

## 1 Corinthians 10 – Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

The church at Corinth had written a letter to Paul asking several questions.

They sent it by the hand of a few of their members across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus where Paul was working.

The carriers of the letter told Paul the Corinthians church was deeply divided into factions based on who they looked to as their leader.

So in chs. 1-4, Paul deals first with the problem of their disunity.

In chs. 5 & 6 he turns to another problem he'd been told about – a case of terrible immorality that was going on in their midst they were doing nothing about.

It isn't till ch. 7 that he begins to deal specifically with the questions in their letter.

He deals first with the tangled issue of marriage & divorce, then in chs. 8 - 10 to their question about *scruples* – specifically about eating things sacrificed to idols.

To recap briefly what we saw last week in chs. 8 & 9 – Paul makes the case that while each person needs to be fully convinced about what they're free to do, they must also exercise great caution in the use of their liberty so that they don't cause someone without it to stumble into sin on account of their example.

At the end of ch. 9 Paul uses himself as an example of someone who possesses liberty but who lays it down so that others can come to faith & grow in grace without hindrance.

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But the overarching context of all this is the rampant idolatry that marked life in Corinth & the rest of the Greco-Roman world.

In ch. 10, Paul shifts from the subject of personal liberty regarding scruples, to speak *directly* to the problem of idols.

### 4. Stay clear of idols Ch. 10-11:1

#### a. OT examples vs. 1-11

##### <sup>1</sup> Moreover, brethren,

This links us to what's come before.

Paul *adds* the example of ancient Israel to *his* example laid out in ch. 9.

He then lists several of the blessings Israel had enjoyed in the Exodus . . .

##### **I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud,**

In Exodus 13 we're told that the presence of God hovered above Israel like a cloud, protecting them from the burning desert sun by day, then coalesced into a pillar of fire at night to illuminate the camp.

For 40 years, all Israel had to do to know God was with them was to look up and see that cloud.

##### **all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,**

The miraculous crossing of the Red Sea remained fixed in the minds of the people of Israel for generations.

As Moses led them through the sea & under the cloud for 40 years, the people became identified with him – just as *our* passing through the waters of baptism identify us with our leader – Jesus.

(Romans 6:3-4)

##### **<sup>3</sup> all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink.**

They were not only *led* by God, they were *fed* by Him.

Each day they gathered the miracle bread known as Manna and enjoyed water from a miraculous spring.

##### **For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.**

Paul draws on a rabbinical tradition here that the water Israel drank from throughout their journey in the wilderness flowed from *one rock*.

They said the water that flowed from the original rock Moses struck made a stream that followed where ever they went.

But Paul added to this rabbinic teaching by saying the rock & water were a type of Christ.

In John 7, during the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus used the ceremony of the pouring of water from the altar as the backdrop to declare to the crowds, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me & drink.”

The entire feast of tabernacles celebrated God’s provision for Israel during the wilderness years of the Exodus.

Part of the ceremony was to commemorate the miraculous provision of water.

A priest would pour a pitcher of water into a funnel-shaped hole in the edge of the altar in the court of the temple.

This hole led to little tunnels that emptied in an exit at the base of the altar.

As he poured water into the hole it ran down and flowed form the front of the altar, looking like water flowing form a rock – thus a commemoration of the water that flowed from the rock in the wilderness.

It was at precisely the moment when the water issued form the base of the altar that Jesus dried out in a loud voice, “If anyone thirst, let him come to ME and drink, and out of his innermost being will gush torrents of living water.”

Paul takes Jesus words in John 7 as the basis for supporting the rabbinic idea that it was really one rock that supplied their need for water.

But what’s the point? Why is this important?

Paul wanted them to understand that Jesus as the Jewish Messiah was no new innovation the Church had made up.

He’d been an integral part of the Exodus, 1500 years before!

Jesus was part of the foundation of the nation under Moses.

In John 6, Jesus said He was the heavenly manna they’d eaten in the wilderness then in the very next chapter He says He was the water that slaked their thirst.

He is both the *bread & water* of life.

**<sup>5</sup> But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.**

Even though the people of Israel were surrounded by the miraculous, even though they had the visible presence of God with them 24/7 for 40 years, & they ate real wonder bread & drank miracle water, still—they failed to live by faith in & dependence on God.

Of the approximately 1½ million adults who left Egypt, only 2 were allowed to enter the Promised Land.

The rest perished in the wilderness because they rebelled against God.

The point is that being surrounded by miracles does not guarantee faith.

On the contrary, an abundance of the supernatural may have the exact *opposite effect*.

For the person who witnesses it but *remains defiant* toward God will have *more* to account for.

**<sup>6</sup> Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.**

Even though Israel enjoyed all the blessing & provision of God, they fell to grumbling & complaining against Him & cried out for a return to Egypt with its supposed delicacies.

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Paul says something crucial here. Ancient Israel is an *example* to believers, whether in Ancient Corinth in Paul’s day or to US who follow Christ *today*.

The word in Greek is tupos – a form, pattern, example. In modern parlance we’d say a *template*.

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Though the outward circumstances are totally different between ancient Israel in the Exodus & us, the inner spiritual issues are *identical*.

God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb.

God delivered us from spiritual bondage in the world by the blood of the Lamb of God = Jesus, on Passover.

They were delivered from the power of Egypt by the waters of the Red Sea.

We were delivered from the powers of sin & death by the waters of baptism which identifies us with Christ.

They were provided for by the manna & water from the rock.

Jesus is our bread & water of life who satisfies like nothing else can.

They were protected & led by the pillar & cloud.

We are led & protected by the Holy Spirit who indwells us and will never forsake us.

And yet, as unreasonable as it is – many in Israel grew tired of God’s blessings & longed to return to the supposed pleasures of the past!

And so it is that many believers do precisely the same.

They long for a return to the things that marked their lives before faith.

Just as there’s no rational reason for the desire of ancient Israel to return to Egypt, there’s no reason for our longing for the good ole days!

The good ole days of waking up with a hangover so fierce you want to die.

The good ole days of worrying about being pregnant or having an STD.

The good ole days of sitting in the backseat of the cop cruiser in handcuffs because you’ve just been arrested for DUI.

The good ole days of driving the porcelain bus, calling to Ralph, & the Technicolor yawn.

Yeah, those were good times. *What foolishness!*

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Listen to Numbers 11 where we read of Israel’s longing for the good ole days – Numbers 11:4-6

**<sup>4</sup> Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat? <sup>5</sup> We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; <sup>6</sup> but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!”**

The problem started among the mixed multitude.

These were folk who were not part of Israel but had taken advantage of the opportunity to escape bondage when Israel left Egypt.

They were not really a part of the covenant with God.

But they were mingled in amongst God’s people.

Once out in the wilderness, they gave in to an intense desire for the things of their past.

Their constant cravings eventually influenced the people of Israel & moved them to the same desires.

They even began to loath the things of God as their desires selectively forgot the *downside* of sin and only remembered the pleasure.

Manna lost value as leeks & onions rose.

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Christian! Jesus, or the world?

Eternal life, joy, peace, satisfaction, purpose, meaning –or- fleeting pleasure followed by the inescapable payment of grief, sorrow, pain, loss, regret, turmoil, unrest, worry.

It’s the same choice for us – Manna or leeks & onions?

It’s a no-brainer – truly!

It was the mixed multitude inside Israel that started the trouble for them.

And it's only that which hasn't been brought into the New Covenant & Lordship of Christ within us that causes *us* trouble.

**7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."**

When Moses was closeted with God on Mt. Sinai for 40 days, the people in the valley below grew restless & persuaded Aaron, Moses' brother, to make an idol for them to worship.

Being a weak man, Aaron complied & fashioned a golden calf they then began to worship with wild abandon.

Paul warns the Corinthians not to fall back into the worship of idols, which as Gentiles they'd been into prior to coming to faith in Christ.

He never would have warned them if it wasn't a potential problem.

Those who had liberty to eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol, because they knew that an idol is really nothing more than a hunk of wood or stone, could very quickly find that their liberty had in fact become it's own idol if they elevated it to a right & demand.

You see, the essence of idolatry is the *exaltation & worship of self* for idols are nothing more than external projections of our own desires.

Man feels guilt for what conscience tells him is sin. He wants to continue his sin but avoid guilt.

So he makes up a god whose worship allows him to do what he wants to do as an act of obedience and worship.

So there's an idol that demands worship in the form of sex.

Another demands worship in the form of eating. Another, violence.

And as new desires emerge, new idols are made.

Paul knew that even our liberty in Christ can become an idol when we elevate it to a right & demand it even though it's practice may harm another.

It's a fine line between lust & liberty.

**8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day 23,000 fell;**

In Numbers 25 is the story of how the women of Moab dressed up in seductive clothes then walked through the camp of Israel to seduce the men of Israel & thus bring on them the judgment of God.

It worked and thousands fell to a plague that swiftly ravaged the camp.

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Listen, the devil knows that he can't keep you from heaven. You are secure in Christ.

But he will still try to *destroy* your witness & *kill* your effectiveness in serving God by enticing you to sin.

He will lead an endless parade of seduction before your eyes & ears, trying to lure you away from the Lord.

You've got to keep in mind that behind his schemes is your ruin – not your good!

Don't be a fool & give in.

Don't be by the nose like a stupid ox to the slaughter.

It was Phinehas, who brought an end to the plague that was destroying Israel by following a Moabite gal & her Israelite mark into the tent where they were knocking it out and he ran them through!

It took drastic action to wake up the people of God to the satanic attack they were tolerating.

And it may take drastic action on our part to end it in ours.

Is there something in your life that needs to be run through with a spear of wild commitment?

A computer, a TV, a collection, a location?

Not that you would sue a literal spear but that you'd make a very pointed, specific decision to simply end something that's allowed lust to leer away & take you away into unholy desire.

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<sup>9</sup> **nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;**  
<sup>10</sup> **nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.**

You remember the story. The complaining of the people against the faithful, daily provision of God grew so great, He eventually sent poisonous serpents among them to awaken them to their error.

<sup>11</sup> **Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**

The history of Israel in the Exodus & Conquest of the Promised Land are a huge colorful lesson to us of the perils that confront us as we seek to be the people of God in this fallen world.

We have much to learn about the life of faith from studying the Tanach.

**b. be on guard vs. 12-13**

<sup>12</sup> **Therefore**

In light of Israel's example →

**let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

Don't forget that of all the adults who left Egypt in the Exodus, only 2 made it INTO the Promise.

They made it because they lived by & walked in faith.

[Our security is IN CHRIST ALONE]

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Now we get a marvelous promise →

<sup>13</sup> **No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**

Having spoken of the strong desires that enticed the people of God & led to their falling away, Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that as fierce as temptation may at times seem, God doesn't allow us to be tempted beyond our capacity to resist.

Indeed, along with every temptation that comes, God provides a means of escape so that we can endure and come through without falling.

Does God tempt us? No way!

But as the Book of Job makes clear, he will allow the enemy to tempt us.

Not to make us suffer! God does not delight in watching us squirm.

He allows us to be tempted so that we might look to Him for help to resist and to realize that we ARE dependent on Him.

Temptation reveals where we're still weak & in need of the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Before a new product is released to the public for sale, it's put to various tests to see where it might be weak.

It's pressed, dropped, shocked, burned, dunked and in many ways stressed, to see where it's weak.

Then these weaknesses are fixed so that it's made strong enough to endure the kinds of trauma it's likely to encounter in the use for which it's intended.

Would you buy a car that had never been run on a test track, an obstacle course, or smashed into a wall?

Would a soldier go into combat with a gun & body armor that had never been tested?

As much as we might like to live a life without temptation, we need to realize it actually serves a good purpose in that it keeps us dependent on God and shows us where we need to grow into His image.

Now – hear this – the temptations you face are not unique to you! Others know them too, many others.

As far as temptation is concerned, you're not unique!

And with every temptation – God provides a way out.

Want to know where it is – it's to HIM! He is the way out because He is THE Way.

**c. steer clear of idols vs. 14-22**

**14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.**

In the midst of all this talk about liberty, about eating meat sacrificed to an idol which in 8:4 he said was really nothing – He NOW says it's best to *steer clear* of anything that smacks of idolatry.

Actually, in Greek, it's this: "**Flee from THE idolatry.**"

Meaning the lifestyle that marked every else in Corinth.

While we enjoy great liberty in Christ, there still needs to be a clear difference in the moral life of the believer compared to the unbeliever.

Nothing in our lifestyle ought to *confuse* either believers or unbelievers *about to Whom* we owe allegiance.

**15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.**

Remember that the Corinthians were all into knowledge & wisdom.

So Paul says, "If you're really wise, you'll agree with this."

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**16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.**

Like baptism, Communion identifies us with Christ; that's why we call it "communion."

We share a cup & loaf as a picture of our spiritual union.

Eating from a common meal both symbolizes & accomplishes our unity.

In the same way, sitting down in one of the pagan shrines to partake of one of their feasts is more than just eating food; it conveys the idea of partnering with the idol.

**18 Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?**

The Law of Moses made clear that when the people ate a portion of the food being offered on the altar, it was a picture of their communion with God.

**19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?**

**20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.**

In 8:4 Paul *agreed* with those who said an idol was really nothing.

He doesn't go back on that here but he *does acknowledge* that pagans see idols as much more.

They see them as deities and attribute spiritual power to them.

Paul knows demons advantage of this belief & use idols as a bridge to compound even more lies.

Since the lost attribute spiritual power contrary to God to idols, believers ought not have any commerce with or connection to idols.

**21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?**

There it is – we can't partake of the Lord's table & carry on in the ways of this fallen world.

Loyalty to God is exclusive.

Friendship with God will set us at odds with this world, just as 1 John 2 says the converse is true, that if we want to be a friend of the world, we make ourselves the enemies of God.

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This is something that has always troubled me – people who try to blend being hip & sophisticated according to the World's standards while at the same time following God. [Expand]

**1 John 2:15-17 • Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.**

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

**d. the bottom line: God's glory vs. 23-11:1**

**<sup>23</sup> All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.**

Paul comes back to the issue of liberty.

When it came to most gray moral issues, he had liberty to indulge.

But he'd come to see that not everything he was free to do actually advanced his spiritual health.

No did they encourage & help others.

**<sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.**

Of chief concern as we decided what to do ought to be question of what's going to benefit those around me.

Now Paul gets down to the nitty gritty of the original question about meat sacrificed to an idol.

**<sup>25</sup> Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; <sup>26</sup> for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness."**

Most, but not all of the meat sold in the marketplace had been offered at a pagan shrine to an idol.

Paul said, When you shop, don't ask where it came from.

Just eat it as the provision of your good God.

**<sup>27</sup> If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake.**

If you're invited over to dinner at someone's house and they serve ribs, don't ask if it was offered at a shrine. Just enjoy it.

**<sup>28</sup> But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness."**

You're there, ready to dig in to a nice juicy T-bone when another guest sitting next to you leans over and whispers – that's Molech meat right there."

The only reason he'd mention it is because he's got a problem with it.

So Paul says, it's off limits now. Eat the salad & vegetables but leave the T-bone.

He uses the same quote from Psalm 24:1 he'd used to justify eating meat in v. 26.

Only now he applies it to NOT eating – because while *everything* ultimately belongs to God, so does *everyone* and it's to God we're accountable for what we do.

**Psalm 24:1 • The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.**

**<sup>29</sup> "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other.**

My personal use of liberty in Christ is *outweighed* by the conscience of those around me.

**For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? <sup>30</sup> But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks?**

Liberty is a precious thing & ought not ever become the subject of someone else's criticism.

So it's best to keep it carefully protected so that it doesn't become a cause of dispute.

**<sup>31</sup> Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

If what we do, is done for God's glory, & we walk with a mind & heart that's set on that objective, it's hard to go wrong.

**<sup>32</sup> Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, <sup>33</sup> just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.**

BY offense, Paul cannot be speaking of the Gospel, which is offensive to the lost.

He's referring here to the use of liberty in regard to gray moral issues.

He says – Live carefully in regard to your morality so that **no one** is led astray by your example.

This includes the religious, the irreligious & the saved.

He ends with -

**<sup>1</sup> Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.**

What Paul says here fits perfectly with what we know about disciples & their rabbis.

The goal of the disciple was to be just like his rabbi.

The word “imitate here comes from the Greek *mimos*, from which we get our word mimic.

It's a synonym for the word “follow” which is what a disciple did for 15 years with his rabbi.

He followed him night & day, 24/7/365¼ - seeking to imitate all the rabbi did & said.

Even though Paul was across the Aegean Sea & days away from Corinth, he called them to follow him, to pattern their lives after his own because he was following Jesus.

[Expand – examples]