



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 10:1-13

Topic

Paul warns the believers who were pushing the limits of their Christian liberty that they should not be putting Jesus Christ to the test

Title

“Over the Limit & Under A Test”

Introduction

If as A Christian I am free to partake of questionable things that exist in the grey areas of life, why would I want to consider limiting my liberties?

We’ve seen one reason since we started on this topic in chapter eight. We want to limit our liberties so as to not stumble the weaker brother whose conscience will not allow him to partake of some questionable thing.

It’s always good to be others-oriented. But the apostle Paul is about to point out that it isn’t just the weaker Christian who might stumble and fall if we exercise liberty. Those who take a stand and insist on their liberties can also be in danger of falling.

Look at verse twelve:

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

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If you take a “stand” for some liberty, that’s great. Just “take heed” because you might stumble and, if you’re living right at the edge, you’re going to fall into sin.

No Christian sets out to fall into sin. But the choices we make with regard to our liberties can make it easier or harder to stumble and fall.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Taking Your Christian Liberty To The Limit Can Lead To A Life Of Indulgence, and #2 Limiting Your Christian Liberty Will Lead To A Life Of Endurance.

#1 Taking Your Christian Liberty To The Limit Can Lead To A Life Of Indulgence

(v1-12)

If you live right to the limit you’re always looking over the edge. There is no margin for error. What began as enjoying a liberty can easily become indulging a lust.

Perhaps an example would be helpful. The Israelites, whose feats and failures are recorded in the Old Testament, are our example of liberty turning to lust.

1 Corinthians 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,
1 Corinthians 10:2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,
1 Corinthians 10:3 all ate the same spiritual food,
1 Corinthians 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

The congregation at Corinth was mostly made up of Gentiles. It seems, however, that they had a pretty good handle on at least the major stories of the Old Testament.

Christians don’t always fully appreciate the Old Testament. We should! For one thing, the people described in it can be seen as our “fathers.” The word can be translated *ancestors*. The believing men and women of the Old Testament are our spiritual ancestors in the sense that we see in them

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how God deals with those He loves and cherishes. We see how God makes men and women of God.

Looking at the Israelites Paul described them as being “baptized” and as having been provided with supernatural food and drink.

- They were guided by the Lord’s presence as a “cloud” by day. When they came to the Red Sea the Lord parted the waters and they passed through on dry ground. Paul called this a kind of baptism; they were “baptized into Moses.” He meant that they all identified with Moses as their deliverer and leader by passing through the waters.
- The Israelites were sustained by “spiritual,” or supernatural, “food and drink.” Manna came down to them from Heaven. A Rock which when struck then spoken to provided water “followed” them.

Paul said “that Rock was Christ.” In doing so he introduced us to the understanding that the Old Testament is filled with types and figures and analogies and metaphors from which we can glean spiritual truth.

He has a specific point in all this for the Corinthians:

- Moses delivered the Israelites from bondage to Egypt. Jesus delivers us from bondage to sin.
- The Israelites were “baptized into Moses.” A Christian is baptized into Jesus Christ.
- The Israelites ate and drank spiritual food. *So do Christians!* God’s Word is our food and His Spirit our living water.

In other words, we can look to the Israelites as an example to us. They were a freed people who enjoyed tremendous privileges.

How did they handle their freedom? They indulged themselves.

1 Corinthians 10:5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

What an understatement of the facts! All of them who left Egypt who were over the age of twenty died in the wilderness. All, that is, except two - Joshua and Caleb.

What happened to these freed people?

1 Corinthians 10:6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

The Israelites “lusted after evil things.” Their liberty turned into lust. The same can and will happen to Christians who push their liberty to the limits.

Paul gave a quick history lesson about Israel’s indulgences.

1 Corinthians 10:7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND ROSE UP TO PLAY."

This is the famous incident in Exodus involving the making and worshipping of the Golden Calf.

1 Corinthians 10:8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;

It’s from the Book of Numbers. Moabite women came into the camp of the Israelites and the men were having sex with them. It brought upon them a judgment from God in which “twenty-three thousand” were killed.

1 Corinthians 10:9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;

In Numbers twenty-one the Israelites complained against Moses because all they had to eat was manna. God sent snakes into the camp - fiery serpents who bit the people and many died.

1 Corinthians 10:10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Numbers sixteen records one such incident in which when the people complained against Moses a plague came and destroyed many of them.

What is so interesting about these examples is that, taken together, they describe perfectly what the supposedly “strong” believers in Corinth were doing. They were attending feasts to the idols. Some of them at least were engaging in sexual activity with the Temple prostitutes. They were complaining against Paul and suggesting he wasn’t a ‘real’ apostle. They were thus “tempting” the Lord by indulging their lusts.

Just in case they didn’t see the correlation Paul spelled it out for them.

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The things we read in the Bible are “examples” to “admonish” us in our walk with the Lord.

We ought to take great heed because we are those “upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” “Ends of the ages” can be translated “the fulfillment of the ages.”

It means that we are to think of ourselves as living in the last days when the return of Jesus to resurrect and rapture the church is imminent. Everything God has been moving toward throughout human history is soon to be fulfilled.

When you are near the end, and time is running out, you typically pull out all the stops and go for it! Applied to our spiritual lives it means we are not living in an age in which indulging our liberties and living on the very edge of sin is normal.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

If you want to take “stands” for your liberties just be careful you are not too close to the edge. “Take heed lest [you] fall.”

Falling is no fun. You never know how injured you're going to be or how it will affect your walking.

Pam and I walk almost every night. When we used to have the Huskies it was a real adventure! I remember one spectacular fall in which I ended up hitting myself over the head with my police flashlight. We lay there - myself, Pam, and both dogs - in a heap. Luckily we weren't badly hurt.

Interestingly, the older you get, the more these physical falls can hurt you, even disable you. The same is true spiritually. You have so much more to lose by falling as a mature believer.

You have liberty in all questionable things. You should defend it, as we learned last week. But you should be careful not to take liberty to its limits. You might find what began as a liberty has become a lust.

#2 Limiting Your Christian Liberty Will Lead To A Life Of Endurance

(v13-14)

The believers who thought themselves to be mature, who were taking a stand for their liberties, were sinning. Their liberties had turned to lust.

Those who realized the impact of what Paul was saying needed a word of encouragement. Boy, did they get one!

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Their exercise of liberty had led them back to lust. They were not as strong as they supposed and were past the limit-line and actively sinning.

It's a strategy of Satan to keep moving the limit-lines. TV is a good example. It wasn't too many years ago that if something was on TV you could trust that all objectionable content had been censored or edited out.

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Not any more! The limit-lines are constantly being moved. What that means is that you can be watching things that just a few years ago you would have thought objectionable but have now become desensitized to. Your liberty just might have turned to lust.

The Corinthians were sinning but God is “faithful.” He limits “temptation” in two ways:

1. First, God limits temptation in that it is “common to man.” In other words, there is nothing unusual about it that makes it unavoidable or impossible to recover from.
2. Second, it is never beyond your ability to “overcome” with God’s help.

There is always either “a way of escape” or the supernatural empowering “to bear it.”

It might help if we understood the shades of meanings of the word for “temptation.” It can mean an enticement to sin. But it is also used of trials and testings.

Vincent’s Word Studies says,

It is a mistake to define this word as only solicitation to evil. It means trial of any kind, without reference to its moral quality. Thus, Genesis 22:1 [says] “God did tempt Abraham” [and commenting on this we read in John 6:6] “This he said to prove him.”

- When temptation is a solicitation to sin, there is always “a way of escape.”
- When temptation is a trial or testing, there is always grace to “bear it.”

Paul expected the inspired Word of God to have impact on the hearers in Corinth. He expected those who were acting just like the Israelites to admit their sin and to “escape” their liberties-turned-to-lust.

One last thought. The phrase “way of escape” was sometimes used of sailors who would throw overboard any unnecessary cargo if they found themselves in a storm or rough seas.

One way to simultaneously avoid the temptation to sin and to be ready to bear up in trials is to jettison all the unnecessary cargo in your life and lifestyle.

The end of the ages has come upon us. All of us - nonbeliever as well as believer.

- If you are not a believer, the Lord is coming! He's coming to take His people home, to keep them out of the awful time of tribulation planned for the planet. If Jesus came right now would you be left behind?
- If you are a believer, the Lord is coming! Once home safe in Heaven we will each stand before Him to give an account for our lives lived for Him. How will that go? It will go better if you lighten the load.