

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor10)

In chapter 8, Paul began to address the broader subject of liberty of the Christian to enjoy the things of this world – all in the context of issues specific to the local church in Corinth during the middle of the 1st Century A.D. Paul’s discourse on these specific issues occupies his narrative from chapter 8:1 thru 11:1 and it falls into the following categories:

- Meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-13)
- His example of sacrificing his liberty even though he is an apostle (9:1-27)
- The danger of idolatry (10:1-22)
- Restrictions on the exercise of Christian liberty (10:23-11:1)

So, understanding the flow of Paul’s thought process throughout these three chapters is important for us to understand so that we have a good grasp of the context as we review any specific chapter in this section. Backing away from these three chapters a little bit more, we recall that Paul began in chapter 7 to address specific questions that the Corinthians had asked in a letter they had written. That too provides a little more context to our examination of chapter 10.

In chapter 8, Paul laid a foundation for his response to their question regarding the eating of meat that had been associated with sacrifices to idols. In that chapter, he explained that the conscience of the believer was the real issue since the idol was in reality nothing as many evidently understood. Nevertheless, there was a responsibility that the believer with the “strong conscience” had toward the believer with the “weak conscience” in this matter.

In chapter 9, Paul uses himself as an example of how he had exercised this principle in so many other areas of life. As an apostle, the world and the carnal minded believer would have perceived such actions as weakness instead of indicative of power and authority.

This is a perfect illustration of the principle that God’s ways and methods are not the ways of the world and fallen man. In God’s economy, it is from the “meek,” the “humble,” and the low in status in this world from which God’s leaders always emerge. Even then, it is not the “meek,” the “humble,” and the “low in status” as the world defines such people – all for the purpose of advancing a political agenda based upon class warfare. It is the “spiritually meek,” the “spiritually humble,” who are generally from among those who are lacking in any worldly notoriety and means that God can advance His purpose.

The reason: these individuals have fully internalized God’s value system and purposes so that their identity is all about Christ glorification rather than self-promotion and approbation. They see this world and the things of this world through a spiritual set of lens that puts the *illusion* of the cosmic matrix in proper perspective so that the *reality* of what God is accomplishing in human history becomes the panorama against which all things are evaluated.

When the believer has fully internalized Truth, then the cynicism, the disappointment with unrealistic expectations having not been met in relationships and systems of this world, and the bitterness that results from carnal (fleshly) old man influenced thinking is replaced with orientation to reality. That reality puts life in this world (including all relationships) in proper perspective.

Paul’s orientation to spiritual reality allowed him to rise above the carnal mind’s demand for self-gratification within the context of liberties that would have been totally legitimate. This principle can be extended to so many areas in life and when “actualization” into the believer’s life occurs, such believers become “invisible heroes” from the standpoint of the world. Only the believer who possesses Christian character will recognize and fully appreciate the character so

demonstrated by a fellow believer. As was true of those who did not understand Paul's sacrifice of things which could have been freely enjoyed by Paul – especially Paul as an Apostle, so it is true of believers today who forego legitimate liberties in the interest of greater spiritual objectives. Examples include:

- Marriage – each spouse in a Christian marriage has a right to respect and honor and mutual submission to each other's needs, yet the spiritually minded spouse will not force or demand such things, but will patiently endure on many occasions the absence of such things in the interest of the greater spiritual issues at stake.
- Family – a father may forego personal and professional goals in the interest of his family's spiritual health.
- Enjoyment of leisure and entertainment – a believer may forego the cost of a more expensive leisure vacation for something less costly so that the money and/or time might be used toward a ministry objective to others.

EXAMPLES FROM ISRAEL'S PAST (1 COR 10:1-13)

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 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 were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Here in chapter 10, Paul now turns to Israel's past as another example. However, in this case, the example is not a positive one like that of Paul's life (chapter 9). The main point of this pericope is this – "Corinthian believers, we share the same spiritual foundation of belief in Jesus Christ. Do not become so oriented to the illusion of the things of this world which you have a right to enjoy so that you allow those things to effectively become an idol that is the all-consuming object of your affection and attention." Now, let us examine some specific phrases Paul uses.

Verses 1b-4a – "...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; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink..."

Five times in verses 1-4 Paul says that all Israel shared in the blessings and privileges of God's grace. All the fathers shared in God's grace, but only Caleb and Joshua entered Canaan and won the prize. All of these people had been "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." This means that all of them had been united with Moses as God's appointed servant-leader. The "cloud" is a representation of God in his shekinah glory and the "sea" is a representation of God's redemption and leadership. The "food" and the "drink" of which they all partook is described as "spiritual" by Paul as a way of highlighting the fact that it was God's gracious provision and so highlighting this fact, Paul sets up a perfect contrast between God's provision and the way it was received by these people of God. These things were "typical" of the

true food and drink which was to later come and of which the Corinthians had partook – none other than Christ Himself (Jn 6:30ff).

30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. (Jn 6:30-35)

41 Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 "It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. 46 "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. 48 "I am the bread of life. 49 "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." (Jn 6:41-58)

Verse 4b – "...and the rock was Christ." The Israelites partook of water as a result of God's intervention on their part. The first occasion is recorded in Exodus 17:3-7. Note that Moses is commanded to "strike the rock." This is typical of Christ's mission during His 1st Advent.

3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." 5 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and **you shall strike the rock**, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He named the place Massah [*literally – temptation*] and Meribah [*literally – contention*] because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?" (Exod 17:3-7)

The second incident occurred near the end of their wilderness wanderings and is recorded in Numbers 20:1-13. Note that Moses is commanded to “speak” to the rock. This is typical of Christ’s mission at His 2nd Advent. Even though Moses is highly revered as the father of the nation of Israel, God’s discipline of Moses causes Paul to include himself in the warnings he is giving as evidenced by his use of the plural personal pronoun “us” on several occasions. This is probably why Paul had expressed his dedication to self-discipline in 1 Corinthians 9:27 and his desire to not be disqualified for the price.

1 Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh. Now Miriam died there and was buried there. 2 There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. 3 The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! 4 "Why then have you brought the LORD'S assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? 5 "Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink." 6 Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them; 7 and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and **speak to the rock** before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." 9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; 10 and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. 12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." 13 Those were the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them. (Num 20:1-13)

Verse 5 – “Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.”

Even though they had shared in all of these blessings, most of them were not pleasing to God (cf. Heb 3:17-19). He saw in them a heart of unbelief and they died dishonorably with their corpses scattered across the desert floor.

17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. (Heb 3:17-19)

Verses 6-10 – “Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.” 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”

Paul explains here that all these things were examples (*tupos* – Gr. τυπος) or “types” of things true of us in the present age and there are specific parallels for the Corinthians to consider. The Israelites lusting for the pleasures of Egypt cried out “Give us meat to eat!” (See Num 11:4-

34) God gave them what they wanted, but while the meat was still between their teeth, He struck them with a plague. The Israelites named the graves of those who died – “Kibroth Hattaava” or “graves of craving” (Num 11:34). The application to the Corinthians would have been obvious (cf. 1 Cor 8:13).

Many of the Israelites became idolaters and paid for it with their lives (Ex 32:28, 35). In Exodus 32:1-6, we read that Israel had Aaron make the golden calf. In Exodus 32:6, quoted here, we read that Israel ate a sacrificial meal in dedication to the calf and then got up “to play” (KJV), that is, to dance in a provocative manner just as the pagans danced before their gods. The Corinthians would have been caused to reflect upon Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 8 about meat sacrificed to idols as being nothing; however, as in the case of Israel, if the Corinthians became so distracted by a focus upon the enjoyment of those things that fell within the realm of Christian liberty, then they too would become idolatrous.

As Paul continues his warning, he alludes to Israel’s joining herself to Baalpeor (Num 25:1-9), an act involving both spiritual and sexual unfaithfulness. Baal-peor was the god of the Moabites who was worshiped by the prostitution of virgins. Idolatry and fornication were in that case inseparable. Again, the correlation or parallel to the Corinthians situation could not have been more dramatic since, as we have noted, the city of Corinth was famous for its temple prostitutes.

In *verse 8*, the Greek text says 23,000 died, whereas the Hebrew and LXX texts of Numbers 25:9 says 24,000. Most likely Paul is speaking about how many died in that one day; he does not include others who were killed subsequently, among them being the leaders in the rebellion, whom God ordered Moses to hang (Num 25:4).

Verse 9 relates to the murmuring of Israel against the Lord for bringing them out of Egypt and tells of their drastic punishment (Num 21:6 – “The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died”).

The next example in *verse 10* relates to Israel’s grumbling against the Lord and His appointed leaders (Num 16:41-49). The result was again death. Paul was perhaps facing a similar situation amongst the Corinthians as evidenced by their sectarianism which he had addressed in chapters 1-4. It is likely that sectarianism was highlighted by those who ate meat associated with idolatrous practices in a sort of defiant claim to their liberty as believers in contrast to others who were of a “weaker” conscience in regard to such matters.