



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 10:1 – 13

“Lessons From the Past”

TRANSCRIPT

It's time for our class to begin. Let's open with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks again for the word of God. We remember that the Scriptures tell us it is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It's a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and it is that which we ultimately have to do. We think of our Lord as the living word, but the written word is that which points perfectly and completely to him.

As we study this evening, we pray Lord that the Holy Spirit again may be our teacher that we may be responsive to the word of God. And that the things that we think about and that we learn may be important for our Christian lives. We pray that the truth may have its application in our lives. We commit our evening to Thee, and we commit each one present to thee and their loved ones and their families and pray for each one of them asking thy blessing upon them. We also remember Lord those who have requested the prayers of the chapel and we pray for them. And we ask that the desires of their hearts may be met and that the prayers may have an affirmative response within thy will. And now we look to thy word and we look to thee Lord to teach us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Well tonight we are turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. We are still in the section in which the apostle is discussing the eating of meats sacrificed to idols and discussing the questions of the weak and the strong with reference to the ability of individuals to respond to just such an issue as this. We have been saying that those who are the weak are those who have scruples about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Those who are strong feel that they know the word of God and that the word of God plainly says that the idols are no idols that eating meat sacrificed to idols is not different from eating any other kind of meat, because there are no idols. The tendency of the weak, of course, is to be moved by the freedom of the strong, and thus to act contrary to their own conscience which, even though it may be perfectly all right to eat, if they act contrary to their conscience, the word of God reminds us that that is sin. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” for that matter. And on the other hand, the strong are in danger of being the instrumentality leading the weak in to sin.

So it’s a critical question, the apostle discusses it here in some detail. He discusses it in Romans chapter 14 again. So it was a problem that existed in the ancient world among the Romans, because there were temples, there were heathen gods, Pagan gods and sacrifices were made to them. And it was very possible for Christians to be invited to the home of someone who would have upon their tables meats sacrificed to idols. It would be known that they may have been sacrificed to an idol, and the question of what would be the response of a Christian and how it might affect others who may not be Christians was the kind of issue that undoubtedly caused a great deal of problem in the early church. It’s clear from these chapters that the apostle treats it very seriously.

Now, in chapter 9 remember he had given an illustration of how those who are strong ought to minister to the scruples of the weak. And his illustration that he uses is the illustration of his freedom and right to support from those whom he ministered. But he said he forewent, I guess that’s what you’d say, he forewent his right to have support in order that he might not do anything other than preach the gospel free of charge, make

it free of charge. He goes on to explain that one of the motivations was not simply that, but he would like, if possible, to have a reward for the ministry that God had given him as an apostle because he regarded himself as one who did not have any liberty to become or not become an apostle. He was apprehended on the Damascus Road, and he says that a stewardship was given to him and he was absolutely responsible to carry it out.

And so by making the gospel free of charge, he was able to do something that the other apostles could not do, did not do, evidently, or at least could not do as he could, and then as he says, gain a reward for preaching the word of God free of charge. He wound up the chapter using the figure of a race in which all run but one receives the prize. And he says that as far as he is concerned, he is disciplining his body, he is bringing it into subjection in order that having preached to others, he himself might not become disapproved. There’s no question about his salvation, he was in the race, all the others are in the race too. But the question is whether he will receive a reward.

Now, in chapter 10 he resumes his discussion of idol meats, and in fact later on will discuss it more directly. But here he resumes his discussion of the idol meats after the example of his own sacrifice of liberty for the sake of the weak and for the sake of a reward.

Now, my text and I think the Authorized Version begins chapter 10 with the word “moreover.” Now, unfortunately that is a mistake. That’s an error. The word that is used as a connecting particle is the word that means “for” or “because” and so this is a very close connection with what has preceded, “For brethren I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud all passed through the sea.” I’ll just go on and read verse 1 through verse 13. Now, this is the passage we’ll try to finish this evening, verse 2, “And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. All ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.” What an interesting clause. “But with most of them God was not well pleased; for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”

Now these things became our examples to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 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.”

You’ll remember the background of that text is shortly after the Children of Israel have entered the land and Moses is on the mountain; it isn’t such a short time before they are going to construct their own gods. So wicked is the heart of man that having experienced the great deliverance of the Red Sea, it’s not but a short time before than can worship other gods, construct their own gods. Now, those things are lessons Paul says. Verse 8, “Don’t let us commit sexual immorality.” Remember that’s the word we have seen so often, fornication. “Let us not commit fornication as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand fell. Don’t let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted - and were destroyed by serpents. Nor complain, as some of them also complained - and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now, all these things happened to them as examples.” The word is the word from which we get the word “type” but the sense is really example. As a matter of fact that’s the sense almost always. In other words, when we talk about types, we are really talking simply about examples.

Type -- there’s no special theological term, it means simply an example. Typology is nothing more than a study of examples that have some further significance in that they reveal characteristics of the living God, and New Testament writers lay stress upon them.

“So now all these things happen to them as examples and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall! No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man. But God is faithful; who will not allow you 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.”

It’s clear that in the church at Corinth there were individuals who had an inadequate understanding of the evils of idolatry, and also an inadequate understanding of the power of the sacraments. Now, sacraments of course we think of as the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Christian church the term sacrament is a term that is used by some denominations as equivalent to ordinances. It is very difficult to distinguish them. I have no real objection to sacrament except it has associations that I don’t like. I prefer the term ordinances, when we think of ordinances in the Christian church as being simply the ordinance of baptism and the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.

Now, baptism and the Lord’s Supper we know are not automatic prophylactics against sin and ensuing judgment. If we’ve been instructed in the word of God, we know that baptism, water baptism, does not remove sin. The Roman Catholic Church believes that baptism does remove sin. We know also, of course, that the Lord’s Supper does not remove sin. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the sacrifice of the Mass does remove sin. So the apostle is against the background of that, is going to point out that sacraments, as such, as were understood by them, were not sacraments that took away sin.

Obviously he is talking now primarily to the strong, and he is reminding the strong of the fact that while they have great freedom, as a result of being delivered from the Law of Moses, they are not delivered from the necessity of a holy life. So it’s wonderful to talk about how free we are in the Christian church. Often you hear people talk about how we are not under law but under grace -- very true, very important, and very significant -- but at the same time if we know that much and are able to say we are not under the law, we ought to also be able to say that we are responsible to live a holy life.

That’s a problem with the men in the ministry back there because they don’t know that I start low, rise higher, may strike fire, and then retire. [Laughter] And so it is constantly increasing in volume. I used to speak on the radio in a place in a booth. The

man who was watching the volume, he always had to watch it. He wasn’t able to set the volume and then go and read the newspaper of something while I was speaking because he was always constantly moving it up. And it’s just a characteristic of some preachers and happens to be a characteristic of me. I’m old now and it is not quite as much a characteristic of me, but it used to be very much.

Now, there are some lessons from this past of the Children of Israel that are very very relevant to the Corinthians, Paul says. And of course now, nineteen hundred years later, you can say there are some lessons from the life of the Corinthians and the life of the Israelites that are very apropos for us today in 1994.

When Oliver Cromwell was planning the education of his son, Richard, he said I would have him learn a little history, and that is what Paul is doing. He is having them learn a little history, a little of the biblical history. Carolyn Wells once said, “That we are told to live and to learn.” But she said, “By the time we’ve learned, it’s too late to live.” And Paul is trying to make sure that it’s not too late for them to live. And so he’s now going back over the illustrations of failure in the life of the Israelites. And he warns by Israel’s past failures that it’s possible just as Israel was disqualified, disapproved, so we today might have a difficulty that way too.

Now, verses 1 through 10 are the verses that describe the illustrations of failure, and he begins by talking about the advantages that the father’s had. You’ll notice the word “all” used five times. He says “all our fathers,” “all passed through the sea,” “all were baptized unto Moses,” “all ate the same spiritual food,” “all drank the same spiritual drink,” repeated five times emphasizing the universality of Israel’s blessings when considered with the fact that almost all perished -- as a matter of fact all but two, Caleb and Joshua. So when he says with most of them God was not well pleased, it’s almost with every one of them except two, he was displeased. They all perished. Now, this links the section very closely to what he has been saying in verse 24 through verse 27 of the preceding chapter, “Don’t you know that those who run in a race all run, but one

receives the prize.” All of them ran but only Caleb and Joshua received the prize of entrance into the land.

Now, he points out that there were five particular blessings that the Israelites enjoyed. And I’ll just talk about them for a moment, talk about the historical place in which you find them in more detail in the Old Testament. The apostle was writing to people who evidently understood the Old Testament context and so he didn’t have to explain in detail. “Moreover brethren I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea.” The first of the five blessings we could call supernatural guidance, “All were under the cloud, all passed through the sea.”

Now, when you think of all being under the cloud, we think immediately of the pillar of cloud in the day and the pillar of fire at night which guided the Children of Israel throughout the wilderness wanderings. Do you remember the instructions that are given in Numbers chapter 9? They were told specifically when the cloud moves they were to move. When the cloud stayed in one place they were to stay in one place. The cloud is a beautiful figure of the Holy Spirit who has come to indwell every one of us who is a believer. And we move in accordance with the direction given us by the Holy Spirit; marvelous freedom to be guided by the person of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the eternal Trinity, our personal guide. So they were all under the cloud. We have our Lord saying, before he ascended up to the right hand of the Father, “Know I am with you always even to the end of the age.” And he is with us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, this supernatural guidance.

If you turn back to the Old Testament in Exodus chapter 13 in verse 21 and verse 22, we read of this particular matter that he is talking about, “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night before the people.” And then in chapter 14 verse 19 we read, “And the angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them;

and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.” Remarkable guidance of the Children of Israel when the Egyptians began to pursue them after they had left Egypt. It is the ministry of the Lord God in the form of the cloud that gave them that supernatural guidance.

Secondly, in verse 1 he says, “All passed through the sea.” That was our remarkable, supernatural deliverance. Again back in Exodus in chapter 14 in verse 15 through verse 22 we read about it. It won’t hurt for us to read it again. Verse 15 through verse 22 and this is the account of the miraculous deliverance of the Children of Israel through the Red Sea, “And the Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the Children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the Children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians,” Isn’t that mean? I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, I will harden whom I will harden, that’s part of the Bible, that’s difficult to understand, isn’t it? So now to read on, verse 20, “So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. There was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the Children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” That’s what Paul is talking about when he says and all passed through the sea, supernatural deliverance, illustrative of the magnificent deliverance that we have through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins.

Peter puts it , I think, very well in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 18 through verse 22 in a passage that I am sure most of you in this audience, not only know, but you love.

“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” -- supernatural guidance, supernatural deliverance and then of course supernatural leadership. We read in verse 31 chapter 14 again of the Book of Exodus, I’ll have to turn back there, I should have kept my finger there, but in verse 31 of chapter 14, “And Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord,” now, isn’t that strange, “believed the Lord and believed His servant Moses.” That’s interesting believed in the Lord, believed his servant Moses.

What does it mean when we read here they all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea? Well, it means simply, they came under the leadership of Moses. They believed in the Lord. They believed in his servant, Moses. So to be baptized in, as he put it, to be baptized into Moses is to come under the leadership of Moses. It made them to pass through the sea under the leadership of Moses. It made them the disciples of Moses, placed them under obligation to recognize the divine commission that God had given to Moses and to submit to Moses’ authority because he was the agent of the Lord God in heaven. This is the only point of analogy that one can make between all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They just came under his authority as God’s leader among them.

In fact that is precisely what happens, there may be other things that happen, but that’s precisely one of the things that happens when you and I have believed in our Lord Jesus Christ and we are baptized in water. We are identified with him in death, burial, and resurrection. Now, united to him and have now come under his authority for our lives, our savior’s authority. So, baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

It’s so interesting to me to read some of the things that people say about this “baptized unto Moses” and naturally Baptists want to find something here that will

prove that Baptists are right, and Presbyterians are not any more holy than the Baptists, they want to find reason for their views here. Charles Hodge, who was a Presbyterian, has this to say, “This is the only point of analogy between the cases. It’s all the apostle’s argument requires. One class of commentators says that they were immersed in the sea and therefore it was baptism. That is immersion, they went in, the waters were around them, what a perfect picture of going down in the water and coming up out of the water. Another says the cloud rained upon them and on that account they are said to have been baptized. In other words, it was like sprinkling.”

Hodge goes on to say, “Both suggestions are forced for the people were baptized as much in the cloud as in the sea, but they were not immersed in the cloud nor sprinkled by the sea. There is no allusion to the mode of baptism here.” Well I think he is probably right if we are going to find our particular mode that we like, we have to go to other places.

So they had supernatural guidance, they had supernatural deliverance from the Egyptians; they had supernatural leadership, because Moses is the leader that God has given to them. And not only that in verse 3, “All ate the same spiritual food.” What was the spiritual food? Well the food was the manna which God gave them, the supernatural food. The Psalmist says that that is angel’s food. That’s better than Del Frisco’s. [Laughter]. That’s better than down there at The Mansion. It would be marvelous if they could have manna, how marvelous. Of course, they wouldn’t know how to put it on the menu because manna means “something, but what is it?” They didn’t know what it was. They looked at it and said, what is it? Well, I’ve looked at a lot of things in restaurants and asked privately, what is it?, too. [Laughter] You know, wondering what in the world is this before me, particularly if it’s seafood. Some of the seafood can look rather strange. At any rate they had angel’s food. All ate the same spiritual food, spiritual food.

And now in verse 4 he says, “They all drank the same spiritual drink.” Now, this of course was the water that was supplied by the Lord God for them on various occasions

particularly when they began to murmur in Exodus in chapter 17. We have them murmuring and God having Moses strike the rock. The rock of course as the Old Testament plainly says from Deuteronomy and from Isaiah, the rock is illustrative of our Lord Jesus Christ. He’s the rock or at least of the triune God. So Moses struck the rock, suggestive to us now, from what we know in the New Testament, of the suffering of Christ and out comes the water, the water of life, the water of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We may make different applications of that. Supernatural food and now supernatural drink, five great advantages that they had, supernatural guidance, supernatural deliverance, supernatural leadership, supernatural food, and supernatural drink, all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock.

Now, that is very interesting. Our Lord is called a spiritual rock. I’d like to read you something that some of the commentators have said concerning this. F. F. Bruce, one of the really outstanding commentators on Scripture had some words to say about the rock that I think are very good. He mentions this, “Because in the Pentateuchal narrative Moses fetches water from the rock of Meribah both at the beginning and toward the end, Exodus 17 and Numbers chapter 20, Jewish, of the wilderness wanderings, Jewish legend conceived the idea of a rock which traveled along side the people throughout their forty-years journey and supplied them with water as they required it. Paul does not endorse this material fancy, but affirms that Christ accompanied his people as a spiritual source of refreshment throughout this period. This interpretation was facilitated by the use of the title ‘rock,’ for Yahweh. For example in the Song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32, Yahweh is the rock. Other places in the Old Testament Isaiah, and by the identification also this is facilitated of Jesus Christ before his incarnation with the angel of Jehovah.” Bruce says, “The angel of Yahweh’s presence who accompanied Israel in the wilderness, if not indeed with the Lord who went before his people, rescued them from their enemies and healed them.”

Now oftentimes Old Testament scholars like to say, and they are believing Old Testament scholars, say that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah and that the Messiah, he acts as a second Moses. But there is far more to this than a second Moses. It’s not only that our Lord supplies them with bread and water, but there is more to it than that. In a moment I will point out why there is more to it, but I’d like to point out what others have about his statement that they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them. Among some of the Christian commentators, it was suggested, and Jewish commentators I should say primarily, and followed by some of the Christians ones, there was I would call it a legend that there was an actual physical rock, a supernatural rock, but an actual physical rock. A rock of heavenly origin that followed the Children of Israel, in fact there are descriptions of it, but I won’t have time to go into that. But they conceived of a literal rock following the Children of Israel and ministering to them.

Now, as far as I can tell the Apostle Paul does not believe anything like that; there isn’t an indication that he did. The idea of a sort of incarnation of Christ in a rock, a physical rock is to me ridiculous. In fact, instead of an incarnation, as you know the “car” in “incarnation” comes from the word that means, flesh. We would have something like inpetrifaction, *petra* meaning term for rock. So we would have an inpetrifaction instead of an incarnation. It is ridiculous. But there are some well known Christian commentators like Meyer who actually suggested such a thing. It is a rabbinical legend, and the Rabbis thought of a rock that rolled along as the Children of Israel marched. And they thought, and some have thought that Paul was just following the rabbinic legend. They all drank of that spiritual rock that followed them.

Now, Charles Hodge has some things to say about it, others have very much the same thing, but I wrote down some of the things he says about it. He denies that the rock is a literal rock. He denies that the water out of the rock is a reference to Christ, and he goes on to say that what is referred to here is our Lord Jesus in his spiritual ministry to the Children of Israel. He was a spiritual rock from which they drank, that is

not a material rock. In the sense, this sense, the rock was 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 anti-type that supplied their wants. The expression is simply figurative.

Christ is the rock in the same sense that he is as he says in John 15 “divine.” So this is simply a figure. So they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them. Who is the spiritual rock? It is our Lord Jesus Christ. Did he follow them? Of course he followed them. He was their leader. He was the Yahweh with whom the covenant had been made, who gave them the covenant, and who followed them, guarded them, protected them, kept them to be sure that the will of God was done for them. This passage distinctly asserts then the preexistence of our Lord Jesus Christ, because he was active before he was incarnate, not only does it assert his preexistence, it also is another one of the many testimonies to the fact that the Lord Jesus is the Yahweh who covenants with Israel in the Old Testament.

Now, that is not surprising, you who listen to me expound the Epistle to the Hebrews, and I pointed out in the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews did not feel any difficulty in applying a text that in the Old Testament refers to Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, Jehovah to the Lord Jesus Christ. If we just remember that the Christian God is a triune God, one God, three persons. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Put it this way, Yahweh the Father, Yahweh the Son, Yahweh the Spirit, the persons having special ministries within the trinity, but nevertheless one God.

For example, I’ll turn to a passage that I didn’t turn to when we were doing the Epistle to the Hebrews, but in John in chapter 12 in verse 37 we read these things, this is at the climax of our Lord’s ministry in his signs, “But although he had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in him, that the word of Isaiah the Prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: ‘Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm

of the Lord been revealed?’ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.’ These things Isaiah said when he saw,” well Isaiah says in Isaiah chapter 6 he saw Yahweh, “I lifted up,” John the apostle says when he saw his glory and spoke of him, the Lord Jesus Christ. So it’s obvious that for John the apostle the Yahweh that Isaiah saw in the temple high and lifted up was the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who spoke to Moses at the burning bush. I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. It is Yahweh, but it’s Yahweh the son, the covenant making and keeping God who is responsible for them. So the apostles know that and they use the Old Testament in the New Testament in that sense. I don’t have time to go any further, you’ll just have to either accept my word for it or deny it, but in the Old Testament he is called the angel of Jehovah, the mighty God, the Son of God, the one whom God sent in Isaiah chapter 48, and other things that identify our Lord as Yahweh the Son.

Now, all of these privileges, and then we read in verse 5, “but with most of them,” well I’ve already mentioned that, “With most of them God was not well pleased for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” What a vivid picture. Look at the wilderness and the wilderness paved with Israelite’s bodies, filled, sated with angel’s food. That’s the picture that we have of the Children of Israel who died one after another in the wilderness filled with the food that God gave them and dying as disqualified for entrance into the land, all but Caleb and Joshua.

Now, Paul goes on to say that those things happened for us. In verse 6, now these things became our examples. So just as their baptism and their Eucharist did not nullify the consequences of their sin, so our baptism and our supper will not protect us from judgment. It is the way we might apply that because they were baptized unto Moses. They ate the spiritual food, drank the spiritual drink, but nevertheless they perished in the desert. So our water baptism, our observance of the Lord’s Supper will

not protect us from judgment and it may well be that some in this auditorium or it might not be true of any of us. Maybe as Paul says disqualified, not lost, I’m not suggesting you are not believers, but disqualified for that’s what Paul said in chapter 9 verse 27.

So what he’s going to warn against, these are the things that disqualify the Corinthians. Now, let me tell you they apply to me and to you. Listen to them. First of all, “Do not become idolaters,” I should read the last of verse 6 because there is the first one, “Now these things became our examples to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.” What was the lust of the Children of Israel? To prefer the food of the world and the food of Egypt to that of the Lord, the manner. What did they say more than once? Moses, you brought us out to die in the desert, couldn’t we have died in Egypt. And then they complained about the food, we love those leeks and the garlic and the other things that we had in Egypt, now what have we got this stuff that we have to eat day after day after day. It was angel’s food, the psalmist calls it, the best kind of food you could possibly have, but they are lusting for the things of Egypt. Egypt, a well known illustration of the appeal of the world -- and don’t think for one moment my Christian friend that we in Believers Chapel are not subject to temptation from the world about us. Not giving our Lord first place in our lives and being carried away with the things that the world is carried away with, wasting our time on things that do not honor the Lord, keep us from honoring him in things that are truly significant.

Second, verse 7, “Do not become idolaters as were some of them.” Oh well of course I couldn’t become an idolater. Ah yes that’s what we like to say. No I’m not going to out up an idol in my house. I’m not going to bow down to an idol that is in some temple. But when John told the readers of his epistle, “Little children guard yourselves from idols,” he was talking about things that are first in our lives, those things that are ultimate concerns. I like some of the things that the liberals have said because they couldn’t say the term God. They couldn’t say the term, Jehovah. They couldn’t say the term God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, so they had to manufacture

terms for God. One of them was our God is our ultimate concern. Well that’s really right to the point isn’t it? That’s to the point that even Evangelicals can grasp that. What is my ultimate concern? Is it the Word of God our Lord Jesus Christ the things that really count or is it other things? My ultimate concern, what is it? To make it big in the business world, to make it big in other ways, our ultimate concern, our idol spans between us and the Lord God. That will keep us from winning the prize.

Verse 8, well we’ve labored this point, we don’t have to do it further. “Nor let us commit fornication as some of them did and in one day twenty-three thousand fail.” The reference is to number twenty-five, I don’t have time to look at it, but it’s put here in a very significant place because idolatry leads to immorality. A man who has his ultimate concern, the things that are not Scriptural things, will be the person who is most likely to turn aside to things that are obviously immoral. The psalmist puts it this way with reference to the idols, he says “They who make them are like unto them.” So that the person who is involved in idolatry soon in his life, I don’t like the term lifestyle, in his life becomes like them, so fornication.

And then in the 9th verse, “Nor let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted and were destroyed by the serpents.” The reference is to Numbers chapter 21. It’s the kind of attitude that says I dare God to live up to his promise of divine discipline. And so they tempt him. The Scriptures make very plain the fact that God disciplines his children. And if we live in such a way as to be contrary to the truth of God, we shall be disciplined. God knows various ways by which to discipline us. And if we are so proud and stiff-necked that we challenge him to discipline us and presume upon the goodness of his word then we disqualify ourselves in the Christian race in which all Christians are running.

And finally this last one, I hope none of us are guilty of this, “Nor complain, nor murmur.” Murmuring is the characteristic sin, it seems for a while in the Book of Exodus and then later on in the Book of Numbers, the Children of Israel over and over again

murmuring against the Lord. I have been in Christian churches in which they murmur. Have you? Come on, have you? There’s hardly a one that doesn’t complain, murmur, criticize. They are not themselves doing anything, they are just criticizing, murmuring. They don’t realize it hurts a church, that hurts the work of the Lord, that hurts the testimony to Jesus Christ to murmur, to complain, to criticize. We are in this together as the local body in this case but on the earth as the body of Christ. Now, those who murmur and complain are problems and disqualifying themselves for the reward the apostle says. Those are the characteristic sins.

Now, he makes the application to the Corinthians in verses 11 and 12.

“Now all these things happen to them as examples and they are written for our admonition upon whom the end,” notice the plural, “The ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” What Paul is simply saying is this, the Old Testament pattern of divine revelation is this. There is a revelation of God, then there is human disobedience, and then there is divine judgment. And what Paul is saying, my Christian friend, is that in the New Testament that same pattern holds.

We have now, the completed revelation. And so we have the word of God. This is God’s word to us. But human disobedience leads to divine judgment. It is operative in New Testament times just as it was operative in the Old Testament times. When the Children of Israel responded negatively to the divine revelation that was given to them in the ongoing way -- of course, in the Old Testament wasn’t complete when they did not respond to it -- and disobeyed the Lord God, judgment and discipline followed and likewise. Now, in the divine revelation now completed, this marvelous revelation of the ministry which we see in the New Testament, what we call Christian doctrine -- the same principle operates when we are disobedient the divine judgment and discipline follows. Divine judgment for those who are not even believers who do not respond to the revelation of the word of God, but for us who know him, who have received him as

our savior, we are subject to discipline. I like the lengthening shadow of Old Testament truth that is suggested here.

Now all these things happen to them as examples. And they were written for our admonition upon whom the ages, the ends of the ages have come. The goal of the prophecy of the prophetic word is the present age and that which lies beyond it. So Old Testament events -- notice he says, now all these things happened. They weren’t fiction; they happened. These events they happened. They are admonitory examples, that’s the meaning of the word *tupos* here, and the intended result is verse 12 so that, my text says therefore, that’s an inferential conjunction, the [indistinct] which is used here is probably used in the sense of result. So then in the sense of this should have this result let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Indulgence brings indictment.

Here’s a word for the strong who fancy themselves secure. In the sacraments for example, he says “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” We particularly have to take heed lest we fall, because it’s characteristic of the New Testament to point out that often the strongest people are the ones who are most surprisingly in danger. Oh take Abraham, the man of faith, how did he fail in lack of faith. That’s how he failed. Sarah’s not my wife. He’s a great man of faith, Sarah’s not my wife. He says it twice, at least. He fails in what he is, the great example of the faithful man. Moses, Moses, the meekest man on the face of the earth, but standing at Meribah when God told him Moses speak to the rock, what does he do, he breaks out into what is almost the kind of language we wouldn’t use. He loses his temper and shouts out you rebels. Moses, the meekest man on the face of the earth, there’s his sentence right on the word of God to remind us that the strongest often fail in which they seem to be strong. Samson, he failed in his strength, not his weakness, he failed in his strength. So therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. So if there should be in my heart at this present time, this is something [name redacted] ought to pay close attention to then it’s probably I who need it most of all. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

And now the apostle, he’s made it a little tough for the Corinthians, but he’s going to wind up with some encouragement. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it. Let me just show you before we look at one thing here. The text says God is faithful, doesn’t it? So if we fall, who’s to blame? Well it’s not God. He’s faithful. The text says that God is in control. No temptation is overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above that which you are able. He is in control. So if I fail, it cannot be excused.

Not only that, we read, he will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it, and so since he provides a way of escape there are no excuses for our falls. We have a God who is faithful, we have no excuse. We have a God who controls circumstances, we have no excuse. We have a God who, as he says here in the last part of the text, makes ways of escape. We are of course inexcusable. This is marvelous provision for the weak and I happen to be of this category, the weak. There is a beautiful protective providence, no temptation is ever overtaken you except such as is common to man. What a comfort that is. God has overseen my life and he does yours to be sure I do not have a temptation beyond my capacity with his help to overcome. Not only a protective kind of providence but a preventive kind of providence; God is faithful he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. He doesn’t shield us, but he sustains us in the trials of life.

In all these things we are, in all the things Paul says, doesn’t he, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us; not out of them, in them. And so many of us have to go through some very disappointing circumstances. I wouldn’t want anyone to go through some of them. The loss of loved ones, how deeply one feels that through him who loved us. Job, what an illustration of this. Joseph what an illustration. And finally this kind of providing providence we could call it in verse 13c,

but with the temptation also make the way of escape -- something like a way out that you may be able to bear it. Not an escape from temptation, but a present power to endure it in its midst. What a glorious provision is made for those who are sorely tried in the Christian life to know there is a way of escape that God provides. Some of you in this audience have had some very serious, serious trials. I know some of them, some I don’t know. But this is the comfort of the saints in the midst of their trials. May God help us to live in such a way that we are not disqualified. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee and praise Thee for these comforting words from the apostle. We thank Thee for the survey of the privileges that Israel had which suggest those great privileges we have, greater privileges. And we thank Thee for the marvelous exhibitions of divine deliverance. For we know that the same angel of Thy presence, the angel of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is our leader and guide who goes before us and he also goes behind us and keeps us for eternal glory. We thank thee for him very, very, deeply and earnestly Lord. May he guide and direct and bless each one.