

Challenges Christians Face

Learn from Old Testament Examples

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

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October 16, 2011

Learn from Old Testament Examples

Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of Christian liberty. Let's learn about this in a message I am calling, "Learn from Old Testament Examples."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13:

¹For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹²Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:1-13)

Introduction

During the early part of my High School education I had to study the subject of history. Frankly, at that time I hated it! I couldn't remember the names of the people, the places they lived, the things they did, and, especially, the dates when it all happened!

It seemed to me that Richard Reeves had it right when he said that “a lot of history is just dirty politics cleaned up for the consumption of children and other innocents.”¹

It wasn't until I became a Christian after High School that I became interested in history. I learned that the famous Harvard professor George Santayana was in fact right when he said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”²

History is extremely important because the lessons that others have learned in the past can teach us to avoid them in the present. Or, as a somewhat pessimistic anonymous author put it, “History teaches us the mistakes we are going to make”!³

The apostle Paul was a great student of history. He knew that God's people should learn from Old Testament examples.

The Corinthian church lived in a very idolatrous society. Many Corinthians had been converted from pagan idol worship. Furthermore, much of the food available for purchase in the market had associations with idol worship. There were many opportunities for Christians to fall back into pagan practices and idolatry. Sometimes when Christians exercised their liberty in Christ without falling into sin themselves, others observing their actions were affected.

And so Paul argued that in order to protect others, Christians should forfeit their liberty in certain situations. Paul showed from Old Testament examples how misusing our liberty can disqualify us from effective service to Christ.

¹ <http://www.quoteagarden.com/history.html>.

² John Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 300.

³ John Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 299.

Lesson

So, in our lesson today, we learn that misusing our liberty can disqualify Christians from effective service to Christ. Christians should learn from Old Testament examples that we must not misuse our liberty. Let's learn about this as follows:

1. The Advantages of Liberty (10:1-4).
2. The Abuses of Liberty (10:5-10).
3. The Application of Liberty (10:11-13).

I. The Advantages of Liberty (10:1-4)

First, let's look at the advantages of liberty.

The break between chapters 9 and 10 is unhelpful. It begins in chapter 10 verse 1 with the word "**For**," thus showing that Paul was actually continuing his discussion about disqualification from effective service to Christ with Old Testament examples of those who suffered God's judgment.

Furthermore, Paul wanted his Christian readers to learn from Old Testament examples when he said, "**For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers**" (10:1a). Paul wanted his readers to remember what happened to God's people in the wilderness.

And so he began by listing five advantages of liberty.

A. *They Were All Under the Cloud (10:1a)*

The first advantage of liberty is that they were all under the cloud.

Paul said in verse 1a: "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, **that our fathers were all under the cloud. . .**"

What was Paul referring to when he said that they **were all under the cloud**?

You remember that Jacob and his family made their way to Egypt during a severe famine in the Promised Land. After Jacob and Joseph died, the people of God spent 400 years in Egypt as

slaves. Eventually, God raised up Moses to deliver his people from the land of Egypt so that they could go back to the Promised Land. After the Ten Plagues that God sent upon the Egyptians, God miraculously delivered his people from Pharaoh. The people of God headed for the Promised Land. “And the Lord went before them by day in *a pillar of cloud* to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night” (Exodus 13:21).

So, the first advantage of liberty is that they were all led by God’s guiding presence.

B. They All Passed Through the Sea (10:1b)

The second advantage of liberty is that they all passed through the sea.

Paul said in verse 1b: “. . . **and all passed through the sea. . .**”

As the people of God made their way to the Promised Land they discovered that Pharaoh changed his mind and was chasing them. They cried out with fear to Moses. Moses went to God who told him to take the people through Red Sea. “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left” (Exodus 14:21-22).

So, the second advantage of liberty is that they were all led by God’s protecting presence.

C. They All Were Baptized into Moses (10:2)

The third advantage of liberty is that they all were baptized into Moses.

Paul said in verse 2: “. . . **and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. . .**”

The word **baptized** is unusual here. The basic significance of Christian baptism is identification with Christ. When we are baptized we acknowledge our new identity as followers of Christ. It seems to me that this is what Paul had in mind in this verse. As John MacArthur said, “The Israelites **were baptized into Moses** in the sense that they identified with him as the Lord’s appointed leader over them. There was solidarity between the people and Moses.”⁴

So, the third advantage of liberty is that they were given a God-appointed leader.

D. They All Ate the Same Spiritual Food (10:3)

The fourth advantage of liberty is that they all ate the same spiritual food.

Paul said in verse 3: “. . . **and all ate the same spiritual food. . . .**”

While the people of God were wandering in the wilderness—which they did for forty years—God provided them with **food**. He gave them quail and manna each day. That **food** was **spiritual** not because there was some unusual quality about it but because it was provided directly by God.

So, the fourth advantage of liberty is that God provided food for his people.

E. They All Drank the Same Spiritual Drink (10:4)

And the fifth advantage of liberty is that they all drank the same spiritual drink.

Paul said in verse 4a: “. . . **and all drank the same spiritual drink.**”

While the people of God were wandering in the wilderness they ran out of water. On at least two occasions God provided wa-

⁴ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 220.

ter for them from a rock (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). Again, like the food, this water was **spiritual** in the sense that God provided it for his people.

But now Paul explicitly stated that God provided for his people through Christ. He said in verse 4b: **“For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”** The *ESV Study Bible* has an interesting note for this verse. It says, “Rabbinic exegesis from after Paul’s time surmised that the rock followed the Israelites throughout their wanderings. This understanding of the rock may have been current in Paul’s time. If so, Paul’s claim that the **Rock** following them was both **spiritual** and **Christ** shows that he did not believe that a physical rock traveled with the Israelites, but that Christ (in spiritual form) was ever-present with them: he was there to supply their need for water, and there to judge those who tested him (1 Corinthians 10:9).”⁵

So, the fifth advantage of liberty is that God provided drink for his people.

God provided tremendous advantages to his people: guidance, protection, God-appointed leaders, food, and drink. God still provides tremendous advantages to his people: guidance, protection, God-appointed leaders, food and drink (in the Lord’s Supper). One would think that the people of God would be grateful, thankful, and wonderfully obedient to God.

But they were not.

II. The Abuses of Liberty (5-10)

Second, let’s look briefly at the abuses of liberty.
Let’s notice five abuses of liberty.

A. *They Displeased God (10:5-6)*

The first abuse of liberty is that they displeased God.

⁵ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2204.

Paul said in verse 5: **“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”**

In fact, of the entire number of adults who left Egypt (which numbered 600,000 men, besides women—Exodus 12:37) only two, Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Even Moses and Aaron were disqualified from entering the Promised Land because Moses struck the rock (for water) rather than speak to it, as God had directed him (Numbers 20:8-12, 24). God made his people wander around in the wilderness for forty years until all the adults died.

“Now,” Paul said, **“these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did”** (10:6).

The people of God disqualified themselves from blessing and effective service because they displeased God.

B. They Were Guilty of Idolatry (10:7)

The second abuse of liberty is that they were guilty of idolatry.

Paul said in verse 7: **“Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’”**

Exodus 32 records the sordid story. Moses had gone up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from God. He was gone for several weeks. The people of God became impatient. So, they persuaded Aaron to make a Golden Calf. Although the calf was an Egyptian idol, the people of God planned to worship it as the one who had delivered them out of Egypt (32:4).

So, Aaron made the calf. Then **the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play**, and thereby became idolaters.

C. They Were Guilty of Sexual Immorality (10:8)

The third abuse of liberty is that they were guilty of sexual immorality.

Paul said in verse 8: **“We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.”**

On another occasion the people of God “began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods” (Numbers 25:1-2). God brought severe judgment on them, **and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.**

D. They Were Guilty of Putting God to the Test (10:9)

The fourth abuse of liberty is that they were guilty of putting God to the test.

Paul said in verse 9: **“We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents. . . .”**

On yet another occasion the people of God put him to the test when they “spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food’” (Numbers 21:5). God **destroyed** some of them **by serpents.**

E. They Were Guilty of Grumbling (10:10)

And the fifth abuse of liberty is that they were guilty of grumbling.

Paul said in verse 10: **“. . . nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.”**

At one point during the wilderness wandering, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their fellow rebels were destroyed by the Lord because of their complaints against God’s appointed leadership (Numbers 16:32-35). Then, “on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the Lord.’” (16:41). God was so incensed at their complaints about divine justice that he immediately sent a plague that killed 14,700 people. The **Destroy-**

er was the same angel who had slain the firstborn of the Egyptians before Israel left Egypt (Exodus 12:23).

Even though God provided tremendous advantages to his people, they were guilty of abusing their advantages by displeasing God, idolatry, sexual immorality, putting God to the test, and grumbling. That is not good!

III. The Application of Liberty (11-13)

Finally, let's look at the application of liberty.

What did Paul want his Christian readers to learn from these Old Testament examples? Two things.

A. *God Has Not Promised to Shield Us from Temptation (10:11-12)*

First, God has not promised to shield us from temptation.

Paul said in verses 11-12: **“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”**

The Bible is clear that Christians cannot lose their salvation. Nevertheless, the warnings in the Bible are very real. God has given his people wonderful advantages. But God's people must never abuse the liberty that has been given to them.

B. *God Has Promised to See Us through Temptation (10:13)*

And second, God has promised to see us through temptation.

Paul said in verse 13: **“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”**

This is the first verse I memorized as a young Christian. It

was a great encouragement to me. Christians face temptation all the time. But the good news is that **God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to handle the temptation, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**

John MacArthur notes that there three ways for us to endure temptation: prayer, trust, and focusing on Jesus Christ.

First, we must pray. “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation,” Jesus told his disciples (Mark 14:38a). Our first defense in a temptation is to pray, to turn to our heavenly Father and put the matter in his hands.

Second, we must trust. When we pray we must pray believing that God will answer and help us. We also trust that, whatever the temptation, God has allowed it to come for our good, to prove our faithfulness. God has a purpose for everything that comes to his children, and when we are tempted we should gladly endure it in his power—for the sake of his glory and our good.

And third, we must focus on Jesus Christ. “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Hebrews 12:3-4). Christ endured more than we could ever be called on to endure. He understands our temptations and he is able to take us through them.⁶

Conclusion

God has given tremendous advantages to his people. Nevertheless, temptations come to God’s people, and as we learn from Old Testament examples, it is entirely possible to abuse our liberty and advantages. May God help us to take hold of God’s promise that he will see us through every temptation. Amen.

⁶ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 229-30.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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Challenges Christians Face

PRAYER:

O God, you have given us incredible advantages. We also recognize that it is so easy to abuse the advantages and liberty that you give us. Help us to face each temptation that comes our way by prayer, trust, and focusing on Jesus Christ.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, remember that as you face every temptation God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.