it says, I think in the NAS, "They craved."

The...an attitude that longs for the evil things of the world. They wanted the health, the wealth, the fame, the entertainment, the sexual experiences, whatever it is that the world passes out. That's exactly what they wanted. Then they got into idolatry, verse 7. "Don't become idolaters, as were some of them, as it is written...and it quotes out of Exodus 32 where..."the people sit down to eat and drink, get drunk, and then rose up to have sexual amusement." They...they got into the world. They got into idolatry. They committed, in verse 8, sexual immorality. And in one day, 23,000 fell. The Levites killed 3,000, and 20,000 died of a plague, according to Exodus 32.

And then there were others who tested Christ, or tested the Lord in verse 9. They presumed on God. They pushed God as far as He would go to see where He would break. They extended their sin as far as it could go. They see how far they could push the envelope or push the edge, as we say it today. This is presumption. Presumption. And the Lord sent venomous snakes to bite them...and you can read about that in Numbers chapter, I think it's chapter 21. And then there were others, verse 10, get this, who complained. That's right, they complained, and they were destroyed by the destroyer. You know how many were destroyed? How many complainers were destroyed? It's interesting. Fourteen thousand seven hundred died.

Some people would say, "Well, certainly grumbling isn't in the category of major sins." It is in the category of major sins...Well, here were the sins, just quickly. Worldliness, idolatry, immorality, presumption, complaining. I mean what did they have to complain about? Tell me. And why would they presume on the miraculous goodness of God? And why would they wanna be immoral when God had given them everything within marriage to provide blessing? And idolatry, that's unimaginable. Why would they worship a golden calf when they knew the true and living God who delivered them from Egypt? And why would they want what the world had to give when it was the world that had tried to destroy them?...

Well, it's always the way it is. You give people blessing upon blessing upon blessing upon blessing, and they become spiritually lazy, and they don't exercise self-discipline, restraint. And they fall into patterns of sin. And so, in verse 11, Paul says, "Now all these things happened to them as an examples." He says it again. This isn't just history. This is example. "They're written for our admonition upon whom the end of the ages have come." The end of the age began when Messiah

came, so we're living since He came, so that's us. This is an example, folks. When you're greatly blessed, beware. When you're greatly blessed, beware. You're living in a time of grave danger.

And that'll take us right back to verse 27, you better learn self-discipline, self-denial, moderation...or you're gonna wind up being disqualified...

I...I don't wanna presume anything, but I would venture to say it's certainly safe to say there are few churches in this generation who are as blessed as you...It's...it's...it's an incredible thing that God has done here. And on the one hand, we rejoice in it. But on the other hand, there is an element of danger in this. Great danger, that you begin to feel so comfortable, so blessed, you begin to feel so much the favor of God, that God is doing so much to show His love for you, that are somehow privileged beyond others, which gives you a little bit of liberty in how you live your life. And you become so much a spiritual consumer, that you find that spiritual easy chair, and you no longer desire to exercise self-denial, self-discipline, self-control, setting priorities, learning to be weak so that you can depend on His strength. You...you begin to...drift closer and closer to old familiar sins, and you find they begin to encroach upon your life.

That's my great fear for the future of the church. I don't really think we're gonna go down the doctrinal drain anytime soon...What could happen to us is that we become smug and self-indulgent, and we overuse our freedom, and we abuse great, great grace...That's why, when we come to this table, it's so important that we always pull ourselves up short. And the Lord's table, for us, is a time to ask, "Have I indulged my liberties too far?" Right? "Have I gone too far?...Am I pursuing self-discipline in every area in the midst of all this blessing?" It's time to examine our hearts. Let's do that.

Father, as we come to the table, it is our desire to look into our hearts and to see what is there, not for our own sake, but that we might see the truth of our sinfulness. And, Lord, where we have played on the edges of worldliness, or even indulged ourselves in the...in the values and thought life and patterns and entertainment of the world, or whether we have found ourselves drawn into material things that have begun to consume us, or whether we have become idolatrous and created all kinds of gods in our lives, all kinds of things that we love more than You, or whether we've become immoral or presumptuous or just complaining and griping and grumbling about this and that because it isn't all exactly the way we want it. Lord, please expose our hearts to us and wash us clean. Create in us a clean heart, clean from all that.

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