



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
TEACHER – Lesson 15

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 7:1-11:16, Questions asked about marriage, idols & head coverings

OUTLINE: Lesson 15

1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1, Temptation, fellowship & conscience

10:1-13 Lessons in temptation

10:14-22 Fellowship with God or demons

10:23-11:1 For the conscience of your brothers

Chapter 9 ended with an encouragement to perseverance. It's good to start the race, but successfully completing the race is the key issue. With chapter 10, Paul uses the history of Israel to show the tragedy of falling short of the prize in spite of the significant privileges and advantages enjoyed by Israel. After all that God had done for them, an entire generation fell in the wilderness and failed to enter the Promised Land. Paul's summary of the experiences of Israel as they left Egypt isn't stated the way we might have expected, but the message remains clear.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Lessons in temptation

10:1-5 Israel's advantages

10:6-10 Israel's fall

10:11-13 A warning of dangers lurking

1. While the symbolism may not be direct, Paul's mention of baptism, spiritual food and spiritual drink evoke certain Christian events. What are they? (cf. Exodus 14; 16:1-17:7)

When reading this passage, it is hard not to think of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Israel was free of slavery when they had successfully crossed the Red Sea. Christians are free of the bondage of sin when we come up from baptism. Israel received life-sustaining nourishment when they were given water and manna in the wilderness. Christians are sustained and encouraged through the Lord's Supper that recalls our reliance on the grace of God. Baptism and the Supper are tremendous and meaningful blessings, but their benefits can be lost through unfaithfulness.

- 2. Paul's statement about Christ being in the wilderness with Israel may catch us off guard, but how is the suggestion made by Paul similar to claims made by Christ? (John 4:14; 6:30-35, 48-59; 7:37-39. Consider also the "Rock" theme in the song of Deuteronomy 32.)**

Jesus claimed to be the bread of life that comes down from heaven and he promised living water that would satisfy eternal thirst.

Paul identifies the rock from which God produced water for Israel as the presence of Christ, and Deuteronomy 32 calls God the Rock of salvation. The story in Exodus 17 doesn't make explicit connection with Christ. But the Israelites had questioned whether God was with them, and God's work through the rock answered their question. In the New Testament we learn that Christ was God among men, and through him God saves us. In John's Gospel, he revealed himself as the bread of life and the giver of living water in reference to the Holy Spirit.

- 3. What happened to the generation of Israelites who experienced the events mentioned by Paul & Jesus?**

God freed Israel from slavery, preserved them in the wilderness, and initially intended to lead them quickly to the Promised Land. Nevertheless, this chosen people was repeatedly unhappy with God's care and, as a result, they all perished in the wilderness without entering the Promised Land. Their advantages and privileges were not irrevocable. The lesson for the Corinthians was that the benefits of baptism and the Lord's Supper (a topic in chapter 11) can be lost if we don't remain faithful.

Until this point, it is unlikely that the Corinthian Christians considered eating in pagan temples as a "salvation issue."

- 4. Classed under the general heading of evil things we should not lust after, what four actions does Paul warn against? What are the Old Testament stories that Paul references?**

Verse 7: Idolatry – The golden calf in Exodus 32.

Verse 8: Sexual immorality – Idolatry and immorality with Moabites in Numbers 25:1-9.

Verse 9: Tempt Christ – The fiery serpents in Numbers 21:4-7 (cf. Psalm 78:18)

Verse 10: Murmuring or complaining against God – Refusal to move towards Canaan in Numbers 14:1-38 (esp. 35-37)

- 5. In verse 7 Paul quotes from Exodus 32:6. Do you see any significance to the fact that in the context of 1 Corinthians 10 he quotes the second half of Ex 32:6 instead of the beginning of the verse? Notice a similar detail in the story from Numbers 25:2.**

The problem in 1 Corinthians 10 concerns meals eaten in association with idol worship. Exodus 32:6 starts with mention of idolatrous sacrifices, but the latter part of the verse is more focused on eating and drinking in connection with idol worship. Numbers 25:2 also makes explicit mention of eating in idol worship. Obviously all idolatry is wrong, but Paul wants to emphasize that table fellowship in idol worship is the issue under discussion, and it is a serious and sinful problem.

- 6. Other than preserving history, what do we learn about God’s purpose for Scripture from Paul’s statement about the Old Testament stories he mentions?**

Paul doesn’t simply use old stories to illustrate his point but asserts that God had intentionally preserved these ancient stories to serve as examples and warnings to Christians (v. 11). They are more than mere history; they are educational and redemptive history. We neglect the lessons they teach at our own risk and peril.

- 7. Why does Paul use such drastic and dramatic stories to deal with the Corinthian question about eating in idols’ temples?**

Israelites lost their lives and earthly reward, and probably their eternal reward, because of their sinful behavior in these situations. Simply being the chosen people did not assure the successful completion of their journey to the Promised Land. The Corinthians must have thought that they were secure and that they could do as they pleased in the matter of associating with idolatrous practices and suffer no spiritual consequences. Paul confronts them with the error of this kind of thinking.

It is common practice when we (Christians or churches) become careless in our obedience to God’s word, that we attempt to minimize the importance of the issue.

1 Corinthians 10:14-22, Fellowship with God or demons

Back in chapter 8, Paul addressed the matter of eating in an “idol’s temple” purely from the viewpoint of how that practice by one Christian could affect the faith of a brother in Christ. He now goes beyond the influence issue and deals with the fundamental nature of such action. This change of primary focus explains the call for a more clear-cut separation from pagan temples.

Paul uses two words in this passage that have similar meanings, and different versions use a variety of translations. The word most commonly translated elsewhere as “fellowship” (*koinonia*) is used in vv. 16 (twice), 18 & 20. A word with a similar meaning (*metecho*) is used in vv. 17 & 21. Translations use “communion,” “participation,” “partake” and “have a part.” It’s useful to note this linguistic emphasis on the nature and meaning of fellowship among Christians.

8. This paragraph flows directly from what precedes as indicated by the first word of verse 14, “Therefore.” What is the direct connection between Paul’s call to “flee from idolatry,” and the warning of verse 13? Was more involved than merely eating a meal in a questionable location?

In matters of idolatry, the “way of escape” isn’t to get involved in questionable practices with the plan to limit our participation to “acceptable” levels. In matters such as idolatry, the way of escape is to “flee.” They were to avoid any level of idolatrous activity.

The attitude that they could participate a little in idolatry, or that they could neglect caring for the sensitivities of weaker brethren, could only lead to greater sin and harm to the church. The fact is that this topic is one of several problems in the Corinthian church that were caused by self-centeredness and careless obedience.

9. The bread or loaf of the Lord’s Supper is symbolic of the crucified body of Christ. What else does the “one bread” symbolize?

It also symbolizes fellowship within the body of Christ. The Lord’s Supper has clear vertical (towards God, v. 16) and horizontal (towards brethren, v. 17) implications. To think we are in fellowship with God but have no responsibilities to our brethren in Christ is a serious error. This attitude was at the root of several of the Corinthian problems.

10. What did eating the food of sacrifices (whether the food of idols, v. 7, or that of God’s temple, v. 18) signify in Old Testament Israel? What did partaking of the bread and the cup of the Lord’s Supper signify? What, then, would sitting and eating at “the table of demons” signify?

- Israel was aware of that eating the temple sacrifices was a part of the blessing of fellowship with God.
- Christians eating the Lord’s Supper express fellowship with God and his people (communion, v. 16, NKJV).
- In the same way, eating in pagan temples would necessarily imply fellowship with the concepts of the gods or demons that the idols represented.

11. At the end of chapter 8, Paul counseled against attending pagan feasts because it could lead a weaker brother astray. Here in chapter 10, he gives an even stronger prohibition against going to meals in pagan temples. What is the fundamental issue that drives this more absolute condemnation?

In chapter 8, the focus was on our treatment of each other as members of the body of Christ. This could be because caring for each other in the church was the more prevalent problem in Corinth. Paul separated that discussion from the fundamental issue of eating in a context that implied fellowship with idols, and simply saved this aspect for specific treatment. Separating the two aspects of this question gave more weight to both problems and avoided one issue getting overlooked because of the other.

12. Can you think of a simple statement of Christ that might lie behind Paul's message in this paragraph about the impropriety of trying to be in fellowship with both Christ and demons? (Note: Paul doesn't often quote Jesus, but many teachings of Paul appear to be rooted in Jesus' statements.)

Eating in pagan temples is directly associated with having fellowship with idols. In a different context Jesus said that a person cannot serve God and mammon (Matt 6:24). One cannot be in fellowship with God and be in fellowship with idols. One excludes the other. Class members might come up with other examples.

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, For the conscience of your brothers

Paul has concluded his answer to questions about attending meals in pagan temples with a definite prohibition. He now moves on to a somewhat related, but nevertheless different, question, and teaches a more flexible attitude.

13. As in question 12, can you think of a statement by Jesus that conveys the same thought as 1 Corinthians 10:24? (cf. Romans 15:1-3; Philippians 2:4)

Matthew 7:12, the Golden Rule. There could be other examples as well.

14. Paul is balancing affirmations of our personal freedoms in Christ with concern for the good of our Christian brethren. Match these two ideas with the corresponding groups of verses.

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| a. Concern for others | a) vv. 23-24 -- Concern for others |
| | b) vv. 25-27 -- Personal freedom |
| b. Personal freedom | c) vv. 28-29a -- Concern for others |
| | d) vv. 29b-30 -- Personal freedom |
| | e) vv. 31-33 -- Concern for others |

15. To summarize and distinguish the three passages that deal with various aspects of the sacrificed foods, let us identify the setting for each section.

a. Where was the sacrificed food being eaten in 8:9-10?

In an idol's temple.

b. Where was the sacrificed food being eaten in 10:20-21?

In a pagan temple, at "the table of demons."

c. Where was the sacrificed food being eaten in 10:25-28?

Temples are not mentioned. Verses 25-26 could be referring to one's own home. Verse 27 is the home of whomever invites the Christian.

16. In what area does the example of Jesus (11:1) provide the perfect concluding statement to this discussion of forgoing personal rights to better serve other people?

Jesus, as the Son of God, had infinite rights and freedoms, but acted for the good of others. He did not become the slave of his own freedom, and voluntarily sacrificed himself for others (cf. Philippians 2:5-8).