

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 11/2/11 Wednesday Evening  
1 Corinthians 10 “Learning from the Past”

Do you like history? Before I headed to college my pastor encouraged me to take as many classes from Dr. James McGoldrick as I could. Dr. McGoldrick was the history professor. I took his advice and greatly benefited. I learned as much about theology and a proper understanding of the Bible from him as I did from my Bible classes, for we studied not only what Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others did, but what they believed, why they believed it, and what happened to them as a result.

We can learn from the past. In fact, it’s been well said that the person who fails to learn from the past is doomed to repeat it. You may not love history, but I urge you to be a student of history, particularly biblical history.

There’s biblical warrant for such an exhortation as we’ll see in our study of 1 Corinthians 10. Paul’s first words of 10:1 are, “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.” And verse 6 states, “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.”

Notice the word “example.” Paul uses it again in verse 11 and again in 11:1.

Discuss: What does it mean to say that Israel’s past is an *example* for us?

We need to put 1 Corinthians 10 in its context. We’ve seen the following in previous studies:

--1 Corinthians is a letter that shows us how to deal with problems in a church God’s way. Paul addresses a variety of problems throughout.

--In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul began a new section in the letter to deal with the problem of food sacrificed to idols (8:1). In my judgment the material from chapter 8 through chapter 11 addresses this same subject.

--In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul talks about “rights.” By personal example he shows that something is more important than getting my rights. What is it? See v 12. Paul’s passion was to *win the lost* (19-27).

How does this discussion of “rights” relate to the matter of eating food offered to idols? In this way. There may be things I have a right to do (like eat meat...) that I choose not to do. Why not? Because, as Paul put it, I must do nothing (even something I may have a right to do) to hinder the advance of the gospel. Nor should I do anything that would disqualify me from meaningful service (9:27).

Q: Has that ever happened in the past? Has any person of God ever disqualified himself or herself from experiencing God’s blessing for effective ministry? Not only has one person done it, a whole *nation* did it. And we can learn from them. That’s what the Israelites did in the wilderness in the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. And that’s what chapter 10 is all about.

We, like the Israelites, are prone to allow problems to distract us (and even disqualify us) from meaningful service to God. We can learn a great deal from the Israelites. Let’s consider our forefathers from four perspectives, as given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-14.

I. Consider the advantages our forefathers experienced (1-4).

Paul begins by saying he didn't want the Corinthians to be "ignorant." What does he mean by that? What you don't know *can* hurt you. That's the danger of a feeling-oriented approach to the Christian life.

The Israelites had some amazing things going for them. Paul mentions four advantages...

**A. They experienced God's presence (1a).**

Q: In what way? They were all "under the cloud."

Q: What was the purpose of the cloud? It was how God led His people. He led them personally where He wanted them to go. There could be no misunderstanding. They couldn't get lost because He took them exactly where He wanted them to go.

Think of the implications. When they were in the middle of the desert, three days removed from water, they couldn't say, "How'd we get here? Did we misunderstand God's will?" No. They followed the cloud. They always knew where God wanted them to go. They may not have understood *why*, but they knew *where*.

**B. They experienced God's power (1b).**

Q: What incident does Paul mention to illustrate God's power? They "passed through the sea." What a miracle! God brought them to the end of themselves, nowhere to go. And then He split the Red Sea, and caused the water to mound up on both sides.

Discuss: What kind of impact would that sight have on a human being?

**C. They experienced God's provisions (2-4).**

Paul mentions three...

1. *God gave them a great leader (2).*

Q: Who?

Q: What does Paul mean by the term "baptism" here?

2. *God gave them spiritual food (3).*

Q: What food does Paul have in mind? The manna

Q: Why does he call it "spiritual" food? Perhaps to indicate its source. Food doesn't drop out of the sky. That doesn't make sense if you're talking about natural processes. It does if you're talking about *supernatural* processes.

3. *God gave them spiritual drink (4).*

Q: What drink does Paul have in mind? Exodus 17

Paul says the water came from a "spiritual rock." Again, this was no ordinary rock. Ordinary rocks don't all of a sudden burst open and give enough water to satisfy two million plus. That takes a supernatural work, a work of the Spirit.

Q: What was the source of this spiritual drink, according to v 4? Christ

Discuss: In what sense was the rock *Christ*?

The Israelites had lots going for them, plenty of divine advantages. But the next word indicates a problem. V 5—"Nevertheless."

II. Consider the outcome our forefathers experienced (5).

Read v 5. The outcome was twofold.

**A. God was not pleased with most of them.**

Q: Why not? We'll see in a moment.

Q: What does the term "most" indicate?

Here's the result of God's displeasure...

**B. They died in the wilderness.**

Paul says their "bodies were scattered over the desert."

Q: How many died? Over a 40 year period, everyone 20 years old or older would die, except for Caleb and Joshua (see Num 14:29-35).

Q: What is one reason this happened, according to v 6? For an *example* for us.

III. Consider where our forefathers went wrong (6-10).

**A. Here's what they did.**

Paul mentions 5 sins...

1. *They set their hearts on evil things (6).*

Notice the problem started where? In the *heart*. They wanted certain things so badly they were willing to sin to get them.

Discuss: What does this insight have to do with the Corinthian problem of eating meat offered to idols?

2. *They committed idolatry (7).*

Q: Did all of them? No. Notice the phrase "as some were." Throughout this section Paul uses a similar phrase to say we shouldn't sin "as some of them did" (verses 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

Q: When did the Israelites do this? One time was when Moses was on Mount Sinai...

3. *They committed sexual immorality (8).*

Q: When? Num 25:1-9, when they participated with the Moabites in the worship of Baal of Peor

4. *They tested the Lord (9).*

Q: How many times? Num 14:22 says they tested God *ten times!* What a patient God! What a persistent bent we have towards not trusting God!

5. *They grumbled (10).*

Q: Is grumbling a big sin? What are we doing when we grumble?

**B. Here are the consequences they experienced.**

Sin always has consequences. Here Paul reminds the Corinthians of what the consequences were for the Israelites...

1. *In one day 23,000 died (8).*

2. *They were killed by snakes (9).*

3. *They were killed by the destroying angel (10).*

What's the point of this history lesson? We'll see next...

IV. Consider the implications of our forefathers' actions (11-22).

**A. We must learn from the past (11).**

Q: What does Paul say is true of us? The “fulfillment of the ages has come” on us. Wow! We are living in an important age, the church age, the age of the Spirit, the age between the first and second coming of the Messiah.

We need to look ahead to Christ’s return. We also need to look back to what Christ has already done—during His incarnation, and even before (remember, who was the rock in the wilderness?).

**B. We must be careful in how we respond to problems in the present (12-13).**

Q: What danger does Paul warn about in v 12?

In v 13 Paul explains how times of testing and temptation work. Israel failed during her time of testing. We, too, can fail if we’re not careful. But we can succeed if we take seriously the three truths presented in v 13.

1. *Our problems are not unique.*

That’s what the term “common” indicates.

2. *God is faithful.*

Q: What will God never do?

3. *We can stand up in any situation if we face it God’s way and by God’s help.*

Q: What will God always provide for us?

Q: What can we do in every situation?

**C. We must flee from idolatry (14-22).**

Remember, the issue being discussed in this section of the letter is food offered to idols. Food is just food, as we’ve seen. But that doesn’t mean this is a trivial matter. Idols are not just trinkets to play around with. Idolatry is a real danger. It captured the Israelites. It allures us in many ways, shapes, and sizes.

Q: What are some examples of present day idolatry temptations?

Q: What are we to do about it? Flee

Q: What does the word “flee” indicate?

Paul will continue to develop this responsibility in the following verses, as we’ll see next time.