

That We Might Not Desire Evil

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Evil is real. Evil is not the result of an overworked imagination. Goodness is also real. Many things in this world are good. And many things in this world are evil.

The real problem is that evil is not only something that exists outside of you and in others. Evil exists within you.

I also believe that good exists in you as well. You were created in the image of God and remnants of that image still exist in every human heart. And, as believers in Jesus Christ, he has created within you a new heart that hungers and thirsts for what is good. So, in Christ, it is not right to think of ourselves as only evil. We are saints in Christ Jesus.

But, because your old nature continues to exist in you, you have evil within you. And that evil is not going away until we die or see Jesus face to face.

This is why Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, writes what he writes in the last verse of chapter 9.

1 Corinthians 9:27 ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Even as an apostle, Paul had to deal with the evil within. He disciplined himself. He gave himself a black eye so to speak. That is the Greek for “discipline my body.” Paul had to exert great amounts of energy to keep his old sinful nature “under control.”

Overcoming evil in his heart was not easy for Paul. It took effort. Continual effort. Persistent effort.

Paul was motivated, in part, by the fear that if he grew slack, he would give into the evil desires within him. And the final result would be that he would be disqualified from eternal life.

Believing this is not a contradiction of the Gospel. But it sure does sound like it!

The Gospel clearly teaches that as sinful human beings, we are given a right to enter heaven because Christ’s perfect record of righteousness is credited to our account. We are given Christ’s righteousness only because we believe in him. We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. And this is by grace alone to the glory of God alone.

But while it is impossible to earn your right into heaven because you can never be good enough, it is not correct to think that your fight against sin is irrelevant. The struggle to be Christ-like is not optional. It is the very purpose for which we have been united to Jesus Christ.

Every Christian must engage in a life-long, struggle against evil desires within their own heart.

But I discipline my body and keep it under control,

Striving to defeat sin is so much more than human effort.

But no one will defeat sin who does not have it as their clear objective, and who is not exerting much effort in the attempt.

And no one will exert much effort if they do not think that it matters.

And so, Paul tries to press home the truth that overcoming the evil of our old nature does matter.

I want you to know, brothers,

Literally: I do not want you to be ignorant
Ignorant of what?

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

What is the point that Paul does not want the Corinthians to miss?

The same people that God brought up out of Egypt and took care of during the wilderness wanderings, He was not pleased with. They had many signs of God's care, but ultimately, God was not pleased with them and they were scattered in the wilderness.

Why? Because they did not take the evil within their hearts seriously.

⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

Paul wants the Corinthians to learn from the bad example of the Israelites.

God had miraculously redeemed them from Egypt.

The purpose of their being redeemed out of Egypt was to give them a good home in the Promised Land.

But most of the Israelites did not enter the Promised Land. Why not?

They continued to lust after that which was evil.

So, too, continuing to indulge our sin will result in our not entering into heavenly glory.

We must learn from the bad example of Israel, if we are ever going to receive a rich welcome into our Promised Land.

Take your sin seriously because if you do not you may very well find yourself being disqualified from your eternal inheritance.

Exactly how this is not contradictory to the Gospel that declares that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is challenging.

But it is the truth.

And it was just as much true for the OT Israelites as it is true for NT Christians.

In order for NT Christians to learn from the OT Israelites their relationship with God must be governed by the same basic rules.

If we are not saved in the same way that OT Israelites were saved, then their example would not apply to us.

If the Israelites were saved by works, and we are saved by grace, then we have nothing to learn from them.

If the Israelites could lose their salvation, yet we cannot lose our salvation, then we have nothing to learn from them.

If the Israelites did not have Jesus, but only animal sacrifices, and we do have the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, then we cannot learn from them.

If the Israelites only had physical blessings from God, not the internal working of the Holy Spirit like we do, then we cannot really learn from their example.

If the Promised Land did not foreshadow and anticipate Heaven, then their journey was not the same as ours and therefore we cannot learn from them.

But the truth of the matter is that the rules that governed Israel's relationship with God are not essentially different from the rules that govern our relationship with God.

This is the truth that underlies Paul's argument.

that our fathers were

Paul is speaking to Gentile Christians. They have not been circumcised. They have not accepted any of the ceremonial aspects of the Jewish religion.

And yet, Paul makes clear to them that Moses and the Israelites were their fathers.

There was a spiritual connection between Moses and the Israelites of his day, and the members of the Church at Corinth.

They have a right to call Moses and the Israelites of his day - their fathers.

The Corinthians were God's people through baptism. And they were regularly nourished by God through Communion.

Paul wants the Corinthians to relate to the Israelites of old, so he categorizes their experiences in terms of Baptism and Communion.

2 all under the cloud,
 and
 all passed through the sea,
 and
 all were baptized into Moses
 in the cloud
 and
 in the sea,

3 and
all ate the same spiritual food,
4 and
all drank the same spiritual drink.
 For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them,
 and the Rock was Christ.

All of the Israelites passed under the cloud.

What cloud is Paul referring to?

- The Pillar cloud

Exodus 13:21-22 ²¹ 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. ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

What purpose did the pillar of cloud serve?

The cloud was a visible expression of the guiding and guarding presence of God.

The cloud reassured the Israelites that God was present.

The cloud prevented the Egyptians from attacking the Israelites while they were backed up to the Red Sea.

The cloud was a visible expression of the guiding and guarding presence of God.

Would you not like to have such a cloud for you today?

If you were struggling with whether God really was present with you in your daily trials, you could just look up to the cloud, and you would know that he was guiding and guarding you.

Pretty nice right?

all passed through the sea

While the presence of the cloud encouraged the Israelites that God was continuing with them in an ongoing way, the reference to passing through the sea was a one-time experience.

What was this one time experience?

It was the miracle that God worked to part the waters of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could walk over on dry ground.

What was the significance of this miracle?

The Red Sea parting was a sign of God's redeeming his people from their slavery to the Egyptians and his taking the Israelites to himself as his people.

The Israelites did not question whether they belonged to God. In the Red Sea Event, there was a transference of ownership. God rescued his people out of the kingdom of darkness and brought them into his own kingdom rule. This is why just after this, God takes them to Mount Sinai and gives them his Law.

The point here is that there was definitive event that every Israelite could look to in order to remind them that they belonged to God.

They had passed through the Sea. God had miraculously taken them through the Sea.

So, the Israelites had a one-time initiating miracle into the Community of God.
And they had an ongoing visible expression of the guiding and guarding presence of God.

Pretty awesome!

all were baptized into Moses
in the cloud
and
in the sea,

Paul explains that these redemptive events functioned as a sort of baptism.
He states that in these events the Israelites were “baptized” INTO Moses.
There is nowhere in the OT that speaks of these events as a baptism.
But Paul wants to draw a parallel between the Israelites of old and the Christians of his day.
So, he uses language that is very similar language to the language of the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:19 ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in (into) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

What does it mean to be baptized INTO some individual?
It means that you were included in, a part of, the redemption that occurred under that individual.

In Moses’ day, he was the leader who led God’s people out of slavery to Egypt.
To be baptized into Moses was to be a part of the redemption that God performed through Moses.

When the Israelites were guided by the cloud, and when they passed through the Red Sea, they were included in the redemption that God gave through Moses.

In the same way, when we are baptized into Christ Jesus, we are included in, and a partaker of, the redemption accomplished in Jesus Christ.

But that is not all.

and
4 all ate the same spiritual food,
and
all drank the same spiritual drink.
For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them,
and the Rock was Christ.

What was the spiritual food that Paul mentions?
It was the providing of Manna to the Israelites.
God sent a type of wafer (they literally called it, “what is it?”) on the ground that provided nourishment for his people throughout their wilderness journeys. Paul says that this was “spiritual food.”

He means by this that it was “supernaturally” provided. It was not some sort of unknown earthly phenomenon. It was spiritual in the sense that it came from God, who is spiritual. Of course it was physical food. It nourished their bodies.

The provision of water was also supernatural. It too was called spiritual because it was provided by God who is Spirit.

There was nothing magical about the water. It was just water. It nourished their physical bodies.

But the source of that provision was spiritual, heavenly.

For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them,
and the Rock was Christ.

Some Jewish legends actually spoke of a rock rolling along beside the Israelites wherever they went. I am not sure that this is the point. The point is that “The Rock” was abiding with them throughout their wilderness journeys.

And that Rock was Christ. As the physical rock provided physical nourishment, Christ was providing spiritual nourishment to their souls through his Spirit.

When the Israelites were drinking water from the rock, were partaking of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ was nourishing his people.
The Holy Spirit was nourishing his people.

They were feeding upon Christ through faith and through the working of the Holy Spirit.
Old Testament Israelites drinking from the hand of Christ himself.

The Corinthians were not baptized into Moses. They were baptized into a far greater name: that of Jesus.

They gathered together to participate in the sacrament of communion. They did this so that they might be nourished by Christ through the Holy Spirit much the same as their fathers did in the wilderness.

OT Israel could feast from the hand of Christ, much like we can also feast from the hand of Christ through Baptism and Communion.

1 Corinthians 10:5-6 ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

Overthrown = scattered – ie. they were not even given a proper burial.

They did not make it to the Promised Land.

If the goal of being brought out of Egypt was to have a home in the Promised Land, not many made it. Of those who were older than 20 years of age during the Exodus, only Joshua and Caleb entered the Promised Land.

A whole generation of Israelites failed to reach the goal of the Promised Land.

Why did they not reach the Promised Land?

Because they continued to lust after evil.

They thought that when they got to the other side of the Red Sea that their struggle against evil was over. The evil Egyptians were behind them.

They did not realize that they had another more insidious enemy – the evil within their own heart.

And God will not simply remove the evil.

We must exert tremendous effort, Holy Spirit driven effort, to put to death the evil of our hearts.

Pause...

Paul will deal with four common types of sin. Sins that the Israelites of old dealt with. Sins that we also deal with today.

1. Idolatry – False Doctrine and False Worship

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."

Idolatry is either worshipping a false god or worshipping the true God falsely.

When we do not submit to the Bible as our standard of what to believe about God and how we are to worship Him, we are making idols.

The first way that we can lust after evil is to want some other God than the One who is revealed to us in the Bible.

We want a god that we can manipulate and control.
We want a god who will conform to our present idea of good and evil.
We want a god that will let us get away with pursuing our sensual passions and pleasures.
The God of the Bible is not that God.

Our world does not consider idolatry evil. They are content that the worship of any god is good. They believe also that God should be happy with any way that we choose to worship.

To only believe in the God of Scripture, and to only worship Him according to his rules irritates and angers most people. They would rather call those who submit to the standard of Scripture as evil – or at least narrow and bigoted.

The world tells you to embrace all religions. To not do so is evil in their eyes.
But in the eyes of God, to change his character is evil.
And to worship Him in ways that he has not told us, is evil.

Paul will deal with the worship of idols later in the chapter. Just know, that it is evil to think of God wrongly. And there are ways of worshipping God that he considered evil. This is why it is so wonderful that God has given us his Word, that we might know him rightly and worship him rightly.

We must take seriously the pursuit of truth.
We must take seriously the right worship of God.

2. Sexual immorality (sensuality)

⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality
as some of them did,
and
twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.

God is the one who has designed sex to be pleasurable. God is not against the pleasure of sex. But, it is evil when we seek the pleasure of sex outside of the marriage relationship. And it is certainly evil when sex is combined with pagan worship.

Paul gives an example of this very thing from the Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land.

Numbers 25:1-3 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. ² These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

Numbers 25:9 ⁹ Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

Why Paul speaks of 23,000 and Numbers speaks of 24,000 is a mystery. It is a mystery for which I do not have a good answer. I have some guesses if you are really interested. Talk to me later. It is not a bone to get choked on. Let's stick with the meat of the passage.

Sexual sin is an issue for many of us. We live in a sex saturated culture.

But the prevalence of sexual sin does not mean that God will overlook ours. Of course, God is faithful to forgive and cleanse us from our sexual sins. But we must turn from them. And we must sincerely and persistently fight against our sexual sin.

Overcoming sexual lust is a lifelong battle. It is not simply a one-time decision. Bringing sexual desire into submission to Jesus Christ will not be complete in this life. There are times when you may think that the forces of evil within you are too strong. If you are in this place right now, please come and talk with me. Jesus gives hope. Victory will not be immediate and it certainly will not be easy. But Jesus can give you hope and help. And we will walk with you as well.

But you must get firm in your heart that overcoming evil sexual desire is a necessity. It is not an option. We will not be perfect in this life. Perfection awaits the day when we see Jesus face to face. But if we have the hope of perfection, every true believer will continue to fight for sexual purity.

3. Testing God

⁹ We must not put Christ to the test,
as some of them did
and were destroyed by serpents,

What does it mean to test God? Test Christ?

Testing God is really standing in judgment over God. You demand of God to serve you. You flip the roles of your relationship with him. You play the role of the master, attempting to make God the servant.

You test God when you disobey him openly, expecting that he will do nothing about it.

You test God when you refuse to submit to Him, but use God's promises for selfish motives. God's promises are designed to help you walk with Him in humble obedience. They are not given so you can command God, as if God were your servant.

You test God when you demand that God prove himself, especially after he has already proven himself. Jesus had just fed the 5,000, and all they could say was, "Do it again!" Jesus has proven himself to you at

the cross. He also gives many daily blessings in our lives. But it is evil to continue demanding that he prove himself to us.

Paul is referring to the situation in Numbers 21.

Numbers 21:5-6 ⁵ And the people 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." ⁶ Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

Do you demand that God serve your wishes?

Do you think you know better than God?

Do you forget what God has done for you in Christ and keep demanding from him that He prove himself to you?

The Bible calls this evil. The fact that we have all been guilty of this evil, does not make it less evil. Many of us will rightly condemn sexual sin, but then spend our lives testing God and think it no big deal. God is within his right to test us. We have no right to test him. He is the only Righteous, and Faithful being in the Universe. We have no right to test him.

And we must confess our sin to him when we do test him, and fight against this evil in our hearts.

4. Grumbling and Complaining

¹⁰ nor grumble,
as some of them did
and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

This evil goes hand in hand with the previous one. We test God when we are always grumbling.

Grumbling and complaining is the one sin out of these four listed that we have made the most friends with. We grumble and complain all the time. We think it is our "God-given" right to grumble and complain. We grumble and complain so readily that we might even be shocked to hear that grumbling and complaining can keep one from entering glory.

But complaining is the result of thinking that you deserve something better. God has not really treated you as He ought to have. The life he has given to you is more difficult than it should be.

The Israelites are happy to be out of Egypt, until life in the wilderness is not what they expected. As Christians we feel the same way. When we first believe in Christ, we are happy. But then the Christian life is not what we expected. And so we begin complaining.

Acknowledging that life is difficult is not what we are talking about. Admitting our weakness and inability to handle the trials of life on our own is not what we are talking about. We are talking about having an attitude that is dissatisfied with God, as if he has fallen short in his goodness towards you.

The example of the spies is a good one. God had promised to his people the good fruit of the Promised Land. But when the spies saw the giants, they did not only think they could not conquer them. They grumbled against God. How could God make entering the Promised Land so difficult? It should be easier than this. I deserve it to be easier than it is. God is the one at fault. Not me.

The truth is that I do not have a right to anything that is good from God. I have forfeited my right through my sin. And God has been overly gracious to me. If I were to list all the ways that God has been good to me, we would be here a long time. So, when God brings a trial into my life, he has every right to do so. I must learn to submit up under God's testing. I must strive to be thankful. I can bring my weaknesses and struggles to Him. I can plead with him in prayer. But I have no right to complain as if I deserve to be treated better.

Grumbling and complaining flows out of pride. And pride has no place in the kingdom of God.

Have you made grumbling and complaining your companion?

Have you accepted it as no big deal?

The ten spies who died in the wilderness, killed by the Destroyer, would tell you otherwise.

1. False Teaching and False worship
2. Sexual immorality (sensuality)
3. Testing God
4. Grumbling and Complaining

Four types of sin that you ought to be striving to put to death.

I do not know how far along you will get before you die or Jesus returns.

But, trust me, you want to be struggling to conquer these sins when he comes.

¹¹ 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.

I have often been in conversations with people and they will make a comment to this effect: Boy, God sure seems harsh in the OT. He is much more relaxed in the NT. I like the God of the NT better.

Paul is telling us that those instances where God appears to us to be more harsh are in Scripture as examples to warn us. God made a point to tell us how he feels about sin. We should not think that God has changed. We should also think that it is true that He is merciful. He does kindly forgive sin. Jesus says, 70 times 7. But he has not changed in how he feels towards our sin. He hates it and we should hate it too.

¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed
lest he fall.

The Israelites stood on the other side of the Red Sea. They were confident in their relationship with God. They did not reckon with the evil within. They did not think that they had to take it seriously.

The Corinthians had many tokens of God's grace. They were in danger of thinking that they did not have to take their sin seriously.

They were convinced that they were right with God while they were engaging in unrepentant sin. Their situation was more precarious than they realized.

But if Paul wants to confront the overconfident Christian.

He also wants to encourage the fearful Christian. If you know the evil within your own heart, you will wonder if it is too great to overcome. We all need Paul's words of encouragement.

13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

Every person is unique in some ways. No two people have exactly the same trials, or the exact combination of inward struggles. But, we all struggle with the same types of temptations. Our temptations are common to one another.

That means that there is no “super-temptation” that only you have. And it also means that you are not alone. There are others around you who are struggling with the same sorts of things. You can lean on one another.

And more importantly, God knows how to help you in your struggles. The evil of your heart does not stymie him.

God is faithful,
and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability,

Your ability to overcome sin is limited. Given enough temptation every person will give in. No person is above sin. Praise God that he measures the amount of temptation that we receive.

But even this is not something we are just to take for granted. In the Lord’s prayer we are to ask the Lord “to lead us not into temptation, but to deliver us from evil.” We are to acknowledge our weakness. We are to ask for grace to overcome. And if we overcome, we are to acknowledge that we have only done so because of God’s faithfulness to us.

If we trust in our own strength. If we don’t pause to pray and to meditate upon God’s Word, God is not being unfaithful when he allows us to commit sin. He is merely working on the pride that lives within us. And even when we are praying and seeking God in his Word and enlisting the help of other Christians, overcoming the evil within is not always immediate. And it will remain incomplete in this life. We all are humbled by those stubborn, indwelling sins.

They drive us to Christ. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Only Jesus Christ! Our desire is to be entirely free from the presence of evil within us. But that is not the victory that God has for you for this life.

but with the temptation
 he will also provide the way of escape,
 that you may be able to endure it.

As long as you live in this world, you will face temptation. Evil continues to live within you. But you are no longer its slave.

Jesus has conquered evil. And he will provide a way to escape its clutches.

He will give you the strength that you need to endure the evil within without obeying its desires.

He will help you conquer.

It will not be all at once. Chuck Swindoll wrote a book, “Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back.” I remember reading this as a teenager. It helped me.

Mortification of Sin by John Owen.

Indwelling Sin by John Owen.

Practical Take A-ways:

1. You must fight the evil within you. Take your sin seriously.
 - a. balance – keep in step with the Spirit.

2. The evil within is the real enemy. (Cultural Shift)
 - a. Global evil vs. Inward evil.
3. True discipleship
 - a. Older
 - b. Peers
 - c. Younger
4. In the struggle, remember that God is faithful.