

5. In the tenth chapter Paul's discussion seems to return to the matter of foods sacrificed to idols. But, in fact, he never departed from the topic, and this chapter only continues his treatment of it. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that the answer they sought to the question of "idol meats" resides in discerning and living out the Christian life *in truth*. The strong at Corinth argued from the vantage point of their freedom in Christ; Paul affirmed that freedom and its importance, but insisted that it must serve the cause of Christ's gospel or it's a perversion of true freedom. Life in freedom is life as a bondservant, and this applies to the Christian's personal walk as well as to his relationship with the saints and the world of unbelievers. Chapter nine ends with Paul focusing on the individual aspect of the freedom/slavery dynamic, and chapter ten continues that emphasis: Living as Christ's freedman means the subjugation of oneself to the cause of the gospel. But, as seen, this self-mastery is *Christ's* mastery of the believer, so that "beating one's body and making it one's slave" amounts to having one's mind – and consequently one's conduct – informed and directed by the Spirit of Christ. The self-subjugation Paul insisted upon involves spiritual discernment before disciplined living; it involves conformity to Christ's mind before conformity to His deeds.

And so, as Paul advanced his discussion from "idol meats" to the larger issue of *idolatry*, he spoke in such a way that the Corinthians would understand that his charge to them to "flee from idolatry" implicated and obligated their perspective and thinking and not merely their actions. Anyone can restrain himself from idolatrous practices; only those possessing Christ's life and mind can actually renounce idolatry as such. The reason resides in the very nature of idolatry: *Idolatry doesn't identify a set of religious practices, but the dynamic whereby that which properly belongs to God is ascribed – consciously or otherwise – to something other than Him*. Once human depravity is rightly understood as speaking to man's estrangement from God and his isolation within a fractured self, it becomes immediately evident that all human beings are consummate and hopeless idolaters. So the remedy for their idolatry is not the renunciation of certain attitudes and practices, but their reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ.

- a. Paul's transitional particle ("for") shows that he was building on his preceding statement regarding his own approach to the Christian life. Specifically, he was shifting his referent from himself to the Corinthians. Paul devoted his life to the cause of the gospel, and they needed to view and order their lives in the same way. They needed to imitate Paul's single-mindedness – which expressed not self-discipline as such, *but Paul's sense of himself and his place in the divine scheme of salvation history*. Paul didn't see himself independently or abstractly, but as a man whom God had scripted into His all-encompassing purpose – the purpose centered in Israel and now realized in the One in whom Israel had found its own destiny and fulfillment (cf. Galatians 1:11-17, 3:15-4:5 with Romans 4, 9-11).

Paul's understanding of the Christian life was grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures and the nation of Israel, its covenant relationship with God, and the history and dynamics of that relationship. *But he conceived the Israel/Church connection in a very specific and critically important way – one which multitudes of Christians have misconstrued to the detriment of Paul's meaning in this passage.*

Much can be said in this regard, but it suffices here to note that this misconstrual applies to both primary interpretive systems within contemporary Protestantism: Dispensationalism and Covenant (Reformed) Theology.

- In the case of Dispensationalism, which regards Israel and the Church as essentially distinct entities, the Old Testament scriptures are treated as directly and primarily pertaining to Israel and its past, present and future in God's program. Consequently, the Old Testament has indirect and secondary relevance to the New Covenant Church; in the main, it provides Christians with historical, theological, and ethical insights and instruction.
- In contrast, historical Covenant Theology characteristically regards Israel and the Church as two different expressions of the one covenant people of God related to Him by the one "covenant of grace." Whereas dispensationalists tend to divide the two testaments as speaking to different groups defined by different dispensations, Reformed people tend to conflate the testaments in the sense that they see them as speaking to the one and same *ecclesia*, distinguished primarily by their particular "economy" under the one covenant. Old Testament or New, both are governed (and interpreted) by the core principles of "law" and "grace."

But neither of these perspectives and approaches does full justice to Paul's conception of the salvation history and its pertinence to Christ's Church. Paul recognized that the Church derives its identity, meaning and role from Israel, but the two are not the same, either entirely or only substantially. But neither has the New Covenant Church supplanted or replaced Israel as God's covenant household. *Paul understood the relationship between Israel and the Church to be that of promise and fulfillment centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

- Jewish Israel has attained its true identity and realization as Yahweh's covenant (Abrahamic) people in the promised Abrahamic seed. Jews become Israelites *indeed* through personal union with the True Israelite (cf. Isaiah 59:1ff with John 8:31-42; Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:1ff).
- So Gentiles become sharers in Israel in the same way (cf. Galatians 3:1-28, 6:14-16; Romans 9:1-33). In the time of preparation, Gentiles entered the covenant household by joining themselves to Abraham through circumcision; now, in the time of fulfillment, they do so by means of the spiritual circumcision which is performed by the true Abrahamite.

A predominantly Gentile Church hasn't supplanted or replaced Jewish Israel; rather, both Jews and Gentiles become members in the "Israel of God" – God's fulfilled and everlasting covenant house – as living stones joined to the Living Stone. In Christ, they become one new man, sharers in the Last Adam. *The Jewish people have lost nothing, while Gentiles still come to God by entering Israel.* Gentiles share in the covenant household, not supplant it (Ephesians 2:11-22).

- b. These considerations are foundational for understanding Paul's insistence that the Israelite history and experiences serve as *types* for the New Covenant Church: Those "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" – which included the saints at Corinth – are related to the Old Covenant people as antitype to type; as fulfillment to promise (ref. 10:6, 11). And that is precisely the perspective Paul wanted the Corinthians to adopt as they considered the issue at hand and the way the scriptural record speaks to it. In making that application, he drew upon four specific circumstances in Israel's history (10:1-4). Before considering them individually, it's important to observe that the four are related in several ways, all of which are critical to Paul's argument.
- 1) The first is that the four circumstances pertained to the *entire covenant house* of Israel, highlighted by Paul's repeated use of the adjective *all*.
  - 2) Secondly, all four occurred during the *wilderness period* between Israel's liberation from Egypt and the nation's entrance into Canaan. Thus they highlight Israel's deliverance and "new life" as God's covenant people as promised to them in the Abrahamic Covenant and ratified at Sinai.
  - 3) Thirdly, as they speak to Israel's unique and privileged covenant status, so they implicitly highlight the *blessings attached to the covenant* and endowed to Israel as Yahweh's elect, covenant son.
  - 4) The final consideration is equally important but easily missed. And that is that Paul connected the Corinthian saints with the four circumstances by identifying them as *children of the Israelites* who participated in those circumstances. Though one might initially conclude that Paul was using the phrase, "our fathers," with respect to himself and other Jewish Christians, his subsequent discussion shows that he intended that all of the Corinthian saints – Gentiles as well as Jews – would see themselves as bona fide children of the Israelite fathers. The previous discussion shows how Paul arrived at this conviction; his reason for introducing this context in this way will soon become evident.

The **first** circumstance Paul cited was Israel's passage "*under the cloud*" and "*through the sea*" (10:1). These are clear references to the Exodus event, but specifically to God's presence and power by which He liberated His people and led them toward their rest after departing Egypt (Exodus 12:51-14:31). Yahweh was *with* His people and *for* them; He was, as it were, leading them to Himself, not merely overthrowing their enemies. Israel understood this and celebrated their covenant God and His faithfulness in the Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-18).

The **second** elaborates on the first by associating God's power and presence with *Moses* (10:2). Paul's emphasis here seems to be Moses' role as Yahweh's chosen prophet/mediator. It was in Moses that God fulfilled His covenant promise to Abraham with respect to his seed (cf. Genesis 15:1-14; Exodus 3:1-17, 6:1-8).