

SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

III. MAINTAINING PROPER DIET & EXERCISE

B.) FREEDOM TO CHOOSE FITNESS

“SELF-DISCIPLINE” (1 Cor. 10:1-22)

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INTRODUCTION:

Last time, we talked about the importance of our lives before Christ in such a way as to be able to finish the race well and not be disqualified. With that as a foundation, we will today follow Scripture's instructions concerning one of the greatest dangers that threatens us with disqualification: idolatry. Idolatry is anything or anyone that takes away from or removes our devotion and focus solely upon Christ, His honor and His provision!

I.) **LEARN FROM ISRAEL** (vv. 1-11)

A.) We Are Spiritually **Alike** (vv. 1-4)

- Believers in Jesus the Messiah, Christians in first century Corinth (and Christians today) are kindred in the faith with the OT Jewish believers.
- God's glory and guiding presence led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and toward the Promised Land, just as now the Holy Spirit guides us in our lives away from the bondage of sin and into the abundant life free in Christ!
- Through God's grace and the mediation on their behalf by Moses, Israel had access to God and His blessings. Through Christ as the Great Mediator, all who believe in Him now have direct access to God, complete forgiveness of sins, and His wonderful blessings!
- As God miraculously provided for Israel's physical sustenance during the desert wanderings (with manna from heaven and wells of water from the rock struck by Moses' staff), so He in an even greater way provides for our physical and spiritual sustenance through the Rock of Ages – Jesus Christ!
- AND YET . . .

B.) Most of Them Were **Disqualified** (v. 5)

- *In spite of* God's sovereign guidance, *in spite of* the people's mediated access to Almighty God Himself, *in spite of* how He continually and faithfully provided miraculous physical and spiritual sustenance and blessings according to and beyond their needs, the Israelites **disqualified** themselves and **failed** to finish the race or receive the prize!
- According to the Book of Numbers, 600,000 men were led out of slavery in Egypt that they might be led to the Promised Land. Including women and children, the total number of Israelites was around 2 million. But, how many 'finished the race and claimed the prize'? How many actually entered into and reaped God's blessings in the Promised Land? **Two!** - Joshua and Caleb.

- *What happened to the rest?* They were disqualified due to their sin – choosing to follow ways other than God's ways, to rely on powers other than His Might, to worship idols rather than the Holy One.
- *What happened to those who were disqualified?* They all perished, never seeing or tasting God's greatest blessings!
- Friends, **it is one thing** to be offered a special path in the footprints of God, to know His greatness, to experience His goodness, grace, provision, deliverance and momentary blessings. **But, it is quite another thing** to genuinely follow Him through all of the path's twists, turns and crossroads to the very end!
- Scripture's message here is simple: TAKE HEED!
- *Despite* their unique relationship with God, *despite* all their knowledge of His revelation and Law, *despite* all the blessings He bestowed upon them, most of Israel turned from Him along the way. **In return**, they were judged, disqualified and lost the prize.
- Now, Paul warns the Corinthian Church to beware making the same mistake.
- The Holy LORD God Almighty did not tolerate Israel's sin, disobedience or catering to other idolatrous beliefs and traditions. Nor will He tolerate the same kind of behavior from the Corinthian Church.
- **NOR will He tolerate it from any today!**

C.) Let Us Learn From Their **Negative Example** (vv. 6-11)

- Still, we have the added grace of God having preserved these examples for us to learn from!

1.) **Idolatry** (v. 7)

- The primary issue/sin is idolatry (putting anyone or anything above God Himself).
- The issue of eating together at pagan gatherings and foods that have been sacrificed to false gods is the example.
- The specific reference Paul makes is to Exodus 32:6b and the incidence of Israel's feeling abandoned and uncertain after Moses had been gone for a time on Mt. Sinai. They responded by making themselves an idol to a false god, making offerings to this idol, and then celebrating it through a communal meal which escalated into revelry that included cultic dancing, shouting and singing.
- The Corinthian Christians, remember, were arguing that it is perfectly okay for them to join in the non-Christian meals and festivities of their community and culture – even those that knowingly included an element of false worship and celebration. They argued that since *they* knew these gods were false and didn't really believe the rest it was okay to just go and ignore that part of the environment.
- Paul, however, is saying this is still no different than what the Israelites did at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

2.) **Sexual Immorality** (v. 8)

- Sexual immorality may seem a great idea at the time, it may be fun and exciting in the midst of it, it may even be justified as just 'a game' – but it is always a very deadly game!
- The reference in this case is to Numbers 25:1-9 and refers to a time when the Israelite men allowed themselves to be seduced by the Moabite women and then joined them in worshiping the false god Baal at Peor. What started as just a fun time 'out' socializing with new and exciting people led to compromise, seduction and turning from the LORD. Worse, it ended in a plague that decimated Israel.

3.) **Tempting Christ (v. 9)**

- Now, God's apostle directs the people's attention back to the events of Numbers 21:5-9. On another occasion during Israel's desert wanderings, the people challenged God's goodness, faithfulness and provision by suggesting He was leading them to their destruction. In effect, they were daring God to have to again prove His goodness, faithfulness and provision in order for them to believe in or follow Him any longer. The LORD responded by sending a hoard of poisonous snakes into their midst that bit and killed many. The only relief to this was when God provided for Moses to make and hold a staff of a bronze snake that whoever would look upon it would recover from their snakebite.
- Paul compares this now to the Corinthians' putting Christ to the test by assuming that they can eat both at His Table and at other's table (the demons' table).

4.) **Complaining (v. 10)**

- This fourth and last example points to the events recorded in Numbers 13-14. The LORD had led Israel to the brink of the Promised Land. But, after the spies reported of the peoples that already occupied the land, the Israelites again began to complain to and about God and question His provision and promise through His chosen leader – Moses.
- They expected an open, abundant land they could just stroll right into without any effort, faith or cost. So, they whined and complained.
- As a result, God promised that not one of those adults would ever enter the Promised Land. Those who had been guilty of inciting the people's complaining and doubts through false and exaggerated reports were immediately struck down.
- **Re-read v. 11**
- In all cases, Scripture is warning against those with who would take the attitude: “We don't need anyone else to instruct or guide us, we are good enough for God just as we are, doing what we feel is reasonable.”

II.) **LEAN ON GOD (vv. 12-13)**

- **v.12** Ray Stedman writes:
“The stories of the Old Testament symbolize our own spiritual struggles. The enemies the Israelites faced are the enemies we face – the principalities and powers of darkness that seek to destroy us and disqualify us. The same enemies that seduced ancient Israel still attack you and me . . . Our opponents are ruthless and clever, and their strategies are subtle. We are not guaranteed success. We can fail. We can be disqualified. We can lose the race and fail to win the prize.”
(Letters To A Troubled Church, pg. 138)
- **THEREFORE, we must be certain to lean on Christ for our foundation, our guide, our strength, and our stamina!**
- **v. 13**
- If we but trust in and lean on Him, God will see us succeed in the face of **every** trial and temptation!
- We WILL be tempted, but never to such a degree that those who continue to lean on Christ cannot and will not stand firm and overcome.

III.) **FLEE FROM IDOLATRY** (vv. 14-22)

- Because our full and uncompromised fellowship with Christ is so important, and because any kind of participation (even fleeting, half-hearted, or 'pretend') in any other spiritual fellowship is so dangerous, there is but one recourse for the one devoted to Christ – FLEE!!!
- *Don't* think about it, *don't* slide a little, *don't* walk or skip, *don't* stand cautiously by, **FLEE!!!**
- Not only do these other fellowships and meals not honor Christ, but they are in fact demonic.
- Yes, in the trials of our life circumstances God will see us through every temptation and trial if we faithfully lean on him. BUT, that does not apply to a pursuit of or engagement in idolatry – even that which is simply by 'association.'
- Consider the contrast between the Lord's Meal and the pagan's, between the fellowship and worship of Christ in the one, and the nature of fellowship of all others.
- In the Lord's supper, there is a fellowship with one another in which its basis and focus is upon Christ – His death, resurrection and bonding of them each to one another by His blood of sacrifice. It serves also as a re-affirmation of the New Covenant between the believer and God Almighty.
- Because there is **one** loaf
we who are many are **one** body;
for we all partake
of the **one** loaf.
- The pagan meals & fellowships also have an underlying foundation of consummating oneness – in their case with something or one *other than* Christ. Whether or not this is at the conscious level or agreed to by all does not change it's foundation.
- Therefore, the two are incompatible. One cannot be both one with the Body of Christ and one with the demonic. To participate in one is to separate from and forsake the other.
- *For a believer to insist on being able to participate in both without compromising their relationship with Christ is to foolishly put God to the test while insisting on your own strength to do other than He says you are capable and dare Him to prove you wrong!*
- **Does that really sound like a good or wise idea? A risk worth insisting on?**

THE CHALLENGE:

- What is the principle and lesson here that we can apply to our lives today in Upstate NY, 2009?
- Most of us have never been invited to a meal fellowship devoted to a Greek or Roman god. But, we ALL are repeatedly confronted with offers to participate in fellowships and activities which are based on or threaten to draw you into an action, activity or attitude that – even temporarily – takes the rightful place of Christ in our hearts; that to any degree pulls us from fellowship in Christ to fellowship of another nature. **ALL such things are idolatry!**
- We must be careful not to be lured, seduced, fascinated or drawn into activities and atmospheres which may seem innocent but beckon participation in the world rather than Christ.
- Hanging out in certain places, with certain groups of people, movies, TV shows, hobbies, books – all of these are things that can start with innocent intentions and quickly become idolatry.
- **What dangers of idolatry lie in your life?**
- **What associations might you need to re-consider?**
- **In what areas have you been testing God: participating in what is unwise because you believe you are strong enough to do so without being disqualified?**

*“O Christ, in Thee my soul hath found,
And found in Thee alone,
The peace, the joy I sought so long,
The bliss till now unknown.*

*“I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah, their waters failed,
E'en as I stooped to drink they fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.*

*“The pleasures lost I sadly mourned,
But never wept for Thee,
Till grace my sightless eyes received,
Thy loveliness to see.*

*“Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me,
There's love, and life, and rest, and joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee.”*

(copied from Ironside's commentary, pg. 284 – original author is not mentioned)