

**10:1:** *For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;*

Paul did not want these Christians to be “*ignorant*” (*agnoeo*, a present tense verb) about Israel’s mistakes or their own standing before God. Paul often used the word *ignorant* to introduce corrective instructions to congregations (compare Rom. 1:13; 6:3; 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:13). Here *ignorant* means “I want you to know” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:21).

Paul realized that Israel was a perfect example to remind the Corinthians about their need to be obedient, but he knew his readers might object to this example. Most of the Corinthians were from a Gentile background (12:2), so some of his readers may have asked how their lives could be compared to the Jews of the Old Testament. Paul answered this objection in verse 1 by saying that even though his readers had a Gentile background, their “*fathers*” were the people of Israel. This is similar to what Paul said in Rom. 4:11 as well as the point made in Heb. 11:40. Although saved people have lived under different covenants, all of the redeemed are joined together by their salvation. This is the sense in which the Corinthians could look at saved people from the nation of Israel and regard them as spiritual “*fathers*.” Yes, they were from a different ethnic background, but since they were also part of God’s spiritual family, saved Jews were their “*fathers*” (brethren).

The first 13 verses in this chapter contain five parallels between the Old Testament nation of Israel and the New Testament church. Other parallels between Israel and Christianity can be found, some of which are in the chart below. For two more charts on differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament (a related subject), see the commentary on Heb. 3:1; Heb. 9:28; Heb. 11:28; Heb. 12:22.

Israel	The New Testament church
Physical bondage (Pharaoh)	Spiritual bondage (sin and Satan)
Had a deliverer (Moses)	Has a deliverer (Jesus)
Struggled with Pharaoh	Struggles with Satan
An experience in the sea	Its members are baptized
All were allowed to leave	All can enter the church
Physical freedom	Spiritual freedom
In the wilderness	In the church
Got to Canaan	Will get to heaven
Some died before Canaan	Some will not go to heaven

One parallel involving Israel and the church is found at the end of this opening verse: *All the fathers “passed through the sea.”* Israel’s sea experience is described with an *aorist* verb (i.e. the *passing* was a one time act, a definite point in history). Since this Old Testament event has a corresponding meaning to Christianity, we too have a *passing* experience. We *pass* from spiritual death to spiritual life (Israel was saved in a physical sense and we are saved spiritually). We leave a life of sin and enter into a state of salvation. While a literal sea was used for the Hebrews, the New Testament process involves “baptism” (Mk. 16:16; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). When we are immersed in water (Col. 2:12, “buried”), one time, for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), we have an experience that parallels Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Peter said, “baptism now saves us” (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is a part of the salvation process, just as faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Acts 17:30) and confession (1 Tim. 6:12) are required for our salvation.

A second comparison is found in the first part of the first verse: *“our fathers were all under the cloud.”* Rather than use the *aorist* tense, Paul employed the *imperfect* tense (continuous action in the past—this is expressed with the verb “*were*”). The meaning is that the cloud *continued* with the Hebrews. In other words, the cloud was not present for a short time (it remained with the Israelites). Paul’s explanation of the cloud is consistent with what is said in the Old Testament. According to Ex. 13:21-22, the cloud guided the children of Israel (notice the words “*lead*” and “*before*”). This cloud also protected the Israelites from things like the sun (Ex. 14:19-20). In a similar way the Corinthians had received guidance and protection. The apostles and the miraculous gifts available in the first century had directed and protected them (these gifts are discussed in chapters 12-14). Protection had also come in other forms as shown in verse 13 of this chapter.

The word *cloud* (*nephele*) is an important New Testament word. Important events are often associated with clouds (compare Mt. 17:5; Acts 1:9; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 14:14).

Israel’s sea experience has been used to deny the necessity of baptism. The following four points reflect the basic points of the Red Sea argument against baptism.

- Sin requires a blood sacrifice (Heb. 9:22).
- The Hebrews offered blood sacrifices *before* going through the Red Sea (i.e. the Passover).
- The Red Sea experience is comparable to Christianity and baptism.
- Since blood was applied to the Hebrews *before* the Red Sea experience, Christ’s blood is applied to sinners *before baptism*. Thus, baptism is not required for salvation.

This argument is very clever but terribly inaccurate. According to the Old Testament, the slaying of the Passover Lamb was *only for the first born males*, not the entire Hebrew nation (Ex. 12:29-32; 13:11-15). If the blood from the Passover lambs is to tell us about Christ's blood (and this is what this argument does), *only males may be saved and only those males who are the firstborn may be saved (women are excluded from salvation)*. Moreover, this argument fails to consider that the Hebrews were *still in captivity* after using the blood. If the Passover blood offered in Egypt is parallel to Christianity, it means Christ's blood leaves people in a state of captivity and sin! If one wishes to make a true comparison between Israel's experience and the church, the following comparison is correct:

Israelites:	Egypt	Red sea	Wilderness	Jordan	Canaan
Christianity:	Sin	Baptism	Church	Death	Heaven

**10:2:** *and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;*

This verse literally says baptized "*into (eis)* Moses" and is so translated by the NKJV, NIV, NASB and RSV. Paul meant the Hebrews were separated from Egyptian bondage and found a new life by being joined to Moses. Prior to crossing the Red Sea the nation of Israel had limited faith in Moses (Ex. 14:10-13. Be sure to read these verses because they prove the Hebrews believed they were going to die in the wilderness. The Hebrews, at this time, did not have faith in Moses being their deliverer). After crossing the Red Sea the nation was "baptized into Moses" (they became fully committed to him and were severed from the Egyptian way of life). It was only after the sea experience that God's people regarded Moses as their leader and truly followed him—this point is specifically stated in Ex. 14:31. More information on "into" as well as when Israel became committed to Moses is in the following paragraphs.

What happened with Moses and the nation of Israel is very similar to Christianity. With Christianity, a person "dies to sin" (repents) and is then separated (cleansed) from sin by being baptized in water. Baptism is the point where a person is joined to Christ (saved from sin), just as Israel was joined to Moses after their "baptism." In Rom. 6:1-4, where the apostle Paul discussed baptism, he said a person has "new life" (forgiveness of sins) after being baptized. In the Christian system, people are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27) instead of being baptized into Moses. Readers may also wish to carefully read Acts 2:38, 41, 47.

When the nation of Israel was separated from the Egyptians, there was no "saving power" in the water (their salvation was based on the power of God and their being obedient to God's directions). Such is also true with Christianity. There is no "power in the water." The power is in Jesus' blood (Rom. 5:9). We access Jesus' cleansing blood by being baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:1-4; Col. 2:12). It is only after baptism (the means to make contact with the benefits of Christ's blood) that a person is separated (released) from their sins like the Hebrews were "separated" from their bondage (compare Acts 22:16).

*Baptized (baptizo)* meant to *immerse, dip, or plunge* (this term is more fully discussed in the commentary on Acts 2:38-39). *Baptism* is also explained by verses such as Jn. 3:23 (this requires "much water" – an immersion). In Acts 8:39 the meaning of baptism is again illustrated (two people had to "come up out of the water." If sprinkling or pouring water can be considered baptism, there was no reason for both men to actually enter into the water). In Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12 baptism is described as a "burial." Because baptism is a burial, Col. 3:1 says a person is "*raised together with Christ*." Not only is a person joined to Christ after baptism (Gal. 3:27), they have a new life (Rom. 6:4)—all their sins have been forgiven (Acts 2:38).

Because *baptism* means an "immersion," Paul used the word *baptism* to explain Israel's being joined to Moses. By saying the nation was *baptized into Moses*, Paul meant the nation became his disciples and had a very close relationship with him. It was as if the sea experience formed a spiritual union between Moses and the nation—the nation was under his control and direction, just as a person's life is under Christ's control and direction after baptism. Just as Israel was not freed from Egyptian control and pursuit

until they had come through the sea, so in the New Testament era a person is not forgiven of his sins (i.e. is not a Christian) until he is baptized into Christ. Men and women are baptized *in order to become* Christians, not baptized “because they are saved.” Faith gives one the “right to become” a child of God” (Jn. 1:12), and baptism is the final step in the process to become a Christian (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

Some highly regarded language resources comment on the significance of the preposition *eis* (the word translated “into” or “unto” in this verse). Brown (2:641) said “baptized unto Moses” is an “analogy of ‘baptism into Jesus.’” Kittel (abridged edition, p. 624) agreed and said the baptism unto Moses is “parallel” to “baptism into Christ.”

Moses was a type of Christ (Deut. 18:15 and Heb. 3:1-6). As the Jews from Egypt were fully joined to Moses in the sea experience and were to be fully committed to him (Acts 7:38), so a similar thing occurs with New Testament baptism. When a person is baptized into Christ, he becomes fully associated with and committed to Jesus. It is at this time a person promises to “take up his cross daily” (Lk. 9:23); puts Jesus above family (Lk. 14:26-27); refuses to “live after the flesh” (Rom. 8:13); and lives “soberly, righteously and godly” in the world (Tit. 2:12). A person is promising to be a full-time soldier in God’s spiritual army (1 Tim. 6:12; Eph. 6:10-17). When we are baptized we pledge to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Mt. 6:33). Baptism places a person “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27) and provides him with spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), but there are also many new and spiritual responsibilities. Jews wanted the blessings but often shirked the responsibilities. Such was also true, to some degree, at Corinth.

Even though baptism is required for the forgiveness of sins (compare Acts 2:38), a variety of arguments have been devised to deny this fact. One such argument is based on 1 Cor. 10:2. It is claimed that Israel was “joined to Moses” prior to their “baptism in the sea” (i.e. Moses was the nation’s leader when leaving Egypt). Since Israel was joined to Moses prior to the Red Sea Experience, and what Israel experienced resembles Christianity, sinners are joined to Christ prior to baptism.

Although this argument is clever and may seem compelling, it is completely wrong. Moses did lead the people out of Egypt, but the Hebrews had a very limited amount of confidence in him. God’s word is very clear as to *when* Moses was considered to be the deliverer of Israel (i.e. it was only **after** being “baptized unto Moses”). As the following verses from Ex. 14:10-15 show, Moses was regarded as a failure prior to the baptism described in 1 Cor. 10:2.

*“And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto Jehovah. 11 And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to bring us forth out of Egypt? 12 Is not this the word that we spake unto thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. 13 And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which he will work for you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. 14 Jehovah will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. 15 And Jehovah said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.”*

Although this information is sufficient to show that Moses was not regarded as a deliverer prior to the Red Sea experience, God gives us even more information on this topic in Ex 14:31. *“And Israel saw the great work which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared Jehovah: and they believed in Jehovah, and in his servant Moses.”* It was only *after* going through the sea that Israel was fully joined to Moses and regarded him as their deliverer.

No one questions that Israel had some level of commitment to Moses before their “baptism in the sea” (the nation, after all, did leave Egypt). Today a man may make some type of commitment to Jesus before baptism, but such a commitment does not mean he is “joined” to the Lord (see Mt. 7:21-22). A related point is also important. Moses was able to successfully plead for the nation of Israel *after* it had been joined to him (Ex. 32:8-14; Num. 14:20). A similar thing is true with Jesus: He can plead for us only *after* we have been put “into Christ” by baptism (Gal. 3:27). Being baptized into Christ gives us access to all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), one of which is His intercession (1 Tim. 2:5).

Some have said the cloud and sea “surrounded” Israel and this proves baptism must be an immersion (a dipping in water). Although *baptism* does mean immersion (see the preceding information including the reference to Jn. 3:23), it does not appear Israel was literally surrounded (covered) by a cloud and the sea. Since the cloud was *behind* (not over) the children of Israel (Ex. 14:19-20, 24), it seems very doubtful that Israel was somehow “immersed” in the cloud. Some have appealed to Num. 14 and Ps. 10 to say the Hebrews were completely covered and thus “immersed” (Num. 14:13-14 and Ps. 105:38-39), but a close examination of these passages shows they describe a time *after* Israel’s deliverance. Christians do not need to rely on unsound arguments to teach any point of truth, and that includes baptism by immersion.

What is said about Israel’s Red Sea experience is one basis for rejecting infant baptism. Israel had to make a commitment to Moses just as people today must make a commitment to Christ. Infants are incapable of making such a commitment, just as infants cannot believe in Christ (a prerequisite for baptism, Mk. 16:16). It is true that Paul said the entire Hebrew nation (“*all*”) was “*baptized unto Moses*,” but he was not thinking about infants (see the previous references for Ex. 14 for information on Israel’s commitment). Paul had in mind commitment made by adults. We frequently use similar language. Imagine a family consisting of a father, mother, a 1 year old son and a 3 year old daughter. It is time for an election and all four family members go the appropriate place and the father says, “My family is here to vote.” Will the children be allowed to vote? The *all* being described by the father, just as the “*all*” being described by Paul, refers to accountable people (those old enough to act and be responsible for their behavior).

The reference to the “*sea*” (*thalassa*) is similar to the *cloud*. God has interacted with man at various times using nature. Such is also true in the life of Jesus. Our Lord demonstrated His power by walking on water (Mk. 6:49); calming a storm (Mk. 4:37-39); and helping the disciples catch several fish (Lk. 5:5-7). He used the sea to help pay a tax (Mt. 17:27). A cloud was used at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:5) and to mask Jesus’ return to heaven (Acts 1:9).

Because the Hebrews had the Red Sea experience, it seems they felt virtually immune to divine chastisement or punishment. Paul went on to say (see verses 5-11) that Israel often chose to sin and it was punished. Being *baptized into Moses* did not give the Jews the right to live unholy lives and the things associated with Christianity would not allow the Corinthians to sin. Rather than give Christians a right to sin, God’s salvation (physical and spiritual) has always required people to live soberly, righteously and godly (compare Tit. 2:12). For Christians, having been baptized, being able to partake of the Lord’s Supper, having the right to pray, etc. provide no authorization to willfully sin (Rom. 6:1).

### **10:3: and did all eat the same spiritual food;**

As stated in the commentary on verses 1-2, the Hebrews passed through the sea, were protected by a cloud, and became Moses’ disciples (each of these events has a corresponding point with Christianity). We pass from the sea of sin and enter into the ocean of life (Jesus called this “abundant life” in Jn. 10:10). A cloud protected the Hebrews, and Christians have protection in Christ (Jn. 10:28-29). The Israelites were joined to Moses, and Christians are joined to Jesus (Gal. 3:27). Now we find a fourth parallel to Christianity in this verse and it may be described by the word “*food*” (the KJV says “*meat*”). The Hebrews received free food from God (“*manna*” came from heaven—Ex. 16:35). Paul says this was “*spiritual*” food. *Spiritual* (this term is more fully defined in the commentary on 3:1-2) means this was not a “*natural*” product (men did not plant and harvest it—it had a supernatural origin). This “*miracle bread*” should have increased the faith of the Hebrew people, but the nation still struggled with unbelief at times (Heb. 3:16-4:2). Today Christians do not have literal bread coming from heaven, but they have *spiritual* food (see Jn. 6:31-35 and compare Matt. 4:4).

Paul did not specifically use the word *manna* to describe what the Hebrews received, but *manna* is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. It occurs five times in the New Testament and three of these places are in Jn. 6 (verses 31, 49, 58). The other two references are Heb. 9:4 and Rev. 2:17. We are not told exactly what manna was, but based upon the words used to describe it in the Scriptures, some believe it still exists. There is a substance that comes naturally from the Tamarisk tree in the Sinai desert in the

rainy season that may be the same or quite similar to the heavenly manna (at least the description of it is consistent with historical information going back to the time of Josephus). For more information on manna see the commentary on Jn. 6:30-31 in section 20 of the Gospels commentary.

Paul left no doubt about “*all*” Israel having access to this food. In a similar way *all* church members (Christians) have access to the Lord’s Supper (compare verse 16 where Paul spoke of the Lord’s Supper and used the pronoun “*we*”). Communion (the Lord’s Supper) is not, as some groups have claimed, reserved for special people. It is for every Christian. All Israel enjoyed the gift of manna and all Christians are privileged to participate in the Lord’s Supper, as well as *eat the teachings of Jesus* (Jn. 6:51).

It seems the Corinthians saw the Lord’s Supper along with their knowledge of the gospel as a type of “insurance policy.” As long as they had and observed the Lord’s Supper, they could do whatever they wanted. In the commentary on 6:11, 12 it was noted how the Corinthians believed “all things were lawful” (this belief was so common Paul mentioned it again in verse 23 of this chapter). Now we find a basis for this belief: The Lord’s Supper (and perhaps other things associated with Christianity), in the minds of the Corinthians, allowed them to do whatever they wanted (i.e. a license to sin). Even now Christians can resort to this type of thinking. Christians may think that “since they have been baptized” or “because they have the Lord’s Supper” they are allowed to engage in activities that would otherwise be wrong. Grace becomes a license to sin. From lax attendance at worship to immoral behavior, God’s blessings have caused some Christians to think God does not care how they live or what they do. I once knew of a preacher who believed God would allow him to violate God’s marriage law (Mt. 19:9) “because he had done so much good.” This chapter says: Look back at the nation of Israel and see how it fared. Even though you live under a New Testament, you will not fare any better because God is still holy and Christians have no license to willfully sin (this same point is also made with the *spiritual drink* in the next verse). When writing to the Romans (Rom. 6:1-6) Paul again dealt with the false idea that God’s grace permits Christians to willfully sin.

**10:4:** *and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ.*

A final similarity between Israel and Christianity is a “*spiritual drink*” (i.e. the water provided by God). This provision, just like the food described in verse 3, was available to “*all*.” When the Hebrews started their journey towards Mount Sinai (Ex. 17:1-7), God provided them with water. As their journey continued, God continued to supply water (Num. 20:1-13; Ps. 105:41). A substantial supply of water was needed day after day (see this discussed in the next paragraph), but this need was always met. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 392) noted how the Greek text means “Not once but, as the imperfect states, continually the Israelites were drinking, and from no mere natural rock although the water was twice made to gush out of such a rock, but of a spiritual rock which was supernatural, divine, and not left behind in the desert as those two natural rocks were but accompanied the Israelites wherever they went in their wanderings.” God cares for His people just as easily as He cares for birds and flowers (Mt. 6:26-28).

Providing for the Hebrews who left Egypt (many estimates suggest 2-3 million people were with Moses) was an enormous task, even by today’s standards. Yet, God did meet the needs of His people day after day, year after year, and the amount of what was needed to sustain the nation is staggering. It has been estimated that Israel consumed 1,500 tons of food, every single day, while in the wilderness. Two mile-long freight trains would be necessary to transport this many groceries. Of course, firewood was necessary for cooking and the timber needed for the nation has been calculated at 4,000 tons per day. Israel’s need for drinking and wash water has been estimated at 11,000,000 gallons per day. Transporting this much water would require a daily train 1,800 miles long. So much water was needed that two Old Testament psalms actually make mention of it (Ps. 78:16; 105:41). In addition to providing food, water, and wood, there was a need for land. If 3 million people left Egypt, the nation needed 750 square miles of space for a stopping place (an area equivalent to the size of Rhode Island).

Paul specifically said Jesus provided water for the Hebrews. Without divine intervention, most or all

the Hebrews would have quickly died in the wilderness. What Jesus did for Israel looked forward to His work described in the New Testament. In Jn. 7:37 we find these words: “*Now on the last day, the great (day) of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*” Jesus had provided Israel with literal water many years before. Stated another way, prior to the virgin birth He was active and working to benefit the very nation that would one day call for His death. Now Jesus is the “savior” in the fullest sense of the word—He is man’s spiritual savior (Lk. 2:11; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Jn. 4:14). He now stands ready to give men the “living water” (Jn. 4:10) that forever satisfies people (Jn. 4:14). For more information on Jesus and His “living water,” see the commentary on Jn. 4:10-14 in section 10 of the Gospels commentary

For Paul, Jesus’ earlier work among the Hebrews must have been an amazing truth. Paul eventually had to recognize and admit that the Old Testament system he had grown up to love and cherish (Phil. 4:3-10) only anticipated (looked forward to) Jesus and the New Testament. A similar point is found throughout the book of Hebrews (the writer of that book repeatedly said the Old Testament had “shadows and types” that pointed forward to Jesus and the New Testament).

The Pulpit Commentary (19:322) relates a legend about Jesus and His being a *rock*. “The rabbis said that it [the rock, BP] was round, and rolled itself up like a swarm of bees, and that, when the tabernacle was pitched, this rock came and settled in its vestibule and began to flow when the princes came to it and sang, ‘Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it.’ It does not, of course, follow from this allusion that St. Paul or even the rabbis, believed their Hagadah *in other than a metaphorical sense.*” Another tradition (at least as old as the Koran) says, “the rock smitten by Moses was not part of the mountain, but a detached rock, pierced with holes whence the water is said to have flowed” (Hodge, Second Corinthians, p. 174).

While the rock legends are certainly fascinating, Hodge’s comments (p. 175) are far more helpful. He said, “But in what sense was the rock Christ? Not that Christ appeared under the form of a rock; nor that the rock was a type of Christ, for that does not suit the connection. The idea is not that they drank of the typical rock; it was not the type but the antitype that supplied their wants. The expression is simply figurative. Christ was the rock in the same sense that he is the vine. He was the source of all the support which the Israelites enjoyed during their journey in the wilderness.” The “supernatural rock that never allowed Israel to perish of thirst in the desert—as any other similar expedition would quickly have perished—was Christ, the Son of God, who later became incarnate for our salvation” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 393).

There are many parallels between Christians and the ancient Hebrews. A study of both groups reveals that each has been *baptized* and *rescued* (see the commentary on verses 1-2 in this chapter) Each group has also received *food*, *drink*, as well as God’s protection. The Corinthians knew what God had done for them, and it seems this knowledge caused them to conclude they were spiritually okay because of their spiritual blessings. As noted in the commentary on verse 1, these Christians must have been thinking: “If God has provided all these things for us, how could He ever be displeased with us? We may do whatever we want.” Paul responded to this type of incorrect thinking in the following verses.

Readers may be interested in doing a fuller study on the word “*followed*” (*akoloutheo*), a term usually found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Jesus *followed Israel* to help this nation while it was in the wilderness, but now men are to *follow Christ*. Here are all the places where *follow* (*akoloutheo*) occurs in Matthew’s gospel: Mt. 4:20, 22, 25; 8:1, 10, 19, 22, 23; 9:9, 19, 27; 10:38; 12:15; 14:13; 16:24; 19:2, 21, 27, 28; 20:29, 34; 21:9; 26:58; 27:55.

**10:5:** *Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

As Paul described Israel in the first four verses of this chapter, he used the word “*all*” five times. Though *all* the Hebrews received the blessings described in verses 1-4, here Paul said “*most*” of them were *not pleasing to God* (5a). *Not well pleased* (*eudokeo*) means “God was very displeased.” This same word is applied to Jesus at His baptism (Mt. 3:17) as well as the transfiguration (Mt. 17:5). Both of the Matthew references show that it is possible to *please* God, but most of the Hebrews, as Paul said here, failed to do this. In the ASV the text says *most* (*pleion*) were not well pleasing while the KJV says

“many” (the ASV rendering is preferred). The reason most of the Jews did not please God is given in verses 2-4. God’s people had been “immersed” (baptized into Moses—fully joined to him) and had received “spiritual food and drink” (verses 3-4). God had been very good to this nation and Israel knew what was right, but the Hebrews decided to disobey and their rebellion angered God.

When the Hebrews left Egypt, the number of men who were twenty years of age or older was 603,550 (Num. 1:3; 2:32; 14:29-30; 26:64-65). Out of this number (more than half a million people) only Joshua and Caleb entered into the Promised Land. This information is perfectly consistent with what Paul said in the previous chapter (many run the race, but not all cross the finish line). Becoming a child of God does not mean a person will be saved in eternity—there must be continued obedience throughout a person’s life or a person will not be saved.

God was so unhappy with most of the Israelites He “*overthrew*” them “*in the wilderness.*” *Overthrown* (*katestronnumi*) meant “*to strew down, lay flat; passive: to be strewn, laid prostrate in death*” (Willis, p. 262). Bengel (2:216) said, “In great heaps, with great force.” *Overthrown* occurs only here in the New Testament and it means those who received God’s richest blessings (Jews delivered from Egyptian bondage) were strewn out all over the wilderness like paper littering the countryside (some died violent deaths and some died of natural causes). *Wilderness* reminds us they died outside the Promised Land.

If the Corinthians were paying attention to what Paul wrote, the point should have been obvious. If they refused to follow the will of God, they also would be strewn about and destroyed. They would not inherit their “Promised Land” (heaven) if they failed to run the Christian race (Heb. 12:1-2).

God does not tell us about the eternal fate of those He destroyed in the wilderness (they may have had an early physical death but be saved in eternity or they may have died prematurely and also perished eternally). We do know that Moses suffered a loss but it was not eternal (Num. 20:12; Mt. 17:1-3). Today, when it comes to our eternal spirit, there is still only one sensible choice: Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt. 6:33).

The Corinthians may have wished to argue they were a “special case” so Paul countered this objection before they could offer it. In the previous verse he said Jesus was involved with the nation of Israel. Since deity had punished the people of God in the past, and deity does not change (Heb. 13:8), those at Corinth would also be punished if they refused to live a faithful Christian life. The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:858) states the point quite well: “Christ lived already in the midst of the ancient people, and that people has perished! How can you suppose, you Christians, that you are secured from the same fate!” Today there are still Christians who think attending services, contributing money, or observing the Lord’s Supper will guarantee salvation. Anyone who reasons in this manner should remember that Israel had contact with the *rock*, but this was not enough to save them. If people wish to please God they must be obedient (compare Heb. 5:8-9).

**10:6:** *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.*

When Paul spoke of “*these things*” he referred to the blessings and punishment experienced by the nation of Israel. Israel’s history provides us with “*examples*” (*tupos*), a word that “refers to a mold for producing a shape” (Spicq, 3:384). *Examples* meant “any mark left by a blow” (ibid) and this meaning of the word is illustrated in verses such as Jn. 20:25 (“*print*”); Rom. 6:17 (“*form*”); 1 Cor. 10:11 (“*examples*”); Tit. 2:7 (“*example*”). Here *examples* means “the events of the old covenant are figurative and instructive concerning that which can happen to us” (Spicq, 3:385-386). “Israel’s ‘missing of God’s will’ is a grave warning to the church of the New Testament” (CBL, GED, 6:327). *Examples* occurs again and has this same meaning in verse 11 of this chapter. Both here and there we find the “*history of the Jewish nation* is a mirror for all mankind.” It was a mirror for Corinth in a special way” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:406). “*There are more than twenty-five hundred warnings* to the saints of the possibility of apostasy in the Scriptures. One can scarcely open the pages of the Bible without having the eyes fall upon some such injunction as the following: ‘Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief in falling away from the living God; but exhort one another day by day, so



long as it is called Today; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin' (Heb. 3:12, 13)" (Woods, James, pp. 64-65).

There is a sense in which Israel is a type of the church and the church is the anti-type of the Jewish nation (one instance of this is the "baptism" discussed in the commentary on verse 2). We need *examples* and we need to be reminded of them because humanity is often forgetful (people frequently forget and thus repeat mistakes from the past). In the case of Israel, God allowed certain things to happen to this nation for the sake of later generations (i.e. for those who would become members of the New Testament church). Israel's experiences now provide Christians (the church) with many positive and negative lessons (compare Rom. 15:4). In this letter we find specific examples from Israel's history that were directly parallel to some of the things taking place in Corinth. Today we can still find and use applicable Old Testament stories to help God's people live faithful Christian lives. Failing to learn from the mistakes of others often means people will repeat the errors and failures of previous generations.

When we look at the religious world, we find that many have refused to learn from the nation of Israel. Israel failed to follow God's word and it was punished, but numerous religious groups today think they can do whatever they want and God will be pleased. In fact, scores of religious groups operate under a philosophy of: "What do people want? and "What will make this group grow?" instead of "What does the Bible tell us to do?" Another common philosophy is: "What pleases me?" instead of "What does the Bible tell me to do?" Israel tried these types of approaches and experienced God's displeasure and judgment [compare Deut. 4:2; Lev. 10:1-2; 2 Sam. 6:1-7; 2 Kgs. 5:11 (*"I thought"*)]. If we fail to learn from the mistakes made by others, including the Jews, we, too, will suffer punishment (Mal. 3:6).

At the end of verse 6 Paul said: "*we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted*" (this is translated "*to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did*" in the NIV). This seems to refer back to Num. 11 (Israel became discontent with the food provided by God and requested a leader to take them back to Egypt). God's people remembered the food such as "fish" they had in captivity (Num. 11:5) and started to complain about "having lost the good life in Egypt." While the grumbling was either started or intensified by the "mixed multitude" among the Hebrews (perhaps Egyptians, Num. 11:4), Israel also complained. One big complaint was the steady supply of manna (Num. 11:6). Moses was with people who wanted meat (Num. 11:13). God promised meat (Num. 11:18) and said the people would eat it for a month (Num. 11:20). The quail came, people began to eat it, and some of them died while enjoying the food as part of God's judgment for the complaining and lusting (Num. 11:33-34).

God was not angry with His people for requesting food; He was angry at their lack of contentment. God provided what the nation needed, but the Hebrews wanted more. In a similar way the Corinthians wanted more than what the church offered. Even now this is true. People want entertainment as part of the worship. Rather than a place to worship and serve, the church becomes something like a local social center for youth, young parents, retirees, etc. Many expect and demand an elaborate "social program" that resembles a professional entertainment program (service). If people do not get what they think they want or need, they threaten to "go elsewhere" where "their needs can be met." Even in the area of benevolence we find a lack of contentment. Among the poor, it is not uncommon to find people who are no longer interested in receiving "help." When people seek assistance they want aid that conforms to their standards. Having food is not enough (it must be the right kind). Having a place to stay is not enough (it must have the proper amenities, be in the right neighborhood, etc). Free clothing is not acceptable unless it conforms to a person's choice of colors, is the right style, and was made by a specific manufacturer.

Because selfish cravings are an age old problem and this temptation can affect God's people, Paul offered a warning: Do not become involved in this way of life. Today anyone who wants more than the "perfect law of liberty" allows for (Jas. 1:25) must also be warned to consider how Israel took this same path and was punished. According to Num. 11:34, those who complained, died and the burial area was named after the deceased. It was called "*Kibrothhattaavah*" ("graves of lust" or "graves of craving"). Many today seem to seek this same type of fate because they are dissatisfied with the New Testament church established by Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28).

*Lust* occurs twice in this verse; it is used first as a noun (*epithumetes*) and then is used as a verb (*epithumeo*). The noun form only occurs here in the New Testament; if this term had not joined with the

word “*evil*,” it would simply mean “strong desire.” Because Paul specified the type of desire Israel had, he described a type of selfish craving and said this was contrary to God’s will. Today when people want more than God intends to offer, they are also guilty of *evil lust*. When we look at the nation of Israel, we see that this is a very serious sin.

The verb form of *lust* (*epithumeo*) is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe a variety of desires, both good and bad. It first occurs in Mt. 5:28 and is associated with an evil sexual desire. Jesus used the word in a positive sense in Mt. 13:17. This verb is translated “fain” in Lk. 15:16 (the son who left his father and went into a far country “*earnestly desired*” food). The word is also used of Lazarus “*desiring*” the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table (Lk. 16:21). For many of the other passages that contain this term see Lk. 17:22; 22:15; Acts 20:33; Rom 7:7; 13:9; Gal. 5:17; 1 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 6:11; Jas. 4:2; 1 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 9:6.

In studying the next several verses it is helpful to remember that Paul has offered five parallels between Israel and the church. Here in verse 6 he also listed one of Israel’s failures—a refusal to be satisfied with what God provided. Now he is ready to list four more of Israel’s failures. His examples must have been “a spectacle for the eyes of the self-satisfied Corinthians: all these bodies, full-fed with miraculous nourishment, strewing the soil of the desert” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:859).

**10:7:** *Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

One of the “examples” Paul had in mind (verse 6) is given here (Israel’s sin with the golden calf, Ex. 32:1-6). While Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the nation of Israel decided to “indulge in pagan revelry” (this is the NIV rendering of 1 Cor. 10:7). God said this revelry was “*idolatry*” (apparently the “eating and drinking” refer to a feast associated with idol worship). Israel became involved with false worship and about 3,000 people were killed (Ex. 32:28 and compare Acts 7:41). Paul reminded the Corinthians that only “*some*” of the Hebrews had to engage in this act to create problems and such was true at Corinth. “Where *some* begin, the mass easily follow, rushing into both sin and punishment” (Bengel, 2:217).

Because Paul appealed to Israelites who became involved with idolatry, a similar sin was probably true at Corinth (brethren were eating, drinking and amusing themselves at idolatrous celebrations). They “had been delivered from the superstitions of heathen religion, but they were still drawn by its festivities. They should have stopped their association with such completely, because enjoying this wild, careless merriment could lead rather easily to idolatry again” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 381). A little later in this chapter (verse 14) Paul said, “flee idolatry.” At least some of the idolatry at Corinth (just as at other times and places in history) included ritual prostitution (i.e. sexual intercourse was part of the “worship”). Paying homage to a false god was bad enough; combining idol worship with fornication brought the threat of swift and severe judgment. Since the Old Testament example of Israel was “*written*,” the Corinthians had a clear lesson on how not to act.

The word translated *idolaters* (*eidololatrias*) is only found here; 5:10, 11; 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:8; 22:15. If these passages are studied, one finds that this term always has a negative meaning in the New Testament. God hates this activity and those involved with it, unless they repent (turn from it), will not be saved. Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible (pp. 364-365) noted how the “New Testament stresses the exceeding sinfulness of idolatry. Frequent listing of sins includes idolatry (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3; Rev. 21:8) and Paul instructs believers not to associate with idolaters (1 Cor. 5:11; 10:14). Distortion brought about by idolatry is emphatically set forth in Romans 1:18-32, where image worship is seen as a downward spiral away from the true God.”

A final comment should be made on the word “*play*” (*paizo*), a term found only here in the New Testament. In Classical Greek, *play* described children and adults who participated in games, dancing, and celebrations. Here *play* is associated with the licentious and immoral behavior often joined with idolatry (i.e. there is no innocent connotation attached to the word in this passage). Kittel (5:629-630) connected it with “cultic dances” that had “an erotic sense” as well as “cultic licentiousness.” At the end

of some idol worship, participants were naked and danced wildly (Ex. 32:25. The KJV actually says the Israelites were naked). Readers may also wish to compare Ex. 32:6, a text that says Israel “rose up to play.” The word translated *play* in Ex. 32:6 is also used in Gen. 26:8 to say Isaac was “sporting” with Rebekah his wife. Since *sporting* has a definite sexual connotation, many believe the same meaning is found in Ex. 32:6.

**10:8:** *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*

There are several good reasons to refrain from sexual activity until marriage and avoid extra marital sexual activity (adultery) after marriage. These reasons include unplanned pregnancies, disease, disappointment, and the violation of God’s will. Sexual sin is an extremely serious matter (6:18) and it is an enticement that affects a majority of the population. Here Paul said God’s people—the Hebrews—chose to engage in it. Even now many of God’s people allow themselves to be drawn into sexual sin.

In ancient times people were often involved with “fertility religion” (pagan worship often included sexual intercourse as part of the service). “Fertility religions believed that participating in religious prostitution and orgies brought health, fertility, and prosperity. The idolatry practiced in Corinth in Paul’s day involved similar fertility practices” (Holman, 7:164 and compare verses 20-21). Here Paul referred back to when some Moabite women enticed Israel (Num. 25:1-2).

Israel engaged in idolatry and sexual sin, God was not pleased with His people, and “23,000” Hebrews died in a single day (Num. 25:9). Since the Midianites were promoting fornication, God said these people were also to be destroyed (Num. 25:16-18). We live under a new covenant, but God is not any more tolerant of sin, especially sexual sin and false worship. Thus, in an earlier section of this letter (6:18) Paul told the Corinthians to “*flee fornication*.” It was imperative for these Christians to know that sexual sin often brings about terrible consequences—it destroys people in this life as well as eternity.

“*Fornication*” (*porneuo*) is often used as a noun in the New Testament, but here it is a present tense verb. Whether used as a noun or a verb, *fornication* includes all forms of sexual sin. It describes departures from God’s “religious norms (e.g. homosexuality, promiscuity, paedophilia, and especially prostitution, Brown, 1:497). Some may think fornication will never be a temptation for them, but Allen (p. 120) correctly said: “The person who says he cannot be tempted sexually is so young his passions have not arisen, so ignorant he does not know what is occurring, so old they have already subsided, not normal or lying. For the vast majority, only death will totally deliver from this temptation. Not simply a fear of evil (which is extremely important) but a passionate love for purity characterizes those who do not go astray in this realm.”

Many have noted how Num. 25:9 says 24,000 people died but Paul said 23,000 died. Critics have often said the different figures prove the Bible is wrong and the difference is a contradiction. The numbers do differ, but this does not necessarily mean there is a contradiction. A contradiction occurs when two or more passages *cannot be harmonized*. Different numbers may be a “difficulty” but not a contradiction. Since there are ways to reconcile the differing figures this passage presents readers with a difficulty and not a contradiction.

Paul may have drawn a distinction between the number who “*fell*” and the number who *died* (this author regards this as possible but not probable). It is also possible that both writers used *approximate* numbers. “Perhaps each writer used a round number. Paul rounded down and Moses rounded up” (Allen, p. 120). If this is correct, the number of dead bodies ranged from 23,000-24,000. A few have suggested that Paul had a memory lapse, but this is unacceptable to anyone who accepts the Bible as a divinely inspired book. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (pp. 526-527) offers two likely possibilities. In one day 23,000 died. By the time the destruction was over the *complete total* was 24,000 (i.e. the total number who died is recorded in Num. 25:9). Another possibility is that the 24,000 in Num. 25 included the leaders, but the figure used by Paul (23,000) did not. In support of this view is the fact that the expression “in one day” appears only in 1 Cor. 10—these words are not found in Num. 25.

Lenski’s explanation (First Corinthians, p. 398) is probably not correct, but it is a thoughtful point. “We

notice that he keeps writing that only ‘some’ of the Israelites committed this sin and that sin. He is picturing these sinful outbreaks, not in the worst possible light, but only in as bad a light as consistency with truth compels. As he writes ‘some’ where he could write ‘many,’ so he writes 23,000 where he could write 24,000. We often make our warnings too sharp and too strong, and our readers or hearers begin at once to discount our words and to evade the effect we seek to produce. Paul avoids this mistake.”

**10:9:** *Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents.*

Now we come to a fourth failure of the Hebrew people. While Israel was on the way to Canaan it decided to “*make trial*” of the “*Lord*” (the KJV says “*tempt Christ*”). *Make trial* (*ekpeirazo*) is a present tense verb and it is found only here, Mt. 4:7; Lk. 4:12; 10:25. Thayer (p. 198) said *make trial* means engaging in “irreligion and immorality to test the patience or the avenging power of Christ.”

God cannot be *tempted* (Jas. 1:13), but people can *make trial* of Him by challenging deity or demanding that God prove He is true, just, or will keep His word. It is almost as if man can “dare” God to do what He has said and this makes God angry (compare Mt. 4:7; Acts 5:9; Heb. 3:8). Jesus experienced this very type of thing at various times in His life and He rebuked people for it. Unbelieving Jews kept demanding signs to prove Jesus’ claims (Lk. 11:29), even though the Lord had previously provided them with sufficient proof (Lk. 11:14).

In “some instances God invites people to put him to the test so that his power and benevolence may be made clear (Isa. 7:10-12; Mal. 3:10)” (Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 762). If someone wants to *prove* or *test* God, he must do it in a way that has God’s approval (compare Judg. 6:36-40; Mal. 3:10-11). Today God allows Himself to be *tested* in the sense that we *prove* certain things about Him (1 Thess. 5:21; Jn. 20:25-27). Sinful testing occurs when we act like Israel did—we doubt God’s goodness, we approach Him with unbelief and disobedience, and we persist in some sin. Israel did this and their rebellion was so great Num. 14:22 says God was tried “ten times.” “It is possible—and dangerous—to test God’s tolerance of sin (Acts 5:9; 1 Cor. 10:9; Heb. 3:9) or the scope of his grace (Acts 15:10)” (Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 762).

One specific example of Israel challenging God came from the nation’s complaining (the Hebrews said life had been better in Egypt, Num. 21:5). Israel’s complaining and challenging God about their provisions was a very bad choice, especially when we consider what Paul said in verse 4 (Jesus was the “rock” that provided water for Israel). Since Jesus served as the water supply for the Hebrews, and the people complained about their water supply (Num. 21:5), the complaints ultimately were made against the Son of God! Heaven did not like complaints about the Son before the cross, and heaven is no more enthused about receiving them now.

Israel provoked God so much it was punished by “*serpents*” (*ophis*). Snakes bit and killed many of the people (Num. 21:4-6). Snakes “were generally feared by Near Eastern peoples for their cunning and deadliness. Evil individuals were often compared to serpents because of their malicious natures (cf. Psalms 58:4; 140:3; Matthew 23:33)” (CBL, GED, 4:424). We are not given specific information about the snakes in Num. 21, but MacKnight (p. 176) cited sources which describe snakes from the deserts of Lybia. These creatures have “gross venom which burns, breeds thirst, and putrifies, and those who are afflicted with it cry as if they were in the fire.”

Paul said God’s people (the Israelites) “*perished*” (*apollumi*). In some manuscripts *perish* is an imperfect tense verb (the image is a steady stream of deaths). Sending deadly snakes among the people demonstrated God’s displeasure with disbelief and complaining. The deadly snakes also looked forward to the New Testament era. Jesus is a “type” of the brass serpent Moses made to heal people (compare Num. 21:8-9 and Jn. 3:14).

The end of this verse again uses the word *trial* to describe testing God, but this is not the same word used in the first part of the verse. This second term (*peirazo*) is used to describe Satan’s *tempting* Jesus (Mt. 4:1). It is also found in places like Mt. 16:1 and 19:3. This second term may be defined as *put God on trial*. Gingrich and Danker (p. 640) said it describes someone who wants to put God “to the test, to discover whether he really can do a certain thing, especially whether he notices sin and is able to punish

it.”

The Corinthians were *testing* God just as Israel had tested God. Christians at Corinth did this by attending pagan feasts—they went to places where they had no right to be. Today it is still possible to *test* God. If we do things we are not supposed to do or go to places where Christians should not be, we *make trial* of God (we test His goodness, patience and love). If we rashly expose ourselves to dangerous and difficult circumstances and expect God to step in and save us from our recklessness, we *test God* (compare Mt. 4:4-7). Anyone who “pushes the envelope” to see what God will allow or permit is guilty of testing deity (compare Heb. 3:9 and Acts 5:9). Many who test God follow a well trodden path. “First comes sensuality, then unbelief. The path remains the same in every generation” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 381).

Some think there is an additional parallel between the Corinthians and the nation of Israel. As Israel was not satisfied with their food in the wilderness, so the Corinthians were not satisfied with what they had received in Christ (one example of this is in the next chapter—some women were not content to wear head coverings). Also, just as Israel was unhappy about leaving behind the food they were accustomed to eating in Egypt, so the Corinthians were unhappy about forsaking some of their old habits such as attending idol celebrations. If the Corinthians continued to *test* God by engaging in forbidden practices, their situation would worsen. God’s grace did not allow Israel to sin and His grace gives Christians no excuse to willfully sin.

Another point about *making trial of God* is related to Pentecostalism. When “Pentecostal Christians” or “charismatic believers” are asked to confirm their claims with a miracle (Mk. 16:20), they usually reply that such requests are “testing God” and no sign will be given. Asking for people to prove they have supernatural gifts (the power of the Holy Spirit) is not testing God; it is a Biblically based request (1 Thess. 5:21). These requests are refused because miracles (as the New Testament uses this term) have ceased (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:9-12). Those involved in the Pentecostal movement can claim power, but when their claims are carefully investigated, one finds it is “all talk” and “no action.”

In first century times Christians who really had the power of the Holy Spirit left no doubt about possessing supernatural gifts of the Spirit (Acts 6:8; 8:6). Unlike today, gospel preaching was not limited to “word only” (1 Thess. 1:5). Non believers did not need to ask for signs because, unlike today, miracles abounded and were openly demonstrated to the public (Acts 8:6, 13; 14:3; Rom. 15:19). Tongue speaking was language understood by others, not senseless babbling (Acts 2:6). God gave miracles to “confirm the word” (Mk. 16:20); now God says His word has been confirmed and verified (Heb. 2:3; Jude 3) so the signs to verify it have been removed. We now have the “perfect” (1 Cor. 13:10—the confirmed word of God), so the “partial” (the supernatural signs used to confirm the word as it was gradually being revealed) has been removed.

What Paul said in this chapter about learning from Israel’s mistakes would have probably angered some of the Corinthians (not many people appreciate being reproved). Thus, Paul used the next verse to deal with expected objections.

**10:10:** *Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyer.*

Now Paul provided the Corinthians with yet another of Israel’s mistakes (this is his fifth example from the nation of Israel). This blunder, just like the preceding four, was similar to what the Corinthians were doing. New Testament saints were “*murmuring*” (*gonguzo*), a word found only here, Mt. 20:11; Lk. 5:30; Jn. 6:41, 43, 61; 7:32. *Murmuring* described “speaking in a low voice half under one’s breath, usually with a negative connotation of grumbling, muttering, murmuring, or complaining” (CBL, GED, 1:638). Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 400) described it as giving “audible expression to unwarranted dissatisfaction.” We might say Israel was a “nation of whiners” and the Corinthians were engaging in a similar practice. Even now we find that both saved and unsaved people whine. Some even pout. Such childish actions result from people not getting what they want, thinking they have been deprived of their rights, believing justice was not served, etc.

One example of Israel’s murmuring is found in Num. 16:41-49 (Korah instituted a rebellion, he and

his followers were killed, and the Hebrews complained about their deaths). Paul seems to be thinking of this example because he said, “*some of them*.” Another example of complaining is found in Num. 14:1-10 (the Hebrews were dissatisfied with and complained about the leadership of Moses and Aaron). This complaining resulted in the wilderness wanderings (Num. 14:34). When the wandering period ended, only Joshua, Caleb, and the younger generation of Hebrews (people who had been under the age of 20 when Israel left Egypt, Num. 32:11) were left. Although many years have passed, complainers still abound in the world. Many complaints involve leadership—people complain about leaders in the workplace, government, church, etc. Some complaints are subtle and infrequent. Others are open, harsh, and often. Just as people have not changed, so God has not changed. Complaining is still a sin, especially as it relates to church leaders (compare Heb. 13:17).

At Corinth, “Voices were beginning to be raised against Paul among the Corinthians; if they remained unchecked, the gravest danger might result. Hence Paul points to the Israelites as a warning” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 400). Paul told these saints, “*Neither murmur ye*.” Rather than complain, Christians should be grateful for what they have. We can grow in gratitude and lessen our complaining if we remember some basic points. Complaining is usually wasted energy, God does not like it, our friends usually do not want to hear it, and divine discipline may be used on chronic complainers (Heb. 12:5-10). Taking inventory of what we do have should lessen the temptation to complain (Col. 3:15b). Having the Lord’s Supper each week (see verse 16 and the commentary on this passage) as well as meeting with fellow Christians for worship (11:18) should help Christians be infrequent complainers.

The reference to the “*destroyer*” (*olothreutes*—a term found only here in the New Testament) brings to mind Ex. 12:23 and 1 Chron. 21:15 (the Chronicles passage describes a plague that fell upon Israel because David took a census. Seventy thousand men died and God said the destruction could have been much greater). Both Ex. 12 and 1 Chron. 21 have been used to teach the idea of a “death angel.” Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic literature all refer to a *death angel*. Jews who lived in the so-called 400 year “silent period” before the New Testament era said this angel’s name was Azrael and it has an assistant named Sammael. Rabbis believed in a death destroying angel called Mashchith (the angel of judgment, Kittel, 5:175). In the Koran (32:11; 47:27) we also find references to Azrael, the “angel of death.” In the Bible, there is no evidence of a “death angel” (for more information on this subject see the special study on angels just prior to the commentary on Acts 11).

Paul did not specifically describe this destroyer or say what was destroyed. It seems he was thinking of the rebellion led by Korah (Num. 16). If this is correct, the *destroyer* was not a special angel. God used *natural forces* to inflict judgment on people (an earthquake, fire and plague were used to destroy Korah and his fellow rebels, Num. 16:31-48).

Some translations have been careless in their treatment of this verse. In the NIV the text says, “the destroying angel.” In the Contemporary English Version the text says “the destroying angel.” The Living New Testament reads, “His Angel to destroy them.” All these renderings go beyond what is expressed in the Greek text. Nothing in this verse and nothing in the rest of the Bible supports the idea of a death-destroying, soul collecting angel, or an angel ruling over death.

**10:11:** *Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.*

Contrary to what some have affirmed (the Old Testament contains myths and legends), Paul said the events in the Old Testament really “*happened*.” Also, the things recorded in the Old Testament were “*all*” (KJV—this word is based a manuscript variation) part of a great master plan. God preserved information about Old Testament events and people so mankind would have “*examples*.” These examples teach us about God as well as what man should and should not do. “Valuable spiritual lessons can be learned and applied from their virtues and vices” (Gromacki, p. 122). The Hebrews could learn from their ancestors and Christians can learn from the things experienced by the Hebrew nation (compare verse 6 and Rom. 15:4).

In this book *example* (*tupos*) is used only here and verse 6 and in each verse it is plural (for more

information about this term, which the KJV translates “*ensamples*,” see the commentary on verse 6). Many Old Testament *examples* show that God blesses the obedient and punishes the rebellious (Rom. 11:22). We also have many examples of men and women who were faithful, often under difficult circumstances (compare Heb. 11:4-37).

The word translated *happened* (*sumbaino*) at the beginning of this verse “seems to convey a sense of significance or severity concerning the circumstances or events it describes” (CBL, GED, 6:154). Since *happened* is an imperfect tense verb (on-going action), Paul told the Corinthians there are important lessons scattered throughout the Old Testament (we cannot find all the lessons in one place or during one specific time period). Many are hesitant to study about or preach from the Old Testament, but Paul says this is a mistake. Israel made many mistakes that we can learn from if we will study and learn Old Testament history.

Paul specifically said the information in the Old Testament was written for the “*admonition*” (*nouthesia*) of Christians. *Admonition* means “*write for the instruction of someone*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 554). Spicq (2:550) offered a general definition for *admonition*: the type of correction “which reprimands, and punishes with moderation, with regret, and as little as possible.” Paul used *admonition* to describe how fathers are to deal with their children (Eph. 6:4). Aside from the present verse and Eph. 6:4, *admonition* occurs only one other time in the New Testament (Tit. 3:10).

*Written for our admonition* means Old Testament characters and events were preserved for our instruction, exhortation, warning, and correction. Historical events were documented so Christians can live as God desires (it is possible to believe in Christ and the Bible, but not follow God’s will). We now have in the most literal sense all the “sacred writings” that “make us wise to salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15), and Christians count “every Scripture” as important (2 Tim. 3:16). We follow the New Testament for Christian living and matters of doctrine, but we learn many key lessons about God, sin and faithfulness from the Old Testament.

The end of this verse contains an especially intriguing thought. Paul said, “*the ends of the ages are come*” (the KJV says “*world*”). This expression tells us we are now in the last era of time (i.e. the final “age”). The world is awaiting just one more truly significant event: Jesus’ return/the destruction of the world. When He returns all will be judged (Jn. 5:28-29) and the universe will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10-12). When Jesus comes again (and this time is unknown, Mt. 24:36), there will be no additional period or era. Contrary to the many theories of Premillennialism, there will be no rapture (a word not found in the English Bible) where some are taken and some are left. There will be no “thousand year reign” on the earth, no “paradise on earth,” etc. “Christians are the goal of all past history” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 402). “All history finds its apex in the Christian Era” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 383).

The *ends of the ages are come* also suggests that God had a long-term goal (plan) from the beginning of time. Paul called this an “eternal purpose” in Eph. 3:11. This goal (the age of Christianity) *had come* (arrived) in Paul’s day (the first century). In fact, the *end of the age* (the goal) was realized when the church was established in Acts 2. All previous ages (dispensations) find their fulfillment in the New Testament era (compare Heb. 1:1-2). The *end of the age* has nothing to do with the “end of the world” or the “end of time.” Compare, also, Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10; Heb. 9:26. God’s ultimate goal will be fully reached when Christ presents the church to Himself at the end of time (Eph. 5:27) and the ungodly are quarantined in hell (Mt. 25:46).

Vine’s comments on the *ends of the ages* are also correct: “The ages are the successive periods of God’s dealings with mankind (sometimes misnamed dispensations; a dispensation is a mode of dealing, not an age). Such periods are the antediluvian, pre-Abrahamic, patriarchal, and the period of the Law. Each of these former periods had led up to, and reached the consummation in, the present age” (2:69).

**10:12:** *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

The word “*wherefore*” points to a conclusion; Paul drew a conclusion about salvation. Christians can “*stand*” (remain saved) or “*fall*” (forfeit their salvation). *Stand* (*histemi*) is a perfect tense verb and it means “stand firm, resist” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:206). Since Paul said a

Christian could “fall,” this is one of the many proofs he did not subscribe to the “once saved, always saved” theory (a false doctrine). If a Christian cannot lose his salvation, this passage, as well as other verses like Gal. 5:4, is meaningless. For more information on the subject of a Christian losing his salvation (apostasy resulting in damnation), see the commentary on 2:14.

The word translated *fall* (*pipto*) generally described an unintentional fall and this is the meaning in this text. Under the Old Testament God’s people (the nation of Israel) did not *intend* to fall; they did not plan to destroy themselves. Today most people behave just as Israel did. Rarely do people think they will fall. Most see themselves as *standing* (secure and confident), no matter how difficult life becomes or how strong a temptation is. Christians should be confident about their relationship with God (1 Jn. 5:13), but not cocky. Being smug and overconfident makes one very susceptible to apostasy and condemnation (notice that “*thinking*” is a present tense verb). Since apostasy is a real possibility for all Christians, God’s people must “*take heed*” (*blepo*), a present tense verb also used in places like 3:10. Paul ordered caution and spiritual alertness because overconfidence is one of Satan’s weapons (compare 1 Pet. 5:8). When a man begins to think, “That could never happen to me,” he has fallen into temptation and may not be too far from falling.

With the Corinthians, idolatry was one of the ways they could have fallen into sin and lost their salvation. “There were Corinthians who convinced themselves that they could never repeat the sins of the Israelites even though they fellowshipped with pagans in the idolatrous temples. They had forgotten Solomon’s counsel: ‘Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall’ (Prov. 6:18)” (Gromacki, p. 123). Today Christians can place themselves in spiritually damaging environments but think their faith is strong enough to keep them from falling. Christians are drawn away and enticed with sin (Jas. 1:14), and part of the enticement is the belief they are strong enough to just “flirt with temptation.” A married man once told me he could “look at but not touch” other women. He flirted with temptation and felt so secure about things he boasted. It was not surprising to find that he and his wife got a divorce. Paul’s warning is still very applicable: “So be careful. If you are thinking, ‘Oh, I would never behave like that’—let this be a warning to you. For you too may fall into sin” (The Living Bible). Israel not only had this experience, it was often prevalent among the Hebrews.

It is important to relate this verse to the previous chapter (these Christians were running a race). Athletes must use great care as they compete (anything can happen during a race), and overconfidence is a great way to lose a race. Christians are to be watchful as they live (1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:18) and this includes self examination (2 Cor. 13:5). Israel failed to watch itself and it did not prosper. Such a fate would also befall the Corinthians if they were not careful. How watchful are we?

**10:13a:** *There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear:*

In the previous verses Paul issued several warnings based on God’s dealings with the Old Testament nation of Israel. Here he offered some encouragement and answered a potential question: “What if Christians are so tempted that they cannot resist turning from Christ?” (Holman, 7:165). A “*temptation*” (*peirasmos*) “is any inducement to sin” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 403). Christians can be tempted mentally, physically, spiritually, financially, religiously or socially because temptations are “*manifold*” (they take many forms, Jas. 1:2). Paul associated *temptation* with earthly wealth in 1 Tim. 6:9 and Jesus associated *temptation* with prayer (Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4), perhaps because temptation is one means of “falling away” from the faith (Lk. 8:13).

The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 383) noted how *temptation* (*peirasmos*) “is capable of three different meanings. First of all, it may mean temptation to sin. This can only come from Satan, never from God. Secondly, people may test God, as Israel did in the wilderness and as the Corinthians were doing. Finally, there is a testing from God that is not enticement to sin but purposes refinement and purification (Deuteronomy 8:2).” In this verse the first meaning is in view. Paul plainly said God will not allow (permit) a temptation that is too great for His people to withstand. “God sets fixed bounds even to the devil, beyond which temptation dare not go as we see so clearly from the case of Job” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 404). Peter (2 Pet. 2:9) said, “*the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation,*



*and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment.”*

Paul’s readers may have understood God’s promise to limit temptation against the background of ancient athletic contests. In the first century athletic officials did “not allow entrants to compete indiscriminately or by chance, but after careful examination of their physique and age they join them up in proper pairings, for example, boys with boys and men with men, pairs who are alike in age and strength. So we must understand that divine providence arranges with most righteous care all who enter the contests of this life, taking account of each one’s virtue: this is known only to providence, which knows the hearts of men. Thus one person fights against this kind of flesh, another against that kind; one for this length of time, another for that; one is goaded by the flesh into this act, another into a different act; one resists this hostile power, another that; a third two or three together.... **But God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength**, that is to say, individuals are tempted in proportion to the degree and strength of their virtue” (The Church’s Bible, p. 167).

When we speak of “proportional temptation,” we do not mean a person will be victorious over a single instance of or all temptation. This simply means temptation will not be beyond a Christian’s potential (capability) to overcome. Having the power to overcome temptation does not always mean the power will be used or used successfully. Neither does a way out from temptation mean victory will be swift, simple, pleasurable, or necessarily easy to see.

Readers may wish to again examine 1 Cor. 7:7 (each man has his “own gift from God”) as well as 1 Cor. 7:17 (“distributed to each one”). Both of these previous verses also affirm that God is actively involved in our world and very involved in the lives of His people. Deity stands ready to aid the saved during times of temptation (compare Lk. 22:31) because God is the deliverer rather than the tempter (Jas. 1:13-15).

With all the hustle, bustle, and commerce at Corinth (we might liken this ancient city to New York City or Chicago), temptation was never far away from these Christians and Paul knew that. Today thoughtful Christians also know temptation is always close by. We may be tempted by bad health, difficult economic times, good economic times, personal failure, business failure, family members, fellow church members, our accomplishments, the accomplishments of others, etc. At Corinth Christians had an “*all things are lawful*” attitude (6:12). They were also morally indifferent to some sins (5:1-2). These incorrect ideas, just like incorrect doctrine today, are also a common source of temptation.

Paul said the Corinthians were not only tempted, their temptations were ordinary. The KJV says their temptations were “*common to man.*” The ASV reads, “*such as man can bear.*” Each of these renderings is based upon a single word (*anthropinos*) that occurs only a few times in the New Testament (here, Acts 17:25; Rom. 6:19; 1 Cor. 2:4, 13; 4:3; Jas. 3:7; 1 Pet. 2:13). This word has several different senses in the New Testament, but here the idea is “humanness.” Men and women have many things in common, and one point of commonality is temptation. Temptation has existed from the time of Adam and Eve and will continue to be in the world until time ends. Jesus assumed human form (Jn. 1:14), and as deity encased in flesh (Phil. 2:5-8), He was tempted (Mt. 4:1-3; Mk. 8:11). He can, therefore, fully understand what living as a human being is like (Heb. 4:15).

Unlike animals driven by lust or creatures who fail to think about the consequences of actions, human beings can *bear* (*hupophero*) their temptations. *Bear* means “withstanding temptation” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:408). Thayer (p. 645) defined *bear* as “*to bear patiently, to endure.*” *Bear* is only found here, 2 Tim. 3:11 and 1 Pet. 2:19. All of God’s people will find there are times when they must *endure* hardships. Christians can deal with and even welcome temptations (Jas. 1:13-15) because God helps (1 Cor. 10:13) and because they realize temptations serve a useful purpose (Jas. 1:12).

The basis for the Corinthians’ successfully overcoming temptations was God. They could be victorious because God would help them and God is “*faithful.*” A wonderful illustration of God’s faithfulness is found in Heb. 13. The author of that book said God will never “fail” or “forsake” His people. This fact is dramatically expressed with five negative words in the Greek text of Heb. 13:5. Kenneth Wuest tried to capture the force of thought with this translation: “*For He himself has said, and the statement is on record, I will not, I will not cease to sustain and uphold you. I will not, I will not, I will not let you down.*”

In his letter to Titus, Paul described God’s faithfulness as being unable to lie (Tit. 1:2). Since 1 Cor.

10:13 says temptations can be overcome, and God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), God's people will not be tempted beyond what they can bear (temptations are kept at a tolerable level for all who are faithful Christians). This fact implies that God takes a personal interest in every one of His people (Jn. 10:27, "I know them"). If God clothes the grass of the field that is temporal, will He not help those who will be with Him in eternity (Mt. 6:30)? Also, since God knows how to care for small creatures like birds (Mt. 6:36), will He fail to help His people when they are tempted?

We need God's help with temptation because the enticement of and from sin can "take" us (13a). This word (*lambano*) is a perfect tense verb and it described seizing someone or something. A specific definition for *take* in this passage is "a description of the struggle facing the Christian (temptation comes over the individual)" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:337). There were temptations capable of seizing the Corinthians and the perfect tense tells us these temptations were lingering. Although these Christians faced some very strong temptations, the Corinthians could overcome the sins that seemed so appealing.

**10:13b:** *but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it*

Now we come to a promise: God provides a way out for His people (an "escape" during times of temptation). This is a promise, but God did not say escaping temptation will always be easy. Jude (verse 23) refers to Christians who need to be "snatched from the fire." He envisioned brethren who were very attracted to sin or Christians who had succumbed to temptation. It was possible for these disciples to *escape* from their temptations, but they would likely have some "burn marks" from the experience. All too often God's people think escaping temptation is fast and painless. Joseph (Gen. 39:1-12) shows that even if we do not want to partake of a temptation, we may still be affected by the experience. No Bible writer says temptation is easy to avoid and faithful Christians can attest to the difficulty of struggling against temptations, many of which are "fiery darts" from Satan (Eph. 6:16).

The word *escape* (*ekbasis*) is an excellent translation of the original term. In Classical Greek *escape* described things like an army's exit or way of escape from a mountain pass. Here it means God provides an "egress" (Thayer, p. 193) from temptations. Since the Greek text has a definite article ("**the** escape"), "every trial has its own particular God-given way of escape" (A New Testament Commentary, p. 395). God has several methods to help His people, including His word. By knowing what the Bible says and obeying that information, we can often "escape" temptation.

Since God's word is such a useful tool to overcome temptation, Paul said the Bible is to "richly" dwell in Christians (Col. 3:16). Jesus certainly internalized God's word and used it during His temptations (Mt. 4:3-4). Being *present* at every congregational assembly to hear the Bible taught and *active participation* in a local congregation are also two very good tools to overcome many common temptations.

Sometimes God uses His *providence* to deliver someone from temptation (for a special study of this subject see the commentary on Phile. 15-16). This form of deliverance is non-miraculous. It involves God using natural circumstances and events in life to carry out His will and help His people. Escape from temptation may come from prayer, spiritual alertness (Mt. 26:41), focusing the mind on right things (Phil. 4:8), concentrating on the right person (Heb. 13:1), and carefully choosing our associates (compare 1 Cor. 5:6b; 15:33). If we are looking at the right things and the right person (Jesus—Heb. 12:2), we will be far less tempted to look at temptation. God has given us the ability to "flee" temptation (2 Tim. 2:22) and we need to actively offer resistance to temptation as well as Satan (Jas. 4:7).

It may be helpful to consider these additional points about God's faithfulness and our temptations:

- God knows each Christian's abilities to bear temptations and He will not let us be burdened by too much.
- Though God's promise of an escape is true, at times we may think God has failed to provide one. Many are like Job (they complain their sufferings are unjust or too great).

- Individuals make up the church (a large body of people), but this verse tells us that God can and does deal with and care for His people individually.
- Satan is limited by two things: God's power and our resistance to temptation.
- We can be tempted to do what is wrong and/or not do what is right.
- If we do not escape a temptation, we cannot blame the failure on God (Jas. 1:13-14).
- Christians ought to diligently pray for deliverance from temptation.
- Never think a temptation "is too difficult to avoid" or we "never have a choice."
- Think of the long term consequence of accepting a temptation instead of the "short term benefit" of sin (compare Heb. 11:25).
- Remember that what tempts us also tempts others. Be wary of thinking or saying, "No one understands what I am going through" or "My situation is unique." The world changes, but temptations basically stay the same (1 Jn. 2:16).
- Recognize that temptation will come and try to be prepared for it (Eph 6:11-18).
- When we fail to avoid temptation, immediately recognize the failure and confess it to God (1 Jn. 1:9).
- Satan is a master tempter. He is a deceiver (2 Cor. 11:3), a liar and murderer (Jn. 8:44), and a thief (Jn. 10:10).
- Age will not do away with temptation. Temptations may change with time, but their severity is sometimes not altered by old age.

If the information in verse 13 is specifically applied to the Corinthians, it must be partly related to idol worship. These Christians were tempted to be involved with idol practices and this enticement had to be recognized and overcome. As Paul explained in the next verse, the temptations about idolatry could be successfully avoided by "*fleeing*."

**10:14:** *Wherefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*

The words "*my beloved*" further reveal Paul's affection for the Corinthians. *Beloved (agapetos)* is an adjective meaning "dear friends" (the KJV says "*dearly beloved*"). Paul loved these Christians and he wanted them to do what was right. He knew they had a problem with idolatry (this subject is first introduced in 8:1) and thus now warned them to "*flee*" from this sin (John also spoke of this matter in 1 Jn. 5:21). Paul knew we are either a child of God or a child of Satan. We are either on the "narrow road" (Mt. 7:14) or the "broad way leading to destruction" (Mt. 7:13b). There are only two choices and we cannot combine the narrow way (the one true God and religion) with anything associated with the "broad way." This point receives additional attention in verses 20-21 of this chapter.

*Idolatry (eidololatreia)* is mentioned in other passages, including Gal. 5:20. It is one of many sins that will keep people from heaven (Gal. 5:21). Here idolatry seems to specifically refer to pagan temples and false religions. The Old Testament nation of Israel was involved with idolatry at various times and was punished for this choice (one of its better known forms of punishment was captivity. Israel was taken into

captivity by nations such as Assyria and Babylon). These confinements were so distasteful the Jews, by and large, lost all interest in idolatry a few hundred years before Jesus entered into the world. Gentiles, however, were still often involved with idolatry in first century times. The Corinthians should have learned from Israel's involvement with idols (verses 5-11) and stayed away from the idol feasts and other pagan practices at Corinth. Today most who live in well developed countries do not worship idols made of metal, wood and stone, but they may worship wealth (Col. 3:5). Although most can now work fewer hours for more money (as compared to many years ago in America), many want more and more (Jesus warned about this in places like Mt. 6:19-21, 24, 31-33) and this desire for material gain is idolatry.

The word "*flee*" (*pheugo*) is a present imperative verb that is found in 6:18 and several other places in the New Testament (for some of these additional references see the commentary on 6:18). *Flee* meant Christians were to abandon idolatry and abandon it quickly. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:420) defined *flee* as "*hold oneself back from the worship of idols.*" Personal self restraint was the only safe course; by using self control these Christians could *escape* this temptation (verse 13). "The addition of the preposition **from** (*apo*, away from) emphasizes that they are not only to flee from idolatry itself, 'but to flee far from all that approaches it or might lead them into it'" (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:408). For more information on how Christians can find a way out of temptation, see the commentary on verse 13.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have used verse 14 to condemn the wearing of crosses as jewelry. According to their view, wearing a cross is a form of idolatry and thus condemned by this passage. Such a view is quite novel but wrong. A cross is typically worn as a piece of jewelry—a symbol of faith or an outward expression of one's commitment to Christ. Only if a cross around the neck were worshipped would it be an idol (compare Ex. 20:4).

**10:15:** *I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.*

Paul realized some of the Corinthians had some common sense. Thus, he spoke to them "*as wise men.*" "Rather than assert his authority on the matter, he thought the reasonableness of his argument would win them to his position. Thus he asked a series of questions about the Lord's Supper to which he assumed they knew the correct answers" (Holman, 7:166).

The word *wise* (*phronimos*) meant "*sensible, thoughtful, prudent, wise*" (Gingrich and Danker, p. 866). Jesus used this word to describe the "wise man" who built his house upon the rock (Mt. 7:24). He also said snakes are "wise" (Mt. 10:16, same word). *Wise* describes the five "wise" virgins (Mt. 25:2) and a "wise" servant (Mt. 24:45). Here it means Paul did not expect these Christians to blindly follow him. He did, however, expect his brethren to use their intellect and follow God's instructions (this included forsaking false religion which in this case was idolatry). If Paul was providing the right information about spiritual things, those with common sense would use their intelligence to heed what he said (compare 11:1). They should have "judged" his words (15b) to be correct and essential to their spiritual well being. "An Arabian proverb says: 'He who knows and knows that he knows, he is wise; follow him'" (Gromacki, p. 124).

Like today in many places, several members of the Corinthian congregation wanted to boast about their knowledge and liberty instead of acknowledge and follow the words of an inspired apostle. Today Christians sometimes join themselves to or choose to associate with religious groups, organizations and special religious efforts that are contrary to the teachings found in the New Testament. People need to know that truth and error do not mix. Rat poison is 98% "good" (most of the poison tastes and smells good—only 2% of the product is poisonous). While two percent may not sound like much, it is enough to be deadly. Using religious information that is mostly true and mixing it with a small amount of religious error is also deadly because it produces "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). God has given the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25). If we change that law, in any way, it is no longer the perfect law and we ought not to expect that we will find *liberty*. This is why Paul said "stand fast in the faith" (1 Cor. 16:13; Gal. 5:1; 2 Thess. 2:15).

In this book there are three different discussions about idol meat. This food is associated with pagan

temples in verses 14-22 of this chapter as well as 8:10. Paul discussed the market places where it was sold (verses 25-26 of this chapter) and the eating of this food (verses 27-30 of this chapter).

## **Introduction to 10:16 and an introduction to the Lord's Supper (the Communion):**

Part of the Old Testament law involved the observance of religious festivals. These festivals helped commemorate historical events and helped bring the Hebrews closer to God (verse 18). In this section of the Corinthian letter Paul said pagan worshippers had a similar practice (pagan festivals were a means of “communing with deity,” verses 19-22). Pagans believed they “received a share in divine power through the common meal, which represented their union with the deity” (Brown, 2:520). “Just as family members have fellowship daily with each other around the dinner table, so religious eating involves the person in communion with his own God” (Gromacki, p. 125). Brown (2:520) concluded, “there was nothing which unites man and man, and man and God, more than eating and drinking.” For Christians, their “fellowship meal with deity” is the Lord’s Supper (compare verses 16-17, 21-22).

Because ancient people believed food was a means of communing with deity, many of the early Christians were criticized. Pagans as well as Jews were often perplexed how Christians could rely upon only one sacrifice (Jesus) while they had to use multiple sacrifices. Unbelievers also found it odd that Christians did not have an “altar” like they had, did not use animals for sacrifices, and did not have special priests. Because Christianity was so different from other religions, some mocked the faith (compare Acts 17:32). One specific response to people who criticized Christians is found in Heb. 13:10. The author of that book said, “we have an altar” (i.e. Jesus’ sacrifice). This author also said Christianity gives man everything he needs for proper and successful worship (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10), even if unbelievers such as the Jews did not understand how the gospel works. Christians have a once for all sacrifice and it is superior to any other religion and this is now the only way to God (compare Jn. 8:24; 14:6).

Remembering Jesus’ sacrifice (Mt. 26:26-28) is a simple and regular part of worship (i.e. it is to be done every Sunday). As shown in these introductory comments as well as the commentary on 11:20b and 16:1, Sunday was the day on which the disciples worshipped and Sunday worship included the Lord’s Supper. Since the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into “all truth” (Jn. 14:26; 16:13), and these men observed the Lord’s Supper each Sunday, we have an example and pattern to follow (compare 1 Cor. 4:16-17 and 2 Tim. 1:13). Observing the Lord’s Supper every Sunday is one of the things “bound” by the apostles (Mt. 16:19).

In the book of Acts we find three separate times when Paul came to a city and remained there seven days before worshipping with fellow Christians (see Acts 20:6-7; 21:4; 28:14). Luke had a purpose in recording this information (Mt. 4:4b) and this author contends he was showing the day on which Christians worshipped. Either Paul arrived too late to worship on these three Sundays and thus remained in each respective place a full week in order to worship, or he came, worshipped, and stayed seven more days for another opportunity to engage in Sunday worship.

In addition to the church at Troas meeting on the first day of the week (the Lord’s Day) for worship and having the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7), the Corinthians and the churches of Galatia also met on Sunday (1 Cor. 16:2) and observed the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20). Furthermore, an early uninspired document called the “Didache” speaks of the Lord’s Supper being practiced on the Lord’s Day (the full English name of this document is “*The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles*”).

The Didache is about the size of the Galatian letter and it says: “*But on the Lord’s day, after that ye have assembled together, break bread and give thanks, having in addition confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure*” (14:1). No author is associated with the Didache and we do not know exactly when it was written. Some believe it was authored about 70 A.D. while others date it about 120 A.D. Because this document lacks information about persecution and heretical teaching, and it is very simple (i.e. religious error had not yet become prominent), it seems best to accept an earlier date, sometime in the first century. We do not base our beliefs on anything but the Bible, but the Didache further illustrates the New Testament practice of observing the Lord’s Supper every Sunday.

The book of Acts is not the only way to prove that Sunday is the proper day for worship. John spoke of the “Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). As noted in the commentary on 11:20b, *Lord* is a special term found only

in 1 Cor. 11:20 and Rev. 1:10. It meant “belonging to the Lord” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:382). The specific day that belongs to Jesus is Sunday. Mark tells us (Mk. 16:9) that Jesus was raised from the dead on Sunday, the first day of the week. One fitting act for the Lord’s Day is the *Lord’s Supper*. Christians cannot truly have the “Lord’s Day” (Sunday) without the Lord’s Supper or have the Lord’s Supper without the “Lord’s Day” (Sunday).

If we are worshipping in truth (Jn. 4:24), we meet with fellow Christians every Sunday and part of our worship includes having the Lord’s Supper. Stated another way, we do not follow the denominational practice of observing the Lord’s Supper once or twice a year, once a quarter, or even once a month. Just as God would not have been pleased with Jews who observed the Sabbath “once a year” or “once a quarter” (“keep the Sabbath” meant “keep it every week”), so every Sunday is the specific day for worship and this includes having the Lord’s Supper. Too, just as the Jews had no right to change the Sabbath (Saturday) to some other day of the week, so we have no right to move the Lord’s Supper to a day other than Sunday.

Those who offer the Lord’s Supper at a wedding ceremony or something like a Saturday retreat or youth devotional may “add to the atmosphere of the event,” but they act without divine authority (Col. 3:17) and engage in “will worship” (Col. 2:23). When people behave in this manner they are not worshipping in “truth” (Jn. 4:24) and Jesus said their worship is vain (Mt. 15:8-9). John said anyone who fails to “abide in the doctrine of Christ” is forsaken by God (2 Jn. 9) and is practicing “evil” (2 Jn. 11).

Early Christians described the Communion in different ways. It is called the “cup of the Lord” and “table of the Lord” in verse 21 and the “Lord’s Supper” in 1 Cor. 11:20. God gives us different ways to designate it, but not different ways of practicing it. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 26:26-28), He used “*bread*” and “*the fruit of the vine*.” Since this was Passover time and unleavened bread was used (Mt. 26:17 and compare Ex. 12:8), we follow this divine example (for more information on this topic see the commentary on Lk. 22 in section 35 of the Gospels commentary).

#### **10:16a:** *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ?*

When observing the Lord’s Supper, Christians have a “*cup of blessing*.” This expression describes a “‘sharing’ in the blood of Christ, i.e., real participation in the death of Christ” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:80. Readers may also wish to review the preceding introductory comments on how festive meals associated people with deity). *Blessing (eulogia)* “means literally ‘good speaking.’ It is used in the Scriptures in various ways, such as praise (Rev. 5:12); benediction (Heb. 12:17); a benefit (Rom. 12:29); or of giving thanks, which is the meaning of this verse” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:409 and compare 11:24). “‘Cup of blessing’ was the name given to the third cup of the Passover meal” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 385) and may have been the cup Jesus used to institute the Lord’s Supper. “The blessing said over this cup by Jews was, ‘Blessed are thou, O Lord our God who givest us the fruit of the vine’” (ibid).

Paul said Christians “*bless*” the “cup of blessing.” It is important to understand the difference between *we bless* and *we consecrate*. Paul did not believe in the modern practice of “consecrating the Lord’s Supper” (i.e. changing the bread and fruit of the vine into something new/different—see the discussion on transubstantiation and consubstantiation in the commentary on 16b). Also, the “idea of blessing, like cursing, presupposes a certain worldview. For there to be blessing, there must be ‘beings and forces from which good and life and power derive, as well as those from which evil comes’” (CBL, GED, 2:640). Stated another way, partaking of the Lord’s Supper acknowledges our belief in Jehovah God plus the existence of evil.

*Blessing (eulogia)* is a noun and *we bless (eulogeo)* is a verb. *We bless* (the verb form of the word) is found many times in the New Testament, but only a few times in this book (here, 1 Cor. 4:12 and 14:16). It refers to giving thanks for the “elements of the Lord’s Supper” (CBL, GED, 2:639).

In addition to the cup, there is also the “*breaking*” (*klao*) of bread. While this specific point is discussed in the commentary on 16b, here a point must be made about the verb tenses. “Breaking” and “we bless” are both present tense verbs. By using the present tense (on-going action), Paul provided even

more proof that the Lord's Supper is to be observed on a regular basis (i.e. every Sunday). The present tense shows the habitual nature of the practice "without going into the details" (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 420). For more information on the frequency of the Lord's Supper see the preceding introductory comments as well as the commentary on 11:20b.

Jesus also referred to the *cup of blessing* while He was with the apostles, but He referred to it as the "*blood of the covenant*" (Mt. 26:28) and the "*fruit of the vine*" (Mt. 26:29). *Fruit of the vine* can describe grape juice or wine since both are actually "fruit of the vine" (this information is more fully discussed in the commentary on Lk. 22 in section 35 of the Gospels commentary). Here we may make a brief point about using alcohol for the Lord's Supper. Even if "wine (alcohol) is lawful" for the Lord's Supper, it is not "expedient" (1 Cor. 6:12). Many congregations have at least one person who has struggled with alcohol abuse. A sip of wine one time, let alone week after week, is putting an occasion of stumbling before him (1 Cor. 10:32). Any congregation considering alcohol should carefully reflect on what Jesus said in Mt. 18:6: "*But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and (that) he should be sunk in the depth of the sea.*"

The word "*cup*" (*poterion*) is used both literally (Mt. 10:42) and figuratively (Mt. 20:22) in the New Testament. Here it "stands, by metonymy, for what it contains" (Gingrich and Danker, p. 695). Christians are to be thankful for what the cup and its contents represent, not the literal container. Although it should not need to be said, perhaps some have failed to remember that Jesus did not specify a *color* for the fruit of the vine. Because God has not legislated on the color of grape juice to use in the Communion, we are forbidden from making a law about it. Such is also true of the bread. Some may prefer a "cracker" style of bread and others may prefer a circular wafer. We may have a personal preference, but in matters God where has not legislated, there is freedom of choice. Sadly, some congregations have experienced contention and even division over the color of the fruit of the vine and the style of bread to be used during the Lord's Supper.

By saying *we bless* the cup, Paul included himself as well as other Christians. This tells us the first century church had no special "clergy" who carried out the Lord's Supper or any other part of the worship ("clergy" was a concept invented by men, not God). Paul could carry out the tasks necessary for worship, but so could other Christians. We find a similar point in Heb. 13:15: "Let *us* offer up sacrifices" (i.e. all Christians).

In this verse it is also evident that all Christians are to partake of the Supper ("the bread which we break"). All Christians (*we*) should partake of the Lord's Supper (both the bread and the fruit of the vine) because all are regarded as "priests" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Since the Lord's Supper is to remember Jesus' death, how and why would any Christian not partake of this memorial? When people are worshipping according to the Bible, no Christian is excluded from the Lord's Supper. Competent men are used to carry out this part of the service (God has given the role of spiritual leadership to men, 1 Tim. 2:8, 11-15), but all Christians are to participate in the eating of the Supper.

Some have asked why Paul reversed the order of the Lord's Supper. Instead of listing the bread first and the fruit of the vine second, the fruit of the vine is mentioned first. One explanation is that Christians are not required to have the bread first (i.e. we may eat the bread last). A better explanation is found in the context. Paul had several things to say about the Communion bread, so he first dealt with the cup because he had less to say about this aspect of the Supper. If we have two items to discuss with someone, we may discuss the briefer matter first.

*Communion* (*koinonia*) occurs twice in this verse and it is a very interesting word, especially when we see where else it is used in the New Testament. Luke used this same word in Acts 2:42 to say Christians were in *fellowship* (communion) with the apostles. Paul joined this word with the Holy Spirit in 2 Cor. 13:14. This term describes a Christian's *fellowship* (communion) in the sufferings of Jesus (Phil. 3:10) and *fellowship* (communion) with the Father (1 Jn. 1:3). John used this word in 1 Jn. 1:6-7 to describe "communion" (fellowship) with deity.

*Communion* (*fellowship*) is applied to several things in the New Testament and here in verse 16 it refers to sharing in the benefits of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. Here it means we have a



“‘partnership’ in the body of Christ effected at the Lord’s Supper” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:305).

**10:16b:** *The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?*

Here we find an expected reference to *bread*, the other essential part of the Lord’s Supper. Bread reminds Christians that a sacrificial body was given in their place at Calvary. Because of what the Lord’s Supper symbolizes, those who do not believe in Jesus or refuse to believe in what He did have no reason or right to partake of it. Some have tried to argue that the Lord’s Supper should somehow be monitored (only “approved” people partake of it), but there is no authority for this practice either. It is the *Lord’s Supper* (it belongs to Christ) and “each one” is to judge himself instead of others (1 Cor. 11:28). This point is also briefly discussed in the “questions about the Lord’s Supper” below (see the commentary prior to 11:21).

When we partake of the bread we have “*communion*” with the “*body of Christ*.” Many have understood this “body” to be the crucified body of Jesus, but here *body of Christ* refers to the church. We do have fellowship with Jesus when we partake of the Communion (Mt. 26:29), but the Lord’s Supper also (the point here) binds Christians together (be sure to compare verse 17). When partaking of the bread Christians are reminded of how Jesus’ body, sacrificed one time on the cross (Heb. 7:27), gives them access to the same savior, hope, spiritual guide, faith, object of worship, etc. and they are truly “one.” A little later (12:13), Paul said another action (baptism) also unites people in the one body (church). The Lord’s Supper is to be a unifying act, but this was not the case at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:19-21).

The word translated “*break*” (*klao*) described the literal breaking of bread. Prior to the Lord’s death, people were familiar with this term and they used it to describe table food (see Mt. 14:19; 15:36). After Jesus’ resurrection, writers were able to give a new and added sense to *break*. It also became a way of describing the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24).

A final point involves false views about the Lord’s Supper. Many are at least somewhat familiar with a Roman Catholic doctrine known as “transubstantiation,” a word meaning “change in substance.” This doctrine is believed to have originated in 1215, more than a thousand years after the church was established. Many think this term was first used by Hildebert of Tours (about 1079) in a sermon. This doctrine was formed to help explain Jesus’ words in places like Mt. 26:26, 28: “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” According to transubstantiation theology, a priest says, “This is my body” and “This is my blood,” and the elements of the Lord’s Supper change into the literal body and blood of Jesus.

There are numerous problems with transubstantiation, some of which are listed below. Here we may simply comment on *priests* officiating at the Lord’s Supper and any other act of worship. Under the New Testament system God says all His people are priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Any religious group that denies the priesthood of all the saved is preaching a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

Others incorrectly teach the doctrine of “consubstantiation” (the bread and fruit of the vine are not changed, but Jesus is “literally in the elements.” This second doctrine (which is also false) says Jesus is “with, in or under” the bread and the fruit of the vine. Stated another way, Jesus’ body and blood are somehow “co-mingled with the elements of the Lord’s Supper.” The physical properties of the bread and the fruit of the vine do not change (taste, appearance, etc. remain the same), but the “inner reality” of the elements undergo a spiritual change. This belief has been compared to a heated iron. As heat resides in a hot piece of iron, so it is said Jesus is actually present in the Communion elements. This second view is typically associated with the Lutheran Church and it is also incorrect for the following reasons.

Jesus once said He is a door (Jn. 10:9), but people realize He is not a literal door. He said He is a shepherd (Jn. 10:11), but people realize this is not literally true. Jesus said He is a vine (Jn. 15:1), but people also recognize this as a figure of speech. Such is also true with the Lord’s Supper. When Jesus said, “this is my body and blood,” He used figurative speech. Bread and fruit of the vine *symbolize* what Jesus did on the cross, just as the door, shepherd and vine imagery symbolize various parts of His redemptive work. We use this same type of speech on a regular basis. If we take out a map, point to a particular location, and say “This *is* Chicago” or “This is our present location,” we are using the very type

of language Jesus used. If we say “this is our son/daughter/grandchildren” but are holding up a picture, we do not mean the picture is our child.

Both transubstantiation and consubstantiation are further shown to be false by Mt. 26:29: “*But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*” Did Jesus promise to *drink His blood* or the *fruit of the vine*? Paul said (1 Cor. 11:26) we “eat the bread” (not flesh) and “drink the cup” (items that represent Jesus’ body). Jesus used figurative language to describe what His death was going to accomplish. When Jesus spoke these words, His blood was still in His body. If people actually partake of Jesus’ body and blood, they fall under the condemnation of Acts 15:20, 29 (these verses say it is wrong to drink blood). Also, if the bread and fruit of the vine are supernaturally changed, this is a miracle. As shown in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of this book (see the commentary on 13:8, 9, 10, 11), miracles (as the Bible uses this term) have ceased. When religious people claim the Lord’s Supper is supernaturally changed into something different week after week, and God says miracles have ceased, both views cannot be right. Because consubstantiation and transubstantiation both affirm the literal blood and flesh are actually part of the Lord’s Supper, they are both false teachings.

Supporters of transubstantiation and consubstantiation sometimes appeal to Jn. 6 where Jesus spoke of “eating His flesh” and “drinking His blood.” This argument fails to realize that this “living bread” is parallel to the “living water” in Jn. 4:14 as well as the “abundant life” in Jn. 10:10. Just as the “living water” in Jn. 4 refers to learning and following Jesus’ teachings, such is true in Jn. 6 (we must “feed” on God’s word because it is the power to salvation, Rom. 1:16). For more information on the meaning of Jn. 6 see the commentary on Mt. 26:26-29 in section 37 of the Gospels commentary and the commentary on Jn. 6:22-25, 51, 52-53, 54-55, section 20 of the Gospels commentary.

**10:17:** *seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread.*

This verse is difficult, especially if studied from the KJV. The ASV makes better sense of the text, but the thought is still complex. Willis (p. 276) suggested this explanation: “We, the many, are one body, since there is one bread.” Having just one Supper (the Communion) is partly designed to unite Christians together. This point is also found in the person of Jesus. Since there is only one Messiah, there is to be unity with Him, for Him, and about Him (i.e. there should be no religious division among Bible believing people; here the point is specifically related to the members of a local congregation).

Paul could have said believers partake of one loaf because they are one body (a point that is true), but this is not what he said. He said believers **are one body because they partake of the one loaf**. Affirming that the Lord’s Supper binds Christians together is directly related to the point at the end of verse 16. By participating in the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, Christians continually affirm they are “one in spirit, one in faith, and one in worship” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 387). Whether well-educated, illiterate, a slave, a free man, a male, a female, rich or poor, all true Christians are bound together by partaking of the Lord’s Supper. This is part of *discerning the Lord’s body* (1 Cor. 11:29).

Because the Corinthians at Corinth lacked unity (a theme introduced in the first chapter of this book—1:10), it is not surprising to find in the next chapter (11:20) Paul saying it was “impossible to eat the Lord’s Supper” (ASV). How could there be “one Supper” or “one Jesus” in a congregation filled with division? Paul’s point also stands in stark contrast to the various “Christian” denominations found throughout the world. Many think and act as if God approves of and is the head of the various denominations. God says this is not true (compare 1 Cor. 14:33). God has only one body (Eph. 4:4) and insists that people be part of this single body or face eternal separation from Him (Mt. 15:13).

Since the ideas of one body and one Supper are joined together by God, it must be asked how any group of believers can partake of the Lord’s Supper once a year, twice a year, or even twelve times a year and claim to be “one body.” If a religious group partakes of the Supper once a month, it is a single body “once a month.” Partaking of the Lord’s Supper once a year means a group is one body “once a year.” As shown in the introductory comments on verse 16 as well as the commentary on 11:20b, the Lord’s Supper is to be carried out on every first day of the week (every Sunday). This is one of the ways a congregation truly shows it is “one body.” Here the practice of every Sunday Communion is expressed with two

present tense verbs. We “*are*” (present tense) one body because we “*partake*” (present tense) of the Lord’s Supper. Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is a regular part of Sunday worship.

When Christians take part in the Lord’s Supper, they do more than “participate” in this activity; Paul said they “partake” of it. *Partake (metecho)*, as noted in the preceding paragraph, is a present tense verb and it is used only in this book (9:1, 12; 10:21, 30) and the book of Hebrews (2:14; 5:13; 7:13—“belongeth” is how the word is translated in this final verse). Here in 1 Cor. 10:17, *partake* is virtually synonymous with the word “Communion” in verse 16. As previously shown in verse 16, the Lord’s Supper (Communion) is a time of fellowship; it is when “*many*” (the entire congregation) become “*one*.” Christians are in fellowship with Jesus (Mt. 26:29) as well as one another (compare Acts 2:42; 4:32a).

This author does not want to leave the impression that Communion is the only thing that binds Christians together. While it is true that verses like Acts 20:7 say Christians came together “*to break bread*” (*to* indicates a reason or purpose), *break bread* in Acts 20:7 stands for all the other acts of worship, including partaking of the fruit of the vine. Every other part of worship is just as critical and involved with unifying Christians. *Singing* is spoken of as activity done to “one another” as well as “unto God” (Col. 3:16). *Praying* is certainly done unto God and is an act in which all should participate (1 Cor. 14:16). *Preaching* glorifies God and is for all who assemble (Jude 20). All also participate in *giving* (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Christianity places much emphasis on Christians being joined together in one body. Readers may also wish to compare Rom. 15:6 and Jn. 17:21.

If religious activities such as the Lord’s Supper create *oneness*, what was true for the Corinthians who participated in idolatrous religious festivities? Participation in heathen religious festivals was tantamount to direct involvement with idolatry. Christians at Corinth were becoming *one* with a pagan deity and the one true God did not approve. If the Corinthians really understood the Lord’s Supper, they had to believe that any involvement with idolatry was wrong. Paul illustrated this point in the following verse by appealing to the Old Testament nation of Israel.

**10:18:** *Behold Israel after the flesh: have not they that eat the sacrifices communion with the altar?*

“*Israel after the flesh*” described the descendants of Abraham and especially the Old Testament nation of Israel. When the Old Testament law was in effect (compare Rom. 10:4), worshippers were sometimes allowed to eat part of the sacrifice (compare Deut. 12:17-18 and Lev. 16:27). Whenever part of the sacrifice was eaten, those who partook of the food were “*communing with*” (*koinonos*) “*the altar*” (the KJV says “*partakers*”). *Communing with* means “that in which one shares or how or whose partner one is” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:303). In the first century world men believed “there was nothing which unites man and man, and man and God, more than eating and drinking” (Brown, 2:520).

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) a wife is called the *koinonos* of her husband (one who shared things with him), Mal. 2:14. Other passages in the Septuagint speak of caution when it comes to “partaking” with ungodly companions (see this illustrated in Isa. 1:23). Another passage that uses the word *communion (koinonos)* is Lk. 5:10 (here the term describes a business partnership). In 1 Cor. 10:18 Paul meant those who ate part of the sacrifice were also part of the process (they shared in it and thus had fellowship or union with the deity being honored). For other places in the New Testament that have the word *koinonos* (“communing with”) and the same meaning as 1 Cor. 10:18, see verse 20 in this chapter; 1 Pet. 5:1; Heb. 10:33. Verse 18 tells us that eating part of the Old Testament sacrifices was a very important activity.

When the Corinthians had the Lord’s Supper (verse 16), they were engaging in *fellowship (koinonos)* with other worshippers as well as God, just as Israel had done under the Old Testament system. This principle is also found in the Old Testament feast known as *Passover*. According to Ex. 12:43-49, non-Hebrews were forbidden from partaking of the Passover. Non-Hebrews could not join in this feast because that would have meant they were in *fellowship with deity*. This feast was for God’s covenant people (the Jews) and not foreigners (Ex. 19:5-8). Believing that a religious ritual such as a meal put one into contact with deity was such an established principle that D. A. Carson (The Gospel According to

John, p. 362) said, “when a pregnant woman worships in a pagan temple her unborn fetus was regarded as participating in the pagan rite.” Pagans were doing a similar thing with their idols (compare verse 21) and this principle now applies to Christians. Jesus made this clear in Mt. 26:29: “*But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom*” (when we have the Lord’s Supper, we are in fellowship with deity).

Since both Jesus and Paul affirmed that the Lord’s Supper is a specific way of having fellowship with God, it is unthinkable for a Christian to worship in a place which does not have the Lord’s Supper each Sunday. Just as the Jews would have been disassociated with Israel’s altar had they not partaken of the feast, so those who are Christians are disassociated with God by not regularly observing the Lord’s Supper.

**10:19-20:** *What say I then? that a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 But (I say), that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have communion with demons.*

Paul knew the preceding information in this chapter might be questioned. Some of the Corinthians may have felt he was telling them two different things. In 8:4-6 Paul said there is no such thing as an idol because there is only one true God. In the preceding verses of this chapter he said people could be in fellowship with an idol. Which view is correct?

The Corinthians likely regarded idolatry as an illusion and therefore powerless. Since they did not attach any religious significance to idolatry, they, out of friendship or social obligations, attended idol festivals. Paul not only spoke against this practice, he anticipated how the Corinthians might object to his teaching and answered their potential objections in this chapter. Here in verse 19 he said his earlier comments were correct (i.e. there is only one true God). He also again affirmed that idols are false gods; as pieces of wood and stone they are powerless.

What the Corinthians may not have understood or remembered is the *power* behind false gods (verse 20). Demons are at the root of idolatry and this is one of the major reasons why idolatry is wrong. Other Bible writers who spoke of the connection between demons and idolatry were Moses (Deut. 32:16-17), a psalmist (Ps. 106:36-37), and the apostle John (Rev. 9:20). Although it is possible to have “*communion*” (*fellowship*, KJV) with demons (verse 20), this is not something Christians do. For information on *communion*, see the commentary on verse 18.

Verse 20 reminds us that idols are merely a “front” for Satan and his helpers. Anytime a person worships someone or something other than the one true God he (1) is guilty of idolatry, (2) ultimately worships Satan instead of God, (3) is classified as “unrighteous,” and (4) will perish eternally unless he repents (these final two points are taught in 1 Cor. 6:9). In another letter (Col. 3:5) Paul said false worship does not always require or involve a lifeless image. When anything is elevated above the Creator, the end result is idolatry.

Verse 20 also reminds that being religious is not enough; we must be religiously right. Jesus affirmed this when He said we must worship in “spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24). This means we have the right object (God) and we do things in the way God has prescribed. Sadly, untold millions are involved in idol worship (compare Acts 14:15; 1 Cor. 12:2; 1 Thess. 1:9). Satan desires to be worshipped (Mt. 4:9), so he tries to take away the truth so men will believe a lie (Lk. 8:12; Jn. 8:44). One lie is the acceptability of idol worship (1 Cor. 10:20). Satan offers a “broad” range of options to turn most people away from God (Mt. 7:13). Two of the devil’s most effective methods are perversions of Christianity (denominationalism) and lifeless idols. Those who accept Satan’s ways—knowingly or not—will have no excuse at the coming judgment day (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

At the end of verse 20 these Christians were reminded that God does not want people to worship devils (1 Cor. 10:20b). This thought is more fully explained in the comments on verse 21.

**10:21:** *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot partake of the table of the*

### *Lord, and of the table of demons.*

This passage has been called a “*moral impossibility*” and this is a good description of the verse. It is impossible for someone to be in fellowship with God and Satan at the same time (compare Mt. 6:24; Jas. 4:4; 2 Cor. 6:14). Being joined to both God and Satan at the same time is not only a logical contradiction, such a union would be spiritual adultery. Thus, the Corinthians had to cease every type of contact with idolatry (see again verse 20 where Paul said idolatry is associated with demonic forces).

Paul described man’s fellowship with God and the occult with the word “*cup*” (*poterion*). This term is also used in verse 16 and 11:25, 26, 27, 28. *Cup of the Lord* means the Lord’s Supper is “received at His direction” and signifies our “allegiance to Him” (The Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:866).

Drinking from a common cup was an ancient way of symbolizing fellowship between deity and man; this was a common practice among the heathens. The Beacon Bible Commentary (10:410) noted how the “cup of demons was the climax of heathen banquets, in which a threefold toast was made in honor of the gods.” Imagine being in an assembly where there was not only a toast to a pagan god, but the deity was actually prayed to and praised. Such an environment would be the wrong type of place for a Christian.

Rather than be involved with honoring heathen deities and false religion, God wants all people to “*drink*” and “*partake*” of the Lord’s Supper. Since each of these words is a present tense verb (the present tense is also used in 11:25 to describe the Lord’s Supper), this is even more proof that God intends for the Lord’s Supper to be observed on a regular basis (every Sunday. For more information on why Christians observe the Lord’s Supper each Sunday see the introductory comments on 10:16 and the commentary on 11:20b). By using the present tense with *drink* and *partake* in this verse, Paul made another point: It is continuously impossible to be joined to Jesus and a false god or religion. God will not tolerate mixing New Testament Christianity with some other type of religion or deity (see again the rat poison illustration in the commentary on 10:15).

Since *cup* in this verse describes fellowship, we know it is possible to have fellowship with Satan (*cup of demons*). Satan has a definite interest in man, though he is never man’s friend (compare Jn. 8:44). Satan uses people for his purposes and casts them aside when they can no longer serve his purposes. Satan is very active (1 Pet. 5:8), but he does not work by himself. He has some helpers to carry out his will and Paul referred to these assistants as “*demons*” (*daimonion*). Although this word is used quite a few times in the New Testament, we do not know much about these creatures. As the Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible (p. 163) noted, “When demons were created, how they came to be demonic, and their organizational structure are not given significant attention in Scripture because the focus throughout the Bible is on God and his work in Christ rather than on the demonic attempts to demean that work.”

Aside from Old Testament references to demons and four references in the book of Acts, every reference to demons is found in the Gospels. Satan and his helpers were very active during the first century, even to the point of inhabiting people (Lk. 11:24-26). Demon possession was apparently permitted in first century times to allow Jesus and the apostles to fully establish their authority and confirm the coming of the New Testament (Mk. 16:17, 20; 1 Jn. 4:4). Each time we read about demon possession we also read about the ability to cast out these evil forces. Since the age of supernatural things is past (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:8-13), demon possession as well as the power to cast out demons is gone.

Although Satan and his helpers are still active (Eph. 6:16) and can be successfully resisted (Jas. 4:7), there are those who are part of his “synagogue” (Rev. 2:9). We also find people who are willing to embrace and follow “demonic doctrines” (1 Tim. 4:1). Satan is not powerless and his helpers are not limited to demons. In the Second Corinthian letter Paul specifically said some of Satan’s helpers are human beings—false apostles who appeared to live righteous lives (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

The end of this verse repeats the thought by using a different example (a “*table*”). *Table* (*trapeze*) means “intimate fellowship with God.” Today, Christians often appropriately refer to the Lord’s Supper as the “*Table of the Lord*” or “*the Lord’s Table*.”

Although this is not signified by the original word, *table* reminds us of a key difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Under the Old Testament system there were special places like a

temple and altar. With the New Testament, we do not need a special place to worship or need special utensils. The Lord's Supper may be served regardless of place and furnishings and it does not need to be elaborate. Remember, also, this point: The "table" is the *Lord's*, not ours. Because the Communion is of the Lord, we are to examine "ourselves," not others (1 Cor. 11:28). We have no right to decide who may and may not participate in this or any other part of worship. For more information on this point see the "common questions on the Lord's Supper" at the end of the commentary on 11:20b.

**10:22:** *Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?*

In studying this verse we should bear in mind the relationship that Christ has with the church (it is described as His *bride*, Eph. 5:22-32). Prior to the New Testament era the nation of Israel used to be God's bride (Ezek. 16). Now the New Testament church is pictured in this way and the "marriage" of the Lord and the church (Christians) will be culminated at the end of time. Paul's asking the Corinthians if they were trying to "*provoke the Lord to jealousy*" is based on the imagery of Eph. 5:22-32. It is equivalent to asking if a man would be angered by his fiancée (wife) joining herself to someone else. As a man would be angry with an unfaithful fiancé or spouse, so God was angered by the Corinthians' association with false gods, deities that were actually the basis for demon worship (compare verse 20).

*Provoke (parazelo)* is a present tense verb and it suggests continued provocation or prodding. God is a "jealous God" (Ex. 20:5), so flirting with or outright association with idols was a very bad choice. As shown in the commentary on verses 7-8, the nation of Israel learned this point the hard way. This argument adds to the previous ones concerning the need to abandon all involvement with idolatry (compare verse 14).

At the end of verse 22 we find another question: *Are we stronger than God?* If the Corinthians persisted in their involvement with idols, God would dispense justice. Moreover, if God did punish the Corinthians for their involvement with idols, would these Christians be able to withstand His judgment (retribution)? Would an idol deliver them from God's wrath? Unless the Corinthians were as strong as God, they needed to quickly and fully flee from all forms of idolatry. *Stronger (ischuros)* is the same term used in 1 Cor. 1:25. There Paul said the *weakness of God* is still *stronger* than all of man's power and abilities.

**10:23-24:** *All things are lawful; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful; but not all things edify. 24 Let no man seek his own, but (each) his neighbor's (good).*

The wording in verse 23 is also found in 6:12. In the commentary on 6:12 it was shown how the Corinthians were arguing "*all things are lawful*" (a Christian is entitled to do whatever he wants). In the sixth chapter the "all things are lawful argument" was associated with sexual activity. Here we find the Corinthians applying this faulty logic to idolatry. Since the Corinthians believed "all things are lawful," they had no qualms about being involved with false gods and engaging in idolatrous practices. The present tense in 6:12 as well as here reinforces the fact that these Christians believed *all things* are *always lawful* (permissible) for a child of God. Paul knew this was bad reasoning and part of his correction is found in the words, *not all things are expedient* (good, wise, proper, and acceptable to God).

Christians are to "speak and do" (Jas. 2:12) what is contained in the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25), but the Corinthians felt as if they were not under any law. Today some Christians express a similar viewpoint when they say Christians are "not under law but under grace." Paul did make this statement (Rom. 6:14), but the meaning of these words is *not under law as a system of justification*. Christians are under law and this law is described as the *doctrine of God and Christ* (2 Jn. 9; Tit. 2:10), the *gospel of God* (Rom. 1:1), the *power of God unto salvation* (Rom. 1:16), and the *gospel of the kingdom* (Mt. 4:23). The *perfect law of liberty* in Jas. 1:25 is synonymous with *the truth* (Jn. 17:17), the *word of God* (Acts 4:31), the *word of life* (Phil. 2:16), the *traditions* given to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:15), the *pattern of sound words* (2 Tim. 1:13), and the *word of grace* (Acts 20:32). It is called the *law of Christ* in Gal. 6:2.

We can become “all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:22) in all the ways consistent with Christ’s example and His teaching through the apostles (1 Cor. 11:1; 15:1-2). If we do not abide by God’s word, we are building our spiritual life on a bad foundation (Mt. 7:24-27).

If people do not reason *all things are lawful* or *we are under grace instead of law*, they may say, “Let your conscience be your guide.” To this belief we may reply with the same principle given by Paul: *The conscience may be your guide, but not all things approved of by the conscience are expedient* (i.e. a proper choice). Rather than being guided by the conscience, as the preceding paragraph shows, we must rely upon God’s word (Jn. 8:31) because it is what “frees” us (Jn. 8:32). Too, a person’s conscience may be “seared” (1 Tim. 4:2). Because we will be judged by the Scriptures (Jn. 12:48), this is the standard by which we must live. Jesus once said His words are “life” (Jn. 6:63). This implies that not following His words will result in spiritual death. If we are ashamed of Jesus’ words, Jesus will be ashamed of us (Mk. 8:38).

In addition to affirming that everything is not *expedient*, Paul said some things do not “edify” (*oikodomeo*). In this book *edify* is used only here, 8:1, 10. In this passage *edify* is a present tense verb and it means “to cause to advance spiritually” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 421). This word tells us some actions are not helpful to the church as a whole or helpful to individual Christians. Here the exact point under consideration is involvement with a feast associated with idolatry. Even if it was not wrong to attend idol festivals, this type of activity is not helpful (beneficial) for Christians. This one fact allowed Paul to condemn any association with idolatry.

We know there were “*weak*” members of this congregation (8:12) and these Christians were troubled by fellow brethren attending pagan festivals. Since weaker brethren were being damaged by this practice (there was either no or a very limited amount of *edification*), this was one more reason to not participate in these heathen feasts. Strong Christians should have been *edifying* weaker Christians, but their attendance at idol feasts was promoting spiritual retardation instead of spiritual advancement. Today we may still profit from and apply this principle. We may not be able to use a specific passage to condemn certain acts, attitudes and choices, but things that tear down or negatively impact the faith of fellow Christians (or hurt our influence with the unsaved) *do not edify* and should be avoided.

Paul made his point even more forcefully in verse 24 (“*let no man seek his own*”). *No man (medeis)* is used in almost every New Testament book. This “no” (which is also found in verse 25) is absolute; it means *no one* or *nothing*. A good illustration of the word is found in Acts 19:40 (there was *no basis* for Jesus’ death). Heaven had a plan involving the Lord’s death, but there was “no” earthly (criminal) basis for Jesus’ death. *No* in verse 24 has the sense of *absolutely no one*. Paul further stressed the thought with a present tense verb “*seek*” (*zeteo*). That is, not a single member of this congregation was allowed to put his or her interests first (compare Phil. 2:4). Every Christian was ordered to continually seek what would edify his or her brethren (it was God’s will that they build up instead of destroy fellow saints).

In verse 24 Paul condemned every form of self-seeking behavior. Today, if personal enjoyment is our first concern, our priorities are out of order and we are guilty of sin. Someone correctly once said, God first, others second, self last. For the Christian, this is the right way to live. We may also compare verse 24 to 1 Cor. 13:5 (instead of thinking just about self, Christians are to put others, especially Christians, before themselves). This is the “servant mentality” often spoken of by Jesus (Mt. 20:27; 23:11; 24:46; 25:21).

Verse 24 brings to a close the discussion about idolatry in the preceding verses. Paul had thoroughly covered this matter so he was ready to deal with a related issue—buying meat in the market place. How could Christians know if the meat they were buying had been previously used in an idol sacrifice? Did this knowledge even matter? This information is discussed in verses 25-26. What if Christians were invited to a friend’s house and meat was part of the meal? If the meat had come from a shop that sold leftover idol meat, would this matter? Would Christians need to know the history of all the food being served at a meal? This information is discussed in verse 27. A third and final topic is a “religious dinner.” If food had somehow been previously associated with an idol (likely leftover meat from an idol sacrifice), what was a Christian to do? This information is discussed in verses 28-30.

**10:25-26:** *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, eat, asking no question for conscience' sake, 26 for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.*

The word “*shambles*” (*makellon*) is found only here in the New Testament; it probably referred to a meat or food market. Several translations actually say “meat market” (NKJV, NIV, NASB, RSV). Kittel (4:370) said this described a “rectangular court of pillars with a fountain in the middle and over it, supported by the pillars, a dome shaped roof.” Shoppers went to the shambles to buy meat, and some of food offered for sale was leftover meat offered to idols. The price may have been quite good since it was leftover and the quality should have been excellent because heathens would have chosen the best meat for their sacrifices.

If the Corinthians had the right to eat this meat (and this is what Paul affirmed), they also had the right to *buy* this food. If Christians did choose to purchase this food, Paul instructed them to not ask any questions about it. Asking where the meat came from or if it had been involved with an idol sacrifice served no useful purpose. Ignorance is usually not a good thing, but there are times when it is helpful and right (Rom. 16:19; Eccl. 1:18). By remaining ignorant about inconsequential matters people can often prevent their conscience from being unnecessarily burdened and avoid things such as guilt and worry.

Paul really emphasized this point for Christian grocery shoppers by saying: “*Asking no questions.*” For information on the word translated “*no*” (*medeis*), see the previous commentary on verse 24. The word translated “*asking*” (*anakrino*) is a present tense verb that meant “examine, judge, investigate, inquire.” This is the same term used in Acts 17:11 (people *examined* the Scriptures daily). Outside of a few references in the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, this term is only found in the First Corinthian letter (2:14, 15; 4:3, 4; 9:3; 10:27; 14:24). “Since all of God’s creation is good, Paul saw no reason for believers (them or us) to place themselves in a position of potential guilt by inquiring about the origin of the meat (cf. Acts 10:15; 1 Cor. 8:4ff.)” (CBL, GED, 1:228).

At the end of verse 25 Paul spoke of the “*conscience*” (*suneidesis*). Man’s *conscience* is the interior faculty for the personal discernment of good and evil. “Conscience is that faculty in man by which he distinguishes between the morally right and wrong, which urges him to do that which he recognizes to be right and restrains him from doing that which he recognizes to be wrong, which passes judgment on his acts and executes that judgment within his soul” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 136). God wants people to have a *clean* conscience (1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; Heb. 10:22). More information about the conscience may be found in the commentary on 1 Tim. 1:5.

The 26<sup>th</sup> verse explains why the Corinthians did not need to ask about the source of the meat (the whole earth belongs to God, Ps. 24:1). Hence, even if Christians bought meat that had been offered to an idol, it was not religiously tainted or contaminated because it ultimately belonged to God (Gen. 9:3). Stated another way, the meat was a neutral product (1 Tim. 4:4-5). If anyone would be faulted or condemned for buying and eating the idol meat, the blame was on those who used it for idol worship. Meat, like many other things, can be used for good or evil and Jesus has declared “all meats clean” (Mk. 7:19b, ASV). Christians could buy and eat the meat (compare Acts 10:15), even if heathens thought it had come from a pagan god, but Christians could not participate in the idol feasts where the meat was being used or celebrations were being held (verses 20-21).

Not asking about where the meat came from may have had an added benefit for the Corinthians. If Christians asked about the source of meat, some of the shopkeepers might have viewed God’s people as eccentric or weird. Christians are to be different, but *different* does not mean bizarre. Christians are to leave a good impression with the unsaved (Phil. 2:15). If God’s people were always asking about the source of meat when they went to the store (i.e. had it been part of an idol sacrifice), they would have been a source of irritation, gained a bad reputation, and hindered the spread of the gospel. To prevent a wide variety of problems Paul said, “Ask no questions.”

**10:27:** *If one of them that believe not biddeth you (to a feast), and ye are disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience' sake.*



Verses 25-26 told the Corinthians what to do when shopping for food. Here in verse 27 as well as verse 28 Paul dealt with a related matter: What should Christians do if exposed to idol food in social settings? Suppose a Christian went to an unsaved person's house for a meal (someone who "*believed not*"). An invitation had been offered to eat with someone who was not a member of the church and the Christian was "*disposed to go*" (accept the invitation). Would the Christian need to ask the unsaved friend if some part of the meal had previously been part of an idol sacrifice? Did a Christian need to know the history of every food item on the table? If a Christian did ask about the history of the food and was told some of it had been used in a pagan sacrifice, would he need to leave the home? Could he stay and eat the food? What were the rules when dealing with unsaved people? The *unbelievers* (*apistos*) are mentioned quite often in this book (for all the references to them see 6:6; 7:12, 13, 14, 15; 14:22, 23, 24).

The question asked in the first part of verse 27 is now answered clearly and concisely at the end of this verse. Paul said, eat "*whatsoever is set before you*" and ask "*no question for conscience' sake*" (the NASB says "*eat anything that is set before you*"). In other words, all food was acceptable. This is the exact same advice Paul gave in verse 25 where he discussed buying meat in the market place (i.e. Christians did not need to ask merchants if their food was leftover from an idol sacrifice). If Christians had a grateful attitude for the food, they could purchase and eat; nothing else was required. In fact, if they asked a host if the meat had been previously used in an idol sacrifice, a Christian risked giving some credibility to an idol. The word "*no*" (*medeis*) in *asking no question* is explained in the commentary on verse 24. Information about the *conscience* may be found in the commentary on verses 25-26.

**10:28:** *But if any man say unto you, This hath been offered in sacrifice, eat not, for his sake that showed it, and for conscience sake:*

Like verse 27, this verse deals with eating a meal at the house of someone else (presumably an unsaved person), but there is a slight shift in the circumstances. At some point before or during the meal, someone said a food item had "*been offered in sacrifice*" (i.e. an idol sacrifice). A host could have said to his friends (some of whom were surely Christians), "We have excellent meat for you to eat. It is all that remains from my sacrifice earlier this afternoon. Since you are my special friends, I want you to enjoy it with me." If Christians were asked to eat food someone specifically told them had been used in a pagan sacrifice, how should they respond? What if they were actually in a person's home and this information was made known just before or during the meal? What if a snooping Christian (compare verses 25 and 27, "*asking no questions*") discovered this information and related it to a fellow church member?

In cases where someone specifically said food items had come from a pagan sacrifice, Paul said "*eat not*." This instruction is very clear and we can give at least three reasons for this rule. First, non-Christian hosts have sometimes tested Christian guests with food and drink. In some of my foreign missionary work, I have been offered alcohol (my hosts wanted to see what a man professing Christianity would do). My choice has been to politely refuse these offers and in some cases I later learned I was being tested. In one case a Russian woman said after my respectful decline, "You must be a good man."

A second reason for not eating this type of food involved fellow Christians. As noted in the commentary on verse 29, it is possible to behave in a way that damages the conscience of a fellow Christian. Suppose a fellow church member knew some of the food had been offered to an idol and was not comfortable eating it. We know he (or some other Christian) is not comfortable with this food, but we eat it anyway and we damage the conscience of a weaker Christian. This is not only wrong, it is so bad Paul said Christians need to forego the food in these types of situations (see 8:13 and the commentary on that passage). A third reason for not eating this food was based on fellowship. Just as Christians were not allowed to fellowship unrepentant Christians involved with sin (1 Cor. 5:1-7), so God's people were to avoid anything that hinted at their fellowship with or support of idols. "Before an unbelieving host or family, the Christian would be closely watched" (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 391).

We may not know exactly who was telling guests about what food had been offered to idols, but we do

know this was being done. “*Showed*” (*menuo*) means “the man *who had made known/revealed*” that the meat had been offered to idols” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:424). People were making it their business to bring this fact to light.

The expression *offered in sacrifice* is translated from a single word, though manuscripts disagree on what this term is. Some manuscripts use the word found in Acts 15:29 (“*that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Fare ye well*”). This term (*eidolothutos*) is also found in places such as Acts 21:25; Rev. 2:14, 20, etc.

Other manuscripts for verse 28 contain a different word for sacrifice (*hierothutos*). This second term is an adjective and, as noted in the commentary on 8:1, serves as a contrast between how pagans and Christians regarded idols (see the commentary on 8:1 for a fuller explanation of this point). If this second term is the one Paul intended to use, it suggests that Christians who ate this meat, even though they had been specifically told it had been sacrificed to idols, gave a type of “endorsement” to idolatry and this could wound the conscience of fellow Christians present at the meal (verse 29a). Christians must be very careful about their actions because the things they do (or refuse to do) may constitute endorsement of an evil practice.

By telling Christians how to act in social settings we find a very practical point. First century disciples did not leave or abandon their unsaved friends. They did not always do what their non-Christian associates did, but Christians did not end all contact with the world. Today fellowship with non-Christians is not only important, it is necessary (1 Cor. 5:9-10). How can we evangelize the unsaved (Mt. 28:19) if we avoid them?

Those who use the KJV will see that verse 28 has some additional information. The additional words are: “*for the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof*.” This added information (which is also found in verse 26) is due to a manuscript variation. The NKJV also includes it as part of the text. If this reading is accepted, the meaning is identical to verse 26.

**10:29-30:** *conscience, I say, not thine own, but the other’s; for why is my liberty judged by another conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?*

Some of the Corinthian Christians had no qualms about eating food (verses 25-26), even if it had been used in an idol sacrifice (verse 27). Other Christians, however, did have “*conscience*” problems if they knew some of the food had been used in an idol sacrifice (verse 29). Thus, the first part of verse 29 means: “You may not be personally opposed to eating food you know has been offered to an idol, but other Christians may be bothered with this activity.”

The end of verse 29 and all of verse 30 contain some of the questions the Corinthians were asking or would want to ask about the preceding information. That is, if Christians were comfortable eating food they knew had been part of a pagan sacrifice, why was their “*liberty*” (the right to eat this food) being interfered with by others (29b)? If they could eat and be thankful for meat they knew had been offered to idols, why should anyone object to what they were doing (verse 30)? Strong Christians were eating this food with “*thankfulness*” (the KJV says “*grace*”), but some fellow Christians were speaking “evil” of them.

Being “*evil spoken of*” in the middle of verse 30 comes from a single word (*blasphemeo*) that is usually translated *blasphemy*. Although this term is not used in Mt. 12 when Jesus spoke about blaspheming the Holy Spirit, it is used in Mark’s discussion of blaspheming the Spirit (Mk. 3:29). This word is used 35 times in the New Testament and it meant “slander, accuse wrongfully” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:219). Here it can be understood as “*to be evil spoken of, reviled, railed at*” (Thayer, p. 102).

Some of the food being eaten by the Corinthian Christians was causing conscience problems for fellow saints; Paul said this problem had to stop. If this sounds silly to us, just think of the church problems that still occur over “small things.” Christians are often bothered by simple and even silly things. This author has heard Christians strongly disagree on things like the “right way” to dispose of unwanted clothing and

household items (is it okay to donate these items to an organization that will sell them to others, or should we seek an organization that will give away our unwanted items to others for free?).

These two verses remind us that some things in life are not wrong, but special circumstances may limit what we do or actually prohibit some things that are not inherently wrong. In cases where our actions suggest a moral or doctrinal compromise, Christians forego some liberties (i.e. avoid what is causing others to stumble). At Corinth this meant avoiding food Christians knew had been sacrificed to an idol. Even if Paul had not explained this point in this letter, common sense should have forbidden participation in eating food that believers knew had been sacrificed to an idol. No Christian would ever want to implicitly or explicitly endorse idolatry or any other sin.

Earlier in the letter (1 Cor. 8:4-6) Paul said an “idol is nothing.” While many of these Christians had come to realize this point, not all were comfortable with this inspired teaching. Christians who were not yet at ease with this conclusion had serious issues with fellow saints who ate food they knew had been used in a pagan sacrifice. Because Christians disagreed on this issue, there was the potential for brethren to be abusive towards one another. Christians who wanted to eat the meat may have said those who opposed the practice were ignorant and weak in the faith. Christians who did not want to eat this meat may have said saints who ate it were hypocrites and sacrilegious. While it is wrong, there have been times when Christians have acted very viciously towards one another (compare Gal. 5:15 where Paul described animal-like behavior).

We may not struggle with the same issue as the Corinthians, but the principle in this chapter has lasting value. All Christians must seek to live in a way where they avoid creating problems/issues for others, especially fellow Christians. In some cases we accomplish this by temporarily or permanently avoiding things that trouble a fellow Christian’s conscience.

**10:31-32:** *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no occasions of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God:*

The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:412) does a good job at capturing the thought in verse 31: “In activities which are not specifically good or evil but left to the Christian conscience, the primary question should not be: What is most satisfying or desirable to me? The question should be: What will bring honor to God’s cause?” Since Christians are to love God supremely and love others as themselves (compare Mt. 22:37-39), they want to do everything possible to be exalt Christ and His people. At Corinth this meant Christians would not eat meat they knew had been sacrificed to an idol because this choice would be an “occasion of stumbling” (verse 32).

If we are a Christian, one of our primary goals in life is to “*glorify*” God in “*all*” things. We do not and cannot glorify God if we are a troublemaker in society or in God’s church. We glorify God by doing God’s will, part of which is expressed by Paul in Tit. 2:2-9. “The highest duty of man is to glorify and praise God in worship, word and act (Matt. 5:16; Rom. 1:21; 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31)” (Brown, 2:47). Christians will never add to God’s glory, but they can recognize and acknowledge it (i.e. praise God and exalt Him in our lives). We accomplish this with our body (1 Cor. 6:20), our mouth (Rom. 15:6; Heb. 13:15) and by Jesus’ authority (1 Pet. 4:11). In Rom. 12:1 Paul spoke of our glorifying God by being a “living sacrifice.” As noted in this author’s commentary on this verse, this does not mean “barely alive.”

“Each truly glorifies God when each acts according to the full measure of his knowledge and his love, and when he seeks constantly to increase that knowledge and that love. We do all things for ‘God’s glory’ when the excellence of God’s attributes is made to shine forth by our actions so that men may see it” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 425). Readers may also wish to compare Heb. 13:15 and the commentary on this passage as well as make a list of things that hamper and/or obstruct glorifying God, things that bring dishonor to God, and specific acts that help Christians praise and elevate God to the unsaved.

The word “*stumbling*” (*aproskopos*) in verse 32 is rendered “*offence*” in the KJV. This word is only found here, Phil. 1:10; Acts 24:16. Here Thayer (p. 70) said it means “*not leading others into sin by one’s mode of life.*” This term tells us Christians can make choices that have a negative impact on others, especially fellow church members. Because God carefully watches what His people do and say,

Christians must always guard against injuring their brethren. Such is especially true for Christians who are new and weak (Mt. 18:6-7). By using this word Paul meant Christians want “to be blameless before everyone” (CBL, GED, 1:413).

At the end of verse 32 the need to glorify God instead of create trouble (*stumbling*) in and out of the church is joined with three different groups of people: “*Jews*,” “*Greeks*,” (the KJV says “*Gentiles*”), and “*the church of God*” (i.e. Christians). The “word ‘*Jews*’ refers to the unsaved Jews, the title ‘*Gentiles*’ applies to the unsaved Gentiles, and the phrase ‘church of God’ incorporates both saved Jews and saved Gentiles” (Gromacki, p. 130). These three descriptions included everyone the Corinthians or anyone else would ever meet.

By referring to all people Paul meant Christians continually seek to be the best possible example to every possible person and they seek to glorify God as fully and as often as possible. This is an enormous responsibility and it means Christians should always be quick to carefully weigh and consider what they say and do because their choices and actions affect other people and may reflect badly on the Christian faith. If our actions wound fellow Christians (verse 29), we are not glorifying God (verse 31). If and when this happens, we must cease involvement with whatever activity (belief) is injuring a fellow saint. “No believer should make himself an obstacle to the salvation of any sinner or to the edification of any saint” (Gromacki, p. 130). This information does not mean Christians can set aside parts of the Bible because certain Scriptures bother someone (see the commentary on 4:20-21). Paul had in mind matters of judgment (personal choices people make). This point is more fully discussed in this author’s commentary on Rom. 14, especially Rom. 14:17-18 and the introductory comments on Rom. 14.

Barclay (First Corinthians, p. 105) used the Jews, Greeks, and church members to offer some practical points of application, though his application is not what Paul originally intended. Barclay compared the **Jews** to enemies of the gospel and suggested this teaches us to be a good example to our enemies. Even though we may be hated and scorned, we, like Jesus, try to help our enemies find eternal life (compare Jn. 8:40). The Corinthians also had a duty to the **Greeks** (these may be compared to people who are indifferent to the faith). Some have no interest in the church, but we must continue to patiently work with and hold out hope for them until all opportunities are gone (compare Mt. 23:37). We even have a duty to **fellow church members**. We are part of the church built by Christ, so our actions have a positive or negative impact on fellow Christians. Our interaction with fellow Christians is either uplifting or destructive, and we should consider if we are a church builder or a church wrecker. Are we helping build up our local congregation through loving and faithful service, or are we one of the devil’s helpers because we are uninvolved or a troublemaker in the place where we worship?

**10:33:** *even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the (profit) of the many, that they may be saved.*

In this final verse Paul said he lived (abided by) the message he preached. He not only “talked the talk,” he “walked the walk.” He strove to “*please all men in all things*,” did not seek his “*own profit*,” and tried to “*profit many*” so people would be “*saved*.” Here he claimed he was as accommodating as he could possibly be to win people to Christ (compare 1 Cor. 9:22b). “The highest principle of conduct and of Christian liberty is not self-expression, but consideration for the good of others. If the Christian seeks the best interest of others, he will not put his own judgment or interests ahead of theirs” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:411).

As noted in the commentary on 9:20, 22, *pleasing all men in all things* does not mean or allow us to compromise the gospel or do something the Bible condemns. This author once read about a minister who made a follow-up contact with a woman who had responded to an evangelistic campaign. The young lady was a stripper and she invited the minister to her place of employment (the strip club). The minister, in the name of evangelism, went to the club and the young lady invited him to watch her dance and undress. The minister incorrectly granted her requests on the basis of 1 Cor. 9:20, 22 and the present verse.

Other Bible believing people have engaged in smoking, drinking and carousing with non-Christians to “become all things to all men.” While these examples are certainly a creative application of what Paul

said, they are completely contrary to what God meant. Jesus and the apostles did not become involved with sin to save people. Imagine Joseph (Gen. 39:1-13) having sexual relations with Potiphar's wife "in order to eventually teach her what was right."

We are to be friendly with the unsaved (1 Cor. 5:9-10), but not involve ourselves with their sins. Peter (1 Peter 1:14-16) said, "*as children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in (the time of) your ignorance: but like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.*" We blend in with a person's beliefs and culture as fully as possible, but this is never done at the expense of violating some part of God's word—even if it seems like we are violating a "small part" of the Scriptures.

The word *please* (*aresko*) is used of the dance that *pleased* King Herod (Mt. 14:6) and of husbands and wives *pleasing* each other (1 Cor. 7:33-34). In 1 Cor. 7:32 it describes pleasing God. Here it is a present tense verb and it means Paul attempted "to please Jews and Greeks in his ministry in order to save everyone" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:151). The same is true for the word "*seeking*" (it is also a present tense verb). *Seeking* (*sumphero*) "refers to the ultimate good and not necessarily the good of the present situation" (CBL, GED, 6:167). "For the apostle Paul the spiritual benefit became the touchstone for all experience" (ibid). Stated another way, Paul's concern was for the welfare and growth of the church as well as reaching the lost. He was not primarily interested in his own personal benefit, gain and comfort (compare 2 Cor. 11:23-28). Such must also be our attitude as we seek to live the Christian life. We put God first, others second, and self last (Mt. 22:37-39; Phil. 2:4).