

7/27/25

Guarding Against Self-Confidence
1 Corinthians 10:1–13

Cornerstone Introduction...

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1–13

Sermon Introduction

In 1708, Charles XII of Sweden, filled with confidence in himself and in his army, set out to defeat Tsar Peter the Great of Russia. Freezing cold conditions and limited provisions due to an extremely long supply chain, had led to his demise and he was defeated.

Roughly one hundred years later, in 1812, Napoleon Bonaparte, was overflowing with confidence in himself and the might of the Grande Armée. But the bitter Russian winter, made worse by disease, starvation, and severe supply shortages, devastated his army. His army was forced to retreat.

Then, about 130 years later, from 1941 to 1943, Adolf Hitler followed the same path. Confident in his own strength and the superiority of his own army, Hitler set out to conquer the Soviet Union and seize its resources. Despite early victories his troops suffered from disease, hunger, and freezing conditions. They too were forced to retreat.

Napoleon did not learn from Charles. And Hitler ignored the lessons that both Charles and Napoleon had left for him. Each man was blinded by his own overconfidence and failed to learn from the history that had gone before him.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 we find a divinely inspired history lesson. It's not a lesson in physical warfare, but in spiritual warfare. This passage stands as warning to the Corinthian church and to all believers. Beware of the dangers of self-confidence.

Context

Leading up to this passage, Paul has been addressing the proper use of Christian liberty. Paul continues with that theme by turning to the history of Israel. He reminds the Corinthians that God's people have often fallen, not from a lack of blessing or provision, but because of misplaced confidence and spiritual complacency.

The gospel gives Christian's liberty in Christ, but that liberty is not a license to sin. True gospel freedom must always be balanced with Christ's call to faithfulness and holiness. And the beauty

of the gospel is that in Christ we not only have the grace to be forgiven but we also have the grace to be transformed.

Main Point: 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 presents three lessons that we must grasp so that we place our confidence in God and not in ourselves.

Outline:

Don't Forget God's Blessings (1–4)

Don't Abuse God's Graces (5–11)

Don't Forsake God's Faithfulness (12–13)

I. Don't Forget God's Blessings (1–4)

Look with me in your Bible at verse 1: **“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren,”**

Paul starts this section with **“For”** which directly connects to the previous passage. In those verses, Paul expressed a personal concern that after preaching to others, he himself might be disqualified.

He now broadens that concern and says, **“I do not want you to be unaware.”** He's not only worried about his own spiritual condition but also about the spiritual danger facing the Corinthians.

Paul wants the Corinthians to grasp the serious danger of living the Christian life with a false sense of security. He wants to guard them against a faith that is careless, self-confident, and ultimately ungentle.

In verses 1–4, the repetition of the word **“all”** stands out. He uses it five times: **all were under the cloud... all passed through the sea... all were baptized into Moses... all ate the same spiritual food... and all drank the same spiritual drink.**

This repeated emphasis on **“all”** highlights the fact that all the Israelites led out of Egypt participated in these spiritual blessings. They all shared in God's deliverance, they all took part in a type of baptism, and they all enjoyed spiritual provision. There was a real participation, identification, and experience of these blessings.

Paul wants the Corinthians to see the similarity between themselves and the Israelites.

Deliverance

The first blessing Paul highlights in this section is that **“that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;”** What is he referring to here? He's pointing back to the Exodus. The incredible event when God redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt.

This would have been a familiar story for the Corinthian believers. Even though many of them weren't ethnically Jewish, the Exodus was THE foundational event of the Old Testament. It was the account of salvation that shaped Israel's identity and understanding of God.

So, although the Corinthians didn't have The Ten Commandments, starring Charlton Heston, or the DreamWorks classic, The Prince of Egypt with Whitney Houston and Boyz II Men on the soundtrack, they still would have cherished this account.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they were led by God Himself in a pillar of **“cloud.”** **Exodus 13:21 “The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way.”**

They also **“passed through the [Red Sea]”** as God miraculously parted the waters, delivering them from Pharaoh's army. **Exodus 14:21–22 “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. ²² The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”**

Paul wants to Corinthians to know that the Israelites also experienced the blessing of God's deliverance.

Baptism

The second blessing is found in verse 2: **“and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;”** Paul connects the Israelites' experience of being led by the Lord in the cloud and their passage through the Red Sea to baptism.

In a figurative way, the Israelites were **“baptized into Moses”** because through these events' they were identified as God's people and it demonstrated their connection to Moses, who was God's earthly deliverer in the Exodus.

Exodus 14:31, captures this idea well: **“When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses.”**

This event marked their identification not only with God, but with Moses. You could say they became followers, or disciples, of Moses by trusting his leadership and following him through the waters that God had parted.

Paul wants the Corinthians to know that the Israelites also participated the blessing of a type of baptism.

Spiritual Provision

We find the third blessing Paul mentions in verses 3–4, they read: **“and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”**

Paul now highlights that the Israelites all partook of God’s supernatural provision in the wilderness. Around two million people were sustained because they ate manna from heaven and drank water from a rock.

These were literal physical provisions, but Paul calls them **“spiritual food”** and **“spiritual drink”** because they didn’t come by ordinary means, God provided them by supernatural means. These were miraculous signs of God’s faithful love and care of His people.

Exodus 16:4 records the giving of manna: **“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you...’”**

I love Asaph’s commentary on this in **Psalm 78:24–25** **“He rained down manna upon them to eat And gave them food from heaven. ²⁵ Man did eat the bread of angels; He sent them food in abundance.”**

Those were the best angel food cakes anyone ever had. Betty Crocker has nothing on manna from heaven.

God also provided water miraculously. In **Exodus 17:6**, the Lord said: **“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.”** (See also Numbers 20:11.)

This wasn’t a trickle. It wasn’t like going to a water fountain and everyone getting their little drink or filling up their Yeti.

Listen again to **Psalm 78:15** **“He split the rocks in the wilderness and gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths.”**

Even more incredible about this spiritual provision, Paul says **“they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”** This does not mean a literal rock physically moved through the wilderness. He’s not talking about Rolling Stones.

No, he wants believers to understand that Christ was the true source of their provision. That He accompanied His people throughout their wilderness journey. The **“following”** refers to His continual presence and provision.

Paul’s point is that just as Christ is present with and providing for the Corinthians now, and just as they are the recipients of the blessings of deliverance, baptism, and provision, so too Israel was the recipients of similar blessings in the wilderness.

And the danger for the Corinthians, and for us, is the same danger for the Israelites. The danger is forgetting God’s blessings in our lives. Forgetting the blessings of the gospel, and His continual love and care of us.

You could say, we are prone to spiritual amnesia.

Luke 17:11–19 (NASB95)

¹¹ While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; ¹³ and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? ¹⁸ “Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

Yet despite Christ’s presence and provision, most of the Israelites fell in the wilderness due to unbelief. That leads us to the next lesson Paul gives...

II. Don’t Abuse God’s Graces (5–11)

Look at verse 5: **“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.** Despite all blessings the Israelites had experienced these blessings did not guarantee that their lives were pleasing to God.

The text says, **“most of them.”** Only two from the Exodus generation, Joshua and Caleb, were permitted to enter the Promised Land. The rest were **“laid low in the wilderness.”**

What this teaches us is that participation in spiritual privileges, spiritual graces, and spiritual activity does not equal living a life of faith. The warning is God’s graces must be met with faith, thankfulness, and faithfulness. Not with distrust, discontentment, and disobedience.

That's what lead him to say in verse 6: **Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.**

One of the reasons God recorded and preserved Israel's failures in the wilderness was because they serve as **"examples"** for God's people in every age.

I praise God that the women are studying the book of Exodus this year in the Women's Bible study. Exodus is so foundational to our understanding of God, ourselves, and the rest of Scripture.

Paul cites Exodus no less than eight times in this passage as part of his discipleship of the believers there in Corinth. The Old Testament is necessary for our sanctification.

Paul uses the word **"crave"** to describe a desire for what God prohibited. Their hearts had a strong desire for evil. Their appetites weren't being shaped by God's graces but rather by their lust for the things of this world and earthly pleasures.

Paul goes on to cite four specific examples to illustrate the kinds of cravings that led Israel into judgment: Idolatry, Sexual immorality, Testing the Lord, and Grumbling.

Idolatry

Let's look at the first example he mentions in verse 7: **"Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play."**

This is a reference to **Exodus 32:6**, where the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, offered sacrifices to it, feasted before it, and gave themselves over to debauchery.

What is idolatry? We can sometimes error in thinking that idolatry is limited to having a statue that we bow down to or offer sacrifices or incense to.

But idolatry is a matter of the heart. In **Ezekiel 14:3**, the Lord tells Ezekiel **"Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts..."** And **Colossians 3:5** reads, **"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you... covetousness, which is idolatry."**

So, idolatry isn't limited to a physical image or statue, it's about the longings, desires, and loyalties of our heart. At its core, idolatry is whatever we look to for satisfaction, security, or meaning apart from God. It's what captivates our thoughts, shapes our priorities, fuels our motivations, and receives our greatest affections and attention.

As one author writes, “The true god of your heart is what your thoughts effortlessly go to when there is nothing else demanding your attention.”¹

We can only find our satisfaction and contentment in our Creator. I love what one pastor said, “You will never be satisfied until you realize that your every desire for more in this life is, in reality, a desire for more of God.”

The Corinthians needed to learn what Israel had tragically forgotten. That only God can satisfy the cravings of the human heart. Idolatry is not only offensive to God it is destructive to us.

Sexual Immorality

The second example is in verse 8: **Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.”**

Here, Paul refers to the incident recorded in Numbers 25:1–9, when the Israelites engaged in sexual immorality with Midianite women at Baal Peor. If you remember this event, the false prophet Balaam was hired by king Balak to curse Israel, but God only permitted Balaam to bless Israel.

In response to this, Balaam told Balak that although they couldn’t curse Israel, they could get them to fall by tempting them with sexual sin. So, they sent the Midianite women to Israel, which lead to their demise. Paul highlights that 23,000 perished in a single day.

This is a sobering reminder of how seriously God views sexual sin.

Based on this verse, I must bring a word of warning to you this morning. If you are currently committing sexual immorality, if you are involved with pornography, sexual promiscuity, adultery, or any other form of sexual sin, and you think it’s a small matter, that the Lord doesn’t see or that He doesn’t care, please hear the warning of this passage and repent.

Sexual sin is never harmless. God has not changed. We can’t abuse God’s grace, patience, or mercy and think that just because nothing bad has happened yet that He approves of our sin.

The same Lord who judged Israel in the wilderness is the Lord of the church today. And He calls His people to holiness.

Testing the Lord

Let’s look at the third example in verse 9: **“Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.”**

¹ Timothy Keller

This incident is recorded in **Numbers 21:1–9**, where the Israelites, in their discontent and rebellion, spoke out against God and Moses. **Numbers 21:5 The people spoke against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.”**

To “**try the Lord**” in this context means to test the boundaries of His patience. It involves pushing to see how far one can go without incurring punishment. It is testing God with the assumption that He will either tolerate our sin or fail to respond to it. This kind of attitude towards God does not reflect faith, but rather rebellion.

God’s response was that He sent fiery serpents among them, and many died.

The warning here is to not test the patience of the Lord. Don’t presume upon His grace while harboring a rebellious heart. God is not indifferent to grumbling, entitlement, or the desire to push boundaries.

Grumbling

The fourth and last example is in verse 10: “**Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.**”

Now, grumbling characterized much of Israel’s time in the wilderness.² But this incident seems to refer to **Numbers 16:41–50**, where, after the judgment of Korah and his followers, the people again grumbled against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of killing God’s people. In Numbers 16:49 it says God sent a plague that killed 14,700 Israelites.

Grumbling may seem like a lesser sin compared to idolatry or sexual immorality, but in Scripture it reflects a complaining marked by a rebellious spirit. It’s an unjustified dissatisfaction of the heart that results in complaining. It essentially is a symptom of unbelief.

Yes, living in a fallen world we may find ourselves in trying circumstances. But if we don’t deal with those difficulties properly by taking to them to the Lord and trusting in His sovereign plans and purposes, then we may find ourselves ultimately grumbling against God’s authority, provision, and purposes.

This warning tells us that even subtle sins of the tongue and attitude can harden the heart and lead to judgment. Therefore, we must reject the temptation to grumble and instead cultivate gratitude, humility, and trust in God’s wise and sovereign hand.

² (Exodus 15:24; 16:1–3, 7, 8; 17:7; Numbers 11:1; 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11; 17:5; Deuteronomy 1:27)

Paul concludes this section by reinforcing the point he made earlier in verse 6. Look again at verse 11: **“Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”**

These examples were not just for Israel, not just for the Corinthian church, but for all believers. We are all included in the phrase, **“upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”**

Brothers and sisters, we are in one of the final phases of redemptive history. Christ has come, He has overcome through the cross, He has ascended into heaven, and He is currently adding to His Church until He returns.

Because we have come to believe these truths, along with the rest of Christ’s instruction, we can’t take sin lightly. We, must read His Word and learn from the examples of those who despite all their spiritual blessings, abused God’s grace, fell into sin, and came under judgment.

I was listening to a sermon on this passage this week and the pastor used a helpful illustration. He told the story a king was looking to hire a new chariot driver. To find the best candidate, the king brought in three highly skilled drivers and gave them a test.

He pointed to a narrow mountain road with steep cliffs on one side and said “Tell me, driving at full speed, how close you can drive to the edge without going over.”

The first driver confidently said he could the chariot within a yard of the edge and. The second, eager to impress, said he could bring the chariot within a foot of the drop. The third driver, however, took a different approach. He said, “Oh king, if I was your charioteer I would stay as far from the edge as possible.”

After hearing all three, the king turned to the third man and said: “You are the one I will trust. I don’t want a man who pushes the limits. I want a man who values safety and stays far from danger.”

Paul is warning them that Christian freedom is not a call to self-gratification but to self-denial. True Christian liberty is expressed not in the pursuit of personal pleasure, but in the pursuit personal of holiness and in the selfless service of others for the sake of Christ.

The examples in the Old Testament warn us that those who presume upon God’s grace while living in disobedience are in danger of divine discipline.

III. Don’t Forsake God’s Faithfulness (12–13)

Paul continues in verses 12: **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”**

The Corinthians believed they were immune to temptation, safe from judgment, and spiritually strong. But Paul is saying, they need to listen to his warnings so that they would not fall.

This verb carries the meaning of “To fall morally or spiritually” “To go astray” or “to worsen” Even “to be completely ruined” Or “to fall so as to be destroyed.” His words here emphasize the real possibility of a total moral or spiritual downfall. He is references more than just a stumbling. He is talking about a fall with serious consequences.

This was a real warning for the Corinthians, and it is a real warning for us. This passage is like the warning light on the dashboard of your car. It’s a wake-up call to those of us who are living our Christian lives on cruise control or autopilot.

There is no more important warning in all of Scripture for many of us than this one. If spiritual failure was experienced by the vast majority of the ancient Israelites, despite their great spiritual privileges, then it can happen to us as well.

How subtle are the sins of pride and self-confidence! How easy it is for us who have grown up in the faith, or think we have reached full maturity, to get complacent and apathetic towards Christ, think we have arrived, and assume we are immune to failure!

Spiritual pride in our hearts is like the proverbial frog in the kettle; we can slowly and steadily destroy our souls in the pot without realizing it.

Instead of being pridefully confident in ourselves, we need to humbly find our confidence in God.

Paul concludes this section with a powerful reassurance in verse 13: **“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”**

The first thing we learn is that when temptations come, they generally don’t announce themselves. Paul uses the term **“overtaken”** to convey this. **“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.”**

The second thing we learn about temptation is that there is supernatural help. Notice verses 13 says, **“God is faithful.”**

We must understand that God's nature is to be faithful to and protective of His children. After this series of serious warnings, Paul does not want to leave us in despair. Instead, he offers hope. Though the danger is real, **"God is faithful"** and His faithfulness is the key to endurance.

The strength to endure temptation is not found in our own willpower or strength. It's not found in following a checklist of rules. And it's not found in hollow religious activity.

The strength to endure and grow in holiness is found in a Person. It's found in the faithfulness of our God and Savior. The truth that **"God is faithful"** is like the linchpin of this whole passage.

One way God provides us with help is that He knows our capacities, our endurance limits, for it says, He **"will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able."**

Another way God provides us with help is that He has promised a way out so that we can overcome the temptation: **"but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also."** God has many ways of providing such an escape.

Sometimes He will sovereignly remove the temptation when we ask; sometimes He will change the circumstances; He may even choose to rid us of the fascinating charm; or He may use an accountability partner to challenge us. Sometimes it's prayer and meditation on God's Word that gets us through.

But mostly we escape temptation, not by getting out of it, but by enduring and overcoming it. That's why the last phrase reads, **"so that you will be able to endure it."**

I thank God for this promise of a way out, and I have experienced it on numerous occasions. I hope you have too. I can honestly say that I don't ever recall facing a temptation where the way of escape wasn't obvious. Sadly, I haven't always taken it, but it's been there.

No believer can claim that they were forced to sin. No one, not even Satan, can make us sin. He cannot even make an unbeliever sin. We sin because we willingly choose to sin.

James 1:13-14 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."

God's Word tells us that if we failed, it's because we refused to take the way out that God provided.

But God if you have failed, know that there is still hope. **Read 2 Chronicles 33:1–13.**

What about you? What is your commitment today? All of us need to recognize that growth in the Christian life is not marked by less of a need of Christ and more reliance on our self. No, growth and maturity in the Christian life is marked by a greater dependence upon Christ.

May we keep our eyes on Christ and continue to delight in knowing Him and making Him known.

Let's Pray.

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”