

A couple of weeks ago (as we finished chapter 9 of 1 Cor), Paul was talking about the lengths he would go to, in sharing the Gospel with the world, but there were limits to what he would do. The danger is, that one can become so connected with the world, that we ourselves become “worldly”. And so he says:

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

Once again (It comes up reasonably regularly), but: Once again, if you’re someone who believes the human teaching of “Once saved, Always saved”, you’re going to have a lot of trouble with this passage...

You see, some people believe, that once anyone makes a commitment to Christ, they are in a special relationship with God, that can never be broken. And no matter how they behave from that point on (and no matter what they believe from then on), provided their initial conversion was genuine, they are always going to be in the privileged position of being “the redeemed”.... But this is a human theology – It’s quite common across some churches, but it just doesn’t stack up biblically – and today is a very good example of how it doesn’t stack up biblically...

Today, Paul is giving us a warning, that **how we live, matters:**

- How we relate to God, matters;
- How we relate to other Christians, matters;
- How we conduct ourselves morally matters.

And it’s all about ‘the heart’ ... It all begins, with what we crave for – whether we crave for things of the Spirit, or

whether we crave for things of the flesh.... Paul describes it here, as a desire (or a craving) for what is evil...

And even though we are saved, we still get tempted sometimes (don't we?). There continues to be (at some level), a craving for evil, that with God's help, we have to recognise, and overcome.

We, are a redeemed people. We have been saved, to become a people who live by the Spirit... Alright, we're **NOT** saved by **being** good people (That doesn't get us saved) – In God's grace, by faith in Jesus Christ, He gives us what we don't deserve – Saved, **despite** our undeserving state. This is what the grace of God, is all about.

And it is a very privileged position that we have, as God's people. But we must not presume upon our standing (before God), and become a people who allow the flesh to rule, rather than the Spirit.

And to make his point, Paul takes us into the Old Testament. It is not only Christians who have a privileged position with God. God made a covenant with Abraham. And the people of Israel became God's chosen people.

And the whole experience, of God saving the people of Israel, out of slavery in Egypt, was an example (No, it was **more than an example**) – the Greek word is “τύποι” (typoi), (you might be able to say “A **type** of salvation experience, similar to what we have in Christ”), but it functions here as more of a “formative model”.... How the Israelites should have been shaped and formed through **their** experience of salvation, is a

formative model, for how **we** should be shaped and formed, through **our** experience of salvation. And the pitfalls that **they** had, are very similar pitfalls, that **we** need to both recognise, and avoid...

And so, Chapter 10 begins, by describing how the people of Israel had their own salvation experience:

10 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were **all** under the cloud, and **all** passed through the sea, ² and **all** were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

What's this "cloud" business?

When God led the people of Israel out of Egypt, the sign that God was with them, was this pillar of cloud, and the glory of God, was within, and concealed by this pillar of cloud:

- The cloud would lead them where they needed to go
- When the Egyptian army pursued them, the cloud of God went to their rear, to protect them from the Egyptian army
- When the tabernacle had been built, the cloud of God would settle on the Tabernacle, as the glory of God, would fill the most holy place. And when the cloud rose from the Tabernacle, they knew "Hey, it's time for us to move on – YHWH is leading us . We'd better follow Him."

And so, the cloud was the sign of God's presence with them.

When they crossed the sea, and God parted the waters, and the people passed through, and then the waters closed in over their

enemies, this was all part of their redemptive experience. And Paul is using this as an analogy of Baptism.

And then he gives an analogy of Communion. They'd even been fed spiritually, with the manna from heaven, and the water from the rock – not just gifts of God, but gifts of Christ. You know Christ didn't only begin to exist when he was born in Bethlehem, hey... – He was right there at creation, and He was right there, at the salvation of the people of Israel from Egypt. When they were thirsty and there was nothing for them to drink, and Moses struck the rock with his staff, and water came out, that was Christ's doing...

Leon Morris, a very highly respected bible teacher says this:
*...[Paul] shows from the history of the people of God that the enjoyment of high privilege does not guarantee final blessing. The Israelites of old experienced redemption, baptism and God's continuing help. But they flirted with idolatry and nearly all of them perished in the wilderness. It may be that some of the Corinthians felt that their baptism and their use of Holy Communion guaranteed their final salvation, no matter what they did. Paul warns them that this is not so.*ⁱⁱ

You see, the Israelites were God's chosen people – **ALL** of them.... They **ALL**, had been saved; They **ALL**, had experienced the miracles.... But do you know, out of the thousands who left Egypt, how many made it to the promised land??? 2.

Why did so many perish on the journey??? V5 has an ominous ring to it, ... **with most of them God was not pleased...**

But, **why** did it happen??? What was the purpose of it all??? Well, you might be surprised to learn, that one of the reasons they perished, was for **our** sake – as a lesson for us, as to the gravity, of just how critical it is, to live by the Spirit...

Somebody once said, *“A wise man learns from other people’s mistakes.”*

And this was done, so that **we might not crave evil, as they had craved evil** . It was done, so that we would not presume upon **our** privileged position, as they had presumed upon **their** privileged position.

And Paul gives 4 specific examples of how the Israelites craved evil, and how it led to their ruin. And they’re not at all, 4 random examples. As we read the letter to the Corinthians, we can very quickly realise, that the 4 examples of craving evil, are re-playing, in that very church in Corinth. People who carried the name “Christian”, were craving, and expressing evil... But we only grasp the true extent of this, when we go back into the Old Testament, and read the stories of what is considered evil cravings in God’s people.

1.

The first example of evil, is idolatry (no surprises there)... But this example of idolatry, isn't an outright choice of God or idols – it's mixing the worship of God up, **with** other gods.

Some of you may be familiar with the story:

Moses is up on Mt Sinai, receiving the 10 commandments (and a heap of other instructions from God). And he's been up there for 40 days and 40 nights... And so the Israelites came to the conclusion, "We don't know what's happened to Moses – we need some gods to guide us." And so they go to Aaron, the one who had been designated by God to be His High Priest, and Aaron gathers all their gold earrings, and makes a golden calf. And he says "**These are the gods who brought you out of Egypt.**" They declared a feast for YHWH (who is our real God), but they mixed it up by worshipping this golden calf...

And it says "the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play... (that's a bit of a euphemism for "playing up") – maybe a drunken revel, maybe a drunken orgy....

Now, a modern form of this craving for evil, might be "universalism".

In our modern society, it seems that the most important of all virtues (and sometimes the only virtue), is "tolerance". And so, a tolerant society comes to the conclusion, "It doesn't matter what god you worship – all gods lead to the one god." ,, And so people mix the Christian god up with Allah; Buddha; Hinduism; you name it...

And, Idolatry, was a very real issue for the Corinthian church... It may not be a big issue for us here, but in our tolerant society, we are going to see more and more promotion of multi-faith worship. Keep away from it.

2.

The second example of a craving for evil, was sexual immorality.

In Numbers 25, the Israelite men were shacking up with the Moabite women, and they then turned to the worship of the Moabite god, Baal... And God was angry with them, and he sent a plague on Israel, and Paul quotes 23 000 who died, In Numbers, it actually says 24 000, but you get the picture, hey...

Craving for sexual immorality, is a craving for evil, and we should learn from their example. God wasn't going to let immorality go unchecked.

In Corinth, Paul's pretty clear, that sexual immorality destroys our relationship with God. And he's also pretty clear that a Christian, should really only ever marry, another Christian. Why? Because although we might feel that we're strong in our faith, to be joined to an unbeliever, or to be joined to someone who worships a different god, makes it really hard for us to remain faithful to God, and to grow in God.

3.

The third craving for evil, is to put Christ to the test... – What does that mean????

In Numbers 21, the Israelites started getting a bit impatient about everything.

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 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 YHWH sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

They put God to the test. They spoke against God, and they spoke against the leader that God had given them (as if it was Moses' fault). And they complained. God was giving them food, but they complained – it's not good enough.

And so, the warning is "Don't put Christ to the test". How do we put Christ to the test? By being impatient, by not trusting Him, and by wanting more than what we need. You know, we start praying for something, and we expect an answer within an hour; or a day; or a week; or a month... And we get impatient. And we blame God, or we blame the leaders of the church...

I've heard Christians say, many times, "It's OK to get angry with God – He can take it."... But it's **not** OK. That's putting Christ to the test.

And the people of Israel, dying in the desert by snakebite, is a warning to you and I, “Don’t get impatient with God.” **God** isn’t working to our time-frame – He has a plan – a good and perfect plan, and faith, is our trusting in God, even when it’s taking longer than what we’d hoped.

4.

The fourth craving for evil we need to recognise and guard against, is “grumbling”. They grumbled, and they **were destroyed by the destroyer.**

What sort of grumbling? Well, the Greek word here (which I’m not going to try and pronounce) means, “*murmuring, grumbling, griping, groaning, whining, whispering, complaining (especially behind one’s hand)...*”

Alright, it’s a picture of seething discontent, bubbling away, mostly under the surface, but sometimes, making a very ugly appearance.

But, let’s go to Numbers 16, to see **what** they were grumbling about. And there’s actually 2 instances in this one story.

A small contingent, led by 4 men, but backed by 250 well-known community leaders, (alright, these weren’t nobodies – they were the good upstanding citizens of Israel)

Numbers 16:3 ... **assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For **all** in the congregation are holy,**

every one of them, and YHWH is among them. Why then do you exalt **yourselves** above the assembly of YHWH?"

Alright, God had chosen Moses and Aaron, and appointed them as leaders. And particularly, God had chosen Aaron to be the high priest. And their discontent? – “Why are **you** so special? **We’re** just as holy as you are. We don’t need you. Why do you get the position of priest???”

And here’s a lesson for us: “Leadership, isn’t contingent upon the leader being the most holy person in the community.” If it was, I’d certainly never be a Pastor, or any kind of leader in a church...

- Moses was a murderer.
- Aaron was an idolater.
- Abraham was a liar.
- Jacob was a deceiver.
- David was an adulterer.
- Peter was a coward.
- Paul was zealously against God...

When God chooses a leader, He doesn’t base His choice on the most qualified; or on the innate goodness or holiness of a person... Leadership in a church, is actually an appointment of grace...

And when we get into this letter to the Corinthians a bit further, we’re going to soon discover, that when God gives Spiritual gifts, we don’t get to decide which gifts **we** get. The church is a body. We each have **different** gifts, and we each

have different ministries. It is **God** who gives the gifts, and it is **God** who assigns the ministries ...

And in Corinth, we've already seen how there were a few in that church, who were attacking Paul, and even denying his worthiness of being an Apostle. There were some in that church, who were elevating themselves, and tearing Paul down... And this becomes *highly relevant* to Corinthian church, where complaining was being fuelled *by covert exchanges in small groups (often against the leadership)*ⁱⁱⁱ.

But back to our story... Moses is distraught. He never wanted to be a leader. In fact, when God first called him, he said, "Find somebody else".

Numbers 16:4 When Moses heard it, he fell on his face,
5 and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning YHWH will show who is His, and who is holy, and will bring him near to Him. The one whom He chooses He will bring near to Him.

Alright, we don't get to choose ourselves – It is **God** who makes us holy, and it is God who chooses His leaders...

And so he says, "Front up in the morning, with your censers (a bowl for burning incense), and we'll see who God decides."

And Moses gives them a dressing-down... Because many of these people, are of the tribe of Levi. They actually already serve in temple – they are already in a position of privilege and honour, but they're not content with that...

Numbers 16:8 And Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: 9 is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do service in the tabernacle of YHWH and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, 10 and that He has brought you near Him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? 11 Therefore it is against YHWH that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?"

But the next day, some of them wouldn't front-up. And a long story short, the ground opened up, and swallowed those who had been grumbling, and then it closed up again, and they were gone.

Verse 33 Numbers 16:33 So they, and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. 34 And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up!" 35 And fire came out from the YHWH and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.

But the grumbling didn't finish there...

Numbers 16:41 But on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of YHWH." 42 And when the congregation had assembled against Moses and against Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting. And behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of YHWH appeared. 43 And Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, 44 and YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. 46 And Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from YHWH; the plague has begun." 47 So Aaron took it as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped.

14 700 people died in the plague...

Grumbling. What sort of grumbling does God hate so much? In both cases, it was grumbling and behind-the-hand

comments about their leaders... And even when it was very clearly, the work of God, the leaders got the blame...

And this is so relevant to the church in Corinth, who were attacking Paul...

And we're told, that these 4 examples, were written down (in what we now know as the Old Testament), for our instruction... We live in a different age, to what they did in the Old Testament. They were living under the Old Covenant – we are living under the New Covenant. But as God's people, sometimes we're not so very different.

What a terrible, terrible trap it is, to be filled with a sense of “self-confidence” in our own standing... V12 says:

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

V¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Do you know what that means? It means, I can never say “I had no choice.”

When we are tempted, we always have a choice. We have a choice to either embrace the craving we have for evil, or to live by the Spirit.

Whether the temptation be:

- Idolatry; or
- Sexual immorality; or
- Putting Christ to the test by becoming impatient, or wanting more than we have;
- Or whether the temptation is to grumble, and to spawn discontent against others (and particular against the leaders that God has chosen);
- Or whether it be some other temptation,

We always have a choice, to escape that sin – to run away from that sin,,,, by the Grace of God...

I don't know about you, but I'm greatly encouraged by this... I've failed God (many times), as I'm sure you have. But I don't need to become a victim of sin, and neither do you. God provides a way out. And that way, is called "Repentance, and Living by the Spirit".

The big difference between the people of Israel and us, is we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. We can live a Spirit-filled life, that helps us to endure...

But there remains a very solemn warning here (for that Corinthian church, and for us):

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

There is no excuse for behaviour that displeases God. The Israelites who fell in the wilderness, are a warning for us – that we cannot presume upon our privileged position. Only those who live according to the Spirit, are truly saved.

Let's Pray.

Oh Lord,

What a tough passage it's been this morning,

We want to thank You, Lord,

For the experiences of the people of Israel,

And how they were written down for our instruction.

Lord, help us to recognise cravings for evil (in ourselves).

Sometimes we convince ourselves that,

“Hey, I'm in the right here”.

We stand on our ‘digs’, and in our pride,

We feel we're standing,

But You said:

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

Oh Lord, we yield to You.

Please reveal, whenever we are acting against You.

There is no excuse.

I cannot say, “I had no option.”

Because we're not alone in our temptations.

And You are faithful,

and You will not let us be tempted beyond our ability.

And You always provide a way to escape temptation –

To run away from temptation,

And to endure temptation.

Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit.
That we might live according to The Spirit.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

ⁱ Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

ⁱⁱ Morris, L., 1985. *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.