



1 CORINTHIANS

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11:1

INTRODUCTION

Paul has used the controversial issue of eating in pagan temples to teach on Christian freedom and love. In chapter 8, he argued that Christ-like love forbids us to do anything, however lawful, if it will harm other believers. We ought to be more concerned with building each other up than asserting our “rights”. In chapter 9, he pointed to himself as an example of this principle. Paul will become all things to all people to see the gospel go out. He now brings this discussion to a close by looking back on Old Testament Israel and unpacking their example for Christians today.

MAIN POINT

Christian love is motivated by glorifying God and seeking the good of others.

REFLECT

Pride was a major problem in the church at Corinth. These “superior” Christians felt that they had surpassed Paul and were beyond any need for his instruction. They looked down on those in the church they felt inferior. In short, this camp of believers felt very sure of themselves. They had “arrived” spiritually-speaking.

Their presumption was in sharp contrast to Paul who was determined not to be disqualified (v. 27). It was also dangerously similar to the Israelites who had been a part of the exodus from Egypt. And so in 10:1-5, Paul compares Corinth to ancient Israel in an effort to rebuke their presumption.

The reason that Israel’s example is so significant here is that the privileges they enjoyed were the same privileges that the Corinthians not only enjoyed, but found their security in. Many felt that being baptized and taking the Lord’s Supper meant that they were safe

from any kind of spiritual harm. But as Paul points out, there were Old Testament equivalents of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and despite the fact that "all" of Israel (note that word's repetition) took part in them, "most of them" never made it to the Promised Land because of their sins. "If this happened to them," Paul is saying, "it can happen to you. So beware of repeating their sins."

The specific sins Paul has in mind were idolatry, fornication, testing God, and grumbling, all of which were prevalent in Corinth (10:6-11). Since these sins invited God's judgment on Israel, the Corinthians should be on guard against them (v. 12). Idolatry specifically comes into view in verses 14-22 where Paul returns to eating meals in pagan temples. In chapter 8 he argued against going to these meals out of love for other believers. Here, he argues against going out of love for God. While these gods aren't real, demons are, and to eat these meals is to participate with them. The solution is clear: flee idolatry by fleeing from these meals.

Another sensitive issue in Corinth had to do with the portions of these sacrificed meats that ended up being sold by street vendors for home consumption. Paul says that these meats aren't contaminated and that it's fine to eat them in the context of someone's home. Even still though, if weaker Christians can't even eat these foods at home with a clear conscience, the other believers should pursue what is best for them and forfeit their right to eat such foods (vv. 25-30).

Paul summarizes this section of the letter by showing how others-focused we should be in our Christian lives. The underlying motivation behind all our actions and decisions should be the glory of God (v. 31) and the good of others (vv. 32-33). In doing so, we imitate Jesus (11:1).

- What warnings does Israel's example in the wilderness have for us today (vv. 1-12)? As you consider these warnings, what comfort does Paul give us in verse 13?
- When do you find it most difficult to have the kind of "others-focused" mindset Paul lays out in 10:31-11:1?
- Whose good can you seek this week? What conveniences will you need to sacrifice in order to do so?

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 10:31 – *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*