

**Living Out Your Liberty**  
1 Corinthians 9:27-10:6

Some of the most remarkable events that Paul recounts about his ministry are found in 2 Corinthians 11:24 **“Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.”** We know that when Paul, a Roman citizen, was beaten at Philippi, he held the authorities accountable (Acts 16:35-40) for his beating. So why would Paul submit to beatings by Jewish people on five different occasions?! The answer was found in Paul’s description of his ministry in 1 Corinthians 9: **“<sup>19</sup> For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant [slave] unto all, that I might gain the more. <sup>20</sup> And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews;”** (1 Corinthians 9:19-20). It would have been so easy for Paul to declare that Christianity was a totally different religion, and thereby escape punishment from the Jews. But he didn’t; he was determined to present Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. So, he allowed himself to be treated like a slave and beaten like a slave. Though he was free from all men, he made himself a slave to all in order to win them with the Gospel of Christ. But look at the way he concluded chapter 9: **“lest . . . I myself should be a castaway.”**

**What Is Meant by Disapproved: Disqualified, “Castaway”**

The word “castaway” translating [*adokimos*] in 1 Corinthians 9:27 brings us up short. What is meant by this word in this context?

- Does it refer to someone who is lost? That is a possibility. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 13:5, **“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own in your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates [*adokimos*].”** Could someone who preaches Christ but does not follow Christ be a mere unregenerate actor? Consider the example of Demas, one of Paul’s evangelistic team members (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24). In a tragic note, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:10, **“For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica . . .”** At the Final Judgment, Jesus will say to many religious preachers who refer to Jesus as Lord (Matthew 7:21-23), **“I never knew you; depart from me you workers of iniquity!”** Is this what Paul has in mind about himself?

- Does it refer to a true believer who is “disapproved?” When we encounter this question, many of us will remember Ephesians 1:6, **“To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”** So does Paul have in mind that our acceptance in the Beloved (Christ) is a qualified acceptance? No, that would be a contradiction of Ephesians 1:6; each true believer is fully and completely accepted in Christ, and is a citizen of heaven. So this raises the only other possibility: that Paul is referring to the Lord’s disapproval of a believer’s conduct. Applying “disqualification” or “disapproval” to the believer’s behavior helps us to understand why this word [*adokimos*] is used here. Consider Paul’s warning about the believer’s behavior in 2 Corinthians 5:8-11:

**“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. <sup>11</sup> Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men . . .”**

In this text, Paul confidently proclaims his assurance that he will be “present with the Lord” when he dies. Yet, he labors to be accepted of the Lord. So it’s clear that he is not speaking of being accepted into heaven. What is he describing? In verse 10, he makes it plain that he is describing conduct: that things that we do with our bodies whether good or bad. Paul clearly referred to the believer’s behavior, his deeds. And in the fear of the Lord (v. 11), Paul was determined to labor in such a way that his conduct would be accepted by the Lord. Now this raises an important question. Is the Lord’s disposition toward us affected by the things that we do? We know the answer to this. In a passage dedicated to specific behaviors (Ephesians 4:17-32), God’s Word commands, **“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption.”** Consider Proverbs 11:20 **“They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD: but such as are upright in their way are his delight.”** “Upright in their way” refers to their behavior. This is why Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:10, **“Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.”**

### **Self-Deception vs. Self-Control**

Paul raised the “castaway comment” to warn himself and others about the dangers of self-deception. He urged them to exercise self-control to avoid this self-deception. If this is what Paul meant by “disapproved” or “disqualified,” wouldn’t we expect Paul to give us examples? Wouldn’t he give us examples of those who were disqualified by their behavior? This is exactly what he does in 1 Corinthians 10:1-6:

**“<sup>1</sup> Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; <sup>2</sup> And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; <sup>3</sup> And did all eat the same spiritual meat; <sup>4</sup> And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”**

### **Historical Examples? 1-4**

Paul wrote to people who were “in the know” about Biblical doctrine. Yet he asked them not to be ignorant about a number of Biblical examples of how those doctrines should be applied.

- The Israelites had experienced remarkable works of God: They were all “under the cloud.” This is a reference to the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night described in Exodus 13:21-22. In Numbers 14:14, Moses submitted this as proof of the personal presence of God among His people. All the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, described in Exodus 14:21-31.
- The Israelites were all identified with Moses, God’s deliverer. Verse 2 tells us they **“were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”** This does not mean that they were sprinkled with water or immersed. The point here is that were all identified with Moses, God’s deliverer. (The main point of Christian baptism today is that we are identified with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection – just as He identified with us to “fulfill all righteousness” Matthew 3:13-17). When a sinner places his trust in Christ’s substitution of Himself (in His death, burial and resurrection), that sinner becomes a citizen of heaven.
- They received food and water by spiritual (or supernatural) means. By miracles of God, they received food (manna beginning in Exodus 16:13-15, and quail in Numbers 11:31). At the beginning of their journey (Exodus 15:22-27), at Massah/Meribah (Exodus 17:1-7), and at Kadesh (Numbers 20), the Lord miraculously brought forth water from the rock. Paul applies this spiritual lesson: the water from the rock indicated the presence of Christ with His people, Israel. In our service this evening, we will examine the phrase, “Christ our Rock.”

Occasionally, you will hear teachers and preachers dismiss the value of the Old Testament for believers in the Church Age. Carl Trueman pointed out that *“there is the constant tendency to neglect the Old Testament, in particular in our theological reflections, and our devotional lives also need to take full account of the Old Testament. We need to read the Bible as a whole, to understand each passage, each verse, within the theological and narrative structure of the canon as a whole.”*<sup>4</sup> In fact, in this passage, Paul explicitly refers to Old Testament stories in order to warn New Testament believers.

### How Should We Apply These Spiritual Examples?

Paul did not want the believers in Corinth to miss the right applications of these historical examples.

- With many of them, God was not pleased; He disapproved of their conduct.
- The lesson is this: we should not lust after things, even neutral things, as they lusted.

Now on the face of it, this seems like a straightforward indictment of the desire for evil things. But let’s take a closer look. Turn back to Numbers 11. This is the passage where the Lord brought quail from the coast to feed the people in the wilderness. Verse 4 tells us that the people were “lusting” or strongly craving something. Now what was that was a “lust after evil things, as they also lusted?” Numbers 11 tells us: **“*4* And the mixed multitude that *was* among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? *5* We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: *6* But now our soul *is* dried away: *there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.*”** They were unhappy with God’s provision (v. 6); He had given them manna to eat. They were in the wilderness and they were surviving and thriving on manna. A minimum calorie intake for a human being in the wilderness would be about 1400 calories per day. A slice of bread is about 80 calories. It would take a little more than seventeen (17) slices of bread to reach 1400 calories. So the Lord miraculously provided the equivalent of more than seventeen slices of bread for each man, woman and child in the wilderness. Assuming a conservative number of 4 million Israelis, that’s the equivalent of 68 million slices of bread each and every day during the forty years that they wandered in the wilderness! But in Numbers 11, they wanted something more; they wanted what they had eaten during their bondage in Egypt. What did they want? They wanted (v. 5) fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks (which are like scallions), onions and garlic. Now doesn’t this seem strange? Was there a law against eating any of these? We could say, “against such there is no law.” So what was the problem, and why was this described as **“lust after evil things, as they also lusted?”**

God’s provision for them in the wilderness at that time did not include those things. For some of those in Corinth, the meat offered to idols weekly might have been their only inexpensive source of meat. Some craved it. But in the case of the Israelites in the wilderness, this unrelenting craving became evil. Theirs was an evil desire for neutral things. They craved what they had before they were delivered from bondage in Egypt; the Corinthians were warned not to crave what they had before they were delivered from their bondage to sin. There was nothing wrong with fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But when they focused on their memories so much that they idolized them, evil entered in. They griped and grumbled to express their discontent. What is it that others have which you do not? Beware the longings of your heart. Read Numbers 11:33-34.

Let’s face it. In modern America, we are largely blind to our idols. To find them requires careful attention using the whole counsel of God. This was true even in Ezekiel’s day. In Ezekiel 14:1-5, the Lord told him that the leaders had set up idols – in their hearts. But the Lord warned that He would **“take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.”** Many years ago, some Chinese house church leaders asked me about our American idols. I explained that most of America’s idols

are secret idols – idols in the heart. Paul’s example served as a warning about the sin of grumbling and discontent.

**<sup>5</sup> But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”**

Should they eat it? If it made their brother to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:9), or hindered the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:12), should they eat it? These are the questions Paul raised about the Christian use of liberty. Paul declared the warning that God was not well pleased with many of His people whom He brought out of Egypt. What was the result? Many were laid low, dying in the wilderness and failing to reach the Promised Land. Think about that little word “many.” It’s quite an understatement. Were all of the Israelites true believers – trusting in the promise of Christ alone for salvation? No, clearly many of them were lost people – who remained unmoved by remarkable, miraculous works of God.

But were all of the Israelites lost people – without true saving faith? There were only two of those people who entered into the Promised Land: Joshua and Caleb. Were the rest of them unregenerate, lost people? No! Moses, Miriam and many others were clearly s believing people. Yet God’s Word says, **“But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”** In the last verse of 1 Corinthians 9, Paul referred to this as being “disapproved” or a “castaway.” In 1 Corinthians 10, he provided these examples, and we shall see many more as we proceed.

### **Applications**

- Are you certain that you know the Lord and that the Lord knows you? Are you confident that you have been accepted in the Beloved Christ to the praise of the glory of His grace?
- As a believer, are you serving the Lord so that your labors may be accepted by the Lord, as Paul did? The danger of self-deception is real; the need to control your desires is very great.
- Christ is our Rock. In Him we have everything we need for life and godliness. Are you content with what He has provided for you? Or are you setting up idols in your heart, longing for things – even neutral things – that the Lord has not provided for you?
- Let us all labor to please the Lord with our conduct, and heed the warning about the Israelites whose bodies were strewn in the desert.
- These things were written for our example; let us take these examples to heart.

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<sup>i</sup> Carl Trueman, “The Marcions Have Landed. A Warning for Evangelicals,” accessed at <https://www.monergism.com/marcions-have-landed-warning-evangelicals>