

1 Corinthians

Bible Study

Temptation

1 Corinthians 10:13–33

The nation of Israel can be used as a good example of what not to do. Paul used Israel's past failures because many Jews were saved out of the synagogue to become members of the Corinthian church. They were well acquainted with Israel's history. Israel continually turned away from obeying God's word and went their own way and suffered the consequences. Paul used the nation of Israel to show the Corinthian church the end result of not following God's word. Like Israel, they were following their own desires instead of following the word of God. God spoke his word to Israel through Moses, and God spoke to the Corinthian church (and us) through the apostle Paul. When the Corinthian church left Paul's doctrine, it resulted in divisions, arguments, and stunted spiritual growth.

Temptation (verse 13)

The usual interpretation of this verse is that when we are tempted to sin that God will help us to find a way to escape in that moment of sinning. The context shows Israel going through trials and provoking God by putting his word to the test. Like the child who tests his or her parents' limit, Israel tested God by seeing how far they could go, in spite of already knowing what He had said through Moses. This section of 1 Corinthians shows how Israel tested God's limits by not following what He plainly told them. We are to use these example of Israel's failures as a warning so that we don't make the same mistake and turn our backs on God's word. The Corinthians were doing just that by ignoring the doctrine Paul had taught them, and following other teachers and doctrines. This caused a number of divisions within the church. Instead of being united under one doctrine, they were adopting multiple ideas and splitting along their doctrinal beliefs.

There is nothing new to the temptations and testing that we face today, They are common to what Israel faced while wandering in the wilderness. These are not God-given tests, but are things that are common to each one of us because we are all in Adam and struggle with our sin nature. Although believers have been given specific instructions about pleasing God (Paul's 13 books), we will all struggle with putting those things into practice. According to Hebrews 3:8–10, God was grieved with Israel because they continually tested Him by being unfaithful, not knowing the ways of God. Their unfaithfulness began with a lack of understanding of what God wanted them to do, even though that information was available. We need to take heed and study the information that God has given to us (God's word) so that we don't become ignorant of what He desires from us.

Since we are all tempted to follow our own desires instead of God's, we need to know how to deal with the temptation to go against Him. Like Joseph running from Potiphar's wife, we need to not entertain the thought of sinning, but flee from it. God has given us the tools to live a life pleasing to Him. The combination of His word (the Bible) and the Holy Spirit will keep us on a holy, sanctified path. We need to renew our minds continually so that we will no longer conform ourselves to the world, but will have a renewed way of thinking. We need to feed ourselves with God's word so that when temptation comes, we will have the properly conditioned mind to move away from pleasing ourselves. If we don't feed upon the word of God, then the Holy Spirit will have nothing to work with, and we will not be able to walk in a manner pleasing to God. It seems that believers often fail to prepare for "battle" and then wonder why they are continually struggling to win over sin. We are in a spiritually war and we need to continually train by studying God's word, rightly divided. Our plan of action to avoid falling into temptation begins days, months, even years before the temptation actually strikes. If we have taken steps to build ourselves up, training ourselves with the knowledge we receive from God's word, then we should find that we are more likely to endure whatever sin we may be tempted with (Hebrews 5:13–14).

It is important to notice that 1 Corinthians 10:13 says we will be able to escape yielding to temptation by being able to endure the temptation. I believe this is because the action of sin begins in the mind and it is not possible to escape our mind. Instead, we are to learn self-control and redirect the mind to think spiritual, godly, and good thoughts instead of things that lead to gratifying the flesh (Colossians 3:1–2).

Flee idolatry (verses 14–22)

Paul continues his thought on the Corinthian's disunity by comparing it to Israel's idolatry. Worshiping something other than God is Idolatry. When the Israelites ate the meat from the sacrifices, they were sharing together in the offering given to God. There was a spiritual unity in giving God the sacrifice and then eating of the meat from that sacrifice. The same was true when the Corinthian believers partook of communion. They were all eating from the same loaf and sharing in the work of Christ on the cross. Partaking in this ritual united them. Those who ate the meat of sacrifices offered to idols were also united, but sharers of a false god. Their disunity was evident in the manner in which they were celebrating the Lord's supper. It was done to gratify the flesh instead of glorifying the Lord.

Although the nation of Israel was one people who experienced God delivering them from Egypt, and sustained them with the miraculous provision of food and water in the wilderness, they turned against Him to follow their own desires. The result was that they were denied entry into the Promised Land. The Corinthians, likewise, were one people who were baptized into Christ, yet they were turning away from Him to follow their own desires. Their idolatry was in the form of elevating their own desires above God. Even though they had been united in sharing the blessing of the shed blood of Christ, and had all shared in the one bread of unity, Jesus Christ, they, like Israel, were provoking the Lord by not being united in doctrine.

All things are lawful (verses 23–30)

Paul now comes back to the subject of liberty. We are free to do anything that is not forbidden by Scripture, but it may not be profitable for us to do certain things. The liberty to do something must be evaluated in light of our requirement to edify one another. We may have the biblical liberty to do something, but if it affects another believer negatively, then we should not do it. Everything we do should be done to build up other believers. Our liberty is not to be used selfishly. If what we do causes another believer to fall into sin, then we should not exercise our freedom in that area.

In general, a believer who exercises their God-given freedom will often be critically viewed by another believer who does not understand their freedom in Christ. The weaker brother lacks knowledge about his or her liberty, but instead of causing them to fall into sin, they think they are the stronger brother because they are following their own special man-made regulations. They often try to impose their "laws" on others thinking that doing so will be pleasing to God. Ironically, the weaker believer who lacks understanding of their liberty thinks they are the strong believer because they have put themselves under their own man-made law.

Glory to God (verses 21–33)

Everything goes right back to God. In the case of our liberty, we can praise the Lord for the freedom we have been given in Christ. In all we do, we are to do it for His glory. If we decide not to eat or drink, we are to do that to His glory. Paul's motivation was to seek the building up of many even at his own expense. He put aside his own desires for the good of those that he was ministering to.

Paul mentions the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God as groups he is trying to not offend. He does not wish to offend anybody by his actions. The Jews and Gentiles were the unsaved. The church of God, a general term for all believers, included the Little Flock and in the Body of Christ.

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