

7,17,25 1 Cor. 10:1-13, Winning the Race

The next couple chapters in 1 Corinthians are exhortations specifically targeting that church. Paul would not have to write this to the Philippians or the Thessalonians or the Romans or Timothy, etc.

Since this is where we are in Corinthains, I will do my best to teach what's here, but I don't want you to think that these warnings by Paul apply to you. It's great information to know; you may need to share it with someone that it *does* apply to at some point in your life, but just remember as we go through these chapters, that this was intended to wake up a dead church, not to burden believers who are growing.

The reason for this qualifier is because what Paul is writing is intense. He knows it needs to be that way to connect his readers to reality; since they are pretty much living in a fantasy world that does not see things as they really are, let alone taking them as seriously as they should be taking them.

Ok, so hang on to that as we move into chapter 10. Here are the first 5 verses:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 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. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Paul begins his warning to the Corinthians by recalling an event in Exodus that we're probably all familiar with. When God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, His purpose in doing that was to take them to Canaan. They weren't delivered from Egypt just to be free from slavery; they were delivered so they could fulfill a very specific purpose the Lord had for them. We are the same, except our purpose is spiritual not geographic. We haven't been saved just to eventually make it to heaven (as awesome as that is), we were saved for a specific purpose, which as we've seen in the past, is conformity to Christ and attaining to spiritual maturity so that we will have the honor of co-ruling with the Lord in His kingdom. And like Israel, some in the Body of Christ will learn what our purpose is and pursue it; and some won't.

Here is an excerpt of a brief explanation of this by Strombeck, which we looked at during our studies in John;

God's purpose in the lives of His children while here on earth is to create, develop, strengthen, and refine that complete dependence on Him which must be found in those who, throughout all eternity, are to be the very closest to Him and share His glory and the Throne of His Son . . . That is why God places so great an emphasis upon the trial of faith. He is preparing for Himself, within a new creation in Christ Jesus, those who will be in complete voluntary dependence upon Him and in living subjection to Him . . . This is the consummation of grace.

In fact, and this is of utmost importance, the earthly existence of the saved is but a brief period of preparation for an eternal calling. Few there seem to be who realize the glories that await those who are saved and how exalted a position is to be held by them throughout an unending eternity. Finite mind cannot grasp the fullness of all this, but the Bible reveals enough to show that it shall be the greatest thing that has ever come to any of God's creatures.

In our passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul is using the experience of the Jews going from Egypt to Canaan as what Paul calls " . . . examples written for *our* admonition . . . "

Israel first had to go through the wilderness and be tested to see which of them would be willing to commit to God's purpose and which would not. You and I are in our wilderness testing now (which takes a multitude of forms).

Israel was offered Canaan; our Canaan is spiritual maturity. Most of Israel died in the wilderness; most Christians aren't even fully aware of what our purpose is or how it's achieved, let alone being among those who attain it. It was a remnant in the Exodus generation and it will be a remnant in ours also. Listen to his passage in Joshua 1:5-9:

Joshua, I will always be with you and help you as I helped Moses, and no one will ever be able to defeat you. Long ago I promised the ancestors of Israel that I would give this land to their descendants. So be strong and brave! Be careful to do everything my servant Moses taught you. Never stop reading The Book of the Law he gave you. Day and night you must think about what

it says. If you follow its instructions, you and Israel will be able to take this land. I've commanded you to be strong and courageous. You need never be afraid or discouraged! I am the Lord your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go.

Canaan was Joshua's inheritance and his trust in God gave him the courage to go in. The means of us securing our inheritance is identical to the means Joshua and Caleb used to secure theirs. We can also see this in Abraham in Rom. 4:21; "(Abraham) was fully convinced that what (God) had promised He was also able to deliver."

Those who enter fully into the purpose that the Lord has offered them will only get there if they are willing to give themselves to whatever the Lord brings them into, and through, to equip them for the role they will have once that purpose is fulfilled. And never lose sight of the promise in Josh. 1:9;

You need never be afraid or discouraged! I am the Lord your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go.

As long as we are walking on the path He sets for us, He will (quote) "help us" all the way to the end. As Watchman Nee explained it:

We are born again as a lump of clay in God's hands. He sees us, but He also sees His plan for the final shape of the clay – His artwork. Shaping the clay is a painful process; it must be pounded, squeezed, flattened, etc. and He works tirelessly and non-stop. That takes time, we aren't shaped overnight. The theological principle for all of this is "I die daily", "pick up cross daily", "delivered unto death daily", "I am not my own", "Present your body as a living sacrifice". That's our part, and all of that, coupled with the Lord's shaping, finally results in "Christ formed in us" which is our victory in this race. The measure of our cooperation with God's shaping will be the measure of Christ formed in us and manifest through us.

The book of Hebrews calls this purpose "Sonship" – attaining to the status of mature sons. And the purpose of "Sonship" is to bring us into a place of spiritual responsibility.

I'll add these comments by Sparks on this:

God has to train us as children in order to develop and bring us where we can take responsibilities for God. He seeks to bring us to a state of spiritual maturity, to full growth. God's school is something much more than mere scholarly activity. His Word says: "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art reprov'd of Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." Note this word "whom He receives." The exact meaning in the Greek is not 'receives,' but "whom He *positions*" or places. It is a matter of position. God is seeking to develop a state in us where He can trust us. When God is dealing with us, there is behind it a wonderful assurance that He is going to put His trust in us. He is bringing us into a position of trust. We do not just want to be servants, bits of a machine, but sons who have become one with the Father, and in whose hands He can put spiritual responsibilities. When we truly recognize this, we begin to understand why God is dealing with us as He does. But because God is in it we know that the end is sure. He will bring us through.

Just like we saw in Joshua's commission – "God will bring us through". But we have to move *toward* our Canaan, not away from it, if we hope to fulfill the calling we've been given.

Now, let's note a couple of interesting verses in our Corinthian passage. First, vs. 4; "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." This is just another subtle statement that shows that *all* of humanity, whether Old Testament or New Testament, springs from the creative act of the second Person of the Trinity. As John 1:1-4 & 11-13 told us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men . . . He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Jesus freed us from Satan and paid for that freedom, that redemption, with His own blood; we belong to Him. Christ is the Sovereign of all creation. (Acts 17:28); “In Him we live and move and have our being.”

Another passage that might need some clarification is vs. 2; “. . . our fathers were . . . all were baptized into Moses”. The word “baptized” when it’s used as a representative adjective means “to be identified with”. The imagery of the cloud and the sea are included in that identification with Moses and Israel’s leader and the one through whom the Lord would fulfill His covenant with them. Here’s Zodhiates’ explanation on these terms;

The cloud was God's sign of His accompanying the children of Israel as long as they followed the leadership of Moses. The last words of our Lord to His disciples were, "I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age. Amen" (Matt. 28:20, a.t). So, it was with Israel until they reached their destination . . . The mystic cloud covered the people while the sea rose in walls on each side of them as they marched across. The immersion (baptism) was complete for all of them in the sea around them and the cloud over them.

And then the warning comes in, in vs. 5; “But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” The word “most” shows, again, that those the Lord *was* pleased with a remnant. This is consistent throughout the entire Bible; the majority always deviates from God’s purpose and only a minority both understands and commits themselves to the will of God.

In vs’s 6-11 Paul explains why this happened to the majority of those in the Exodus generation, and he begins by making sure they realize that what happened to Israel could also happen to them.

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.” Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor 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, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The entire history of the nation of Israel has a spiritual counterpart in the Church. Besides all that we can learn of God's dealing with His people and of faith and commitment in the Jewish nation over the centuries, the main reason that Israel's history occurred and was recorded was what Paul wrote in our passage in 1 Cor. 10;

These things became *our* examples . . . they were written for *our* admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

What Israel experienced in the wilderness and in the conquering of the Canaanites has a spiritual application to *our* experiences in our spiritual growth and in the conquering of the enemies *we* have. Our enemies are not antisemitic nations, as theirs were;

(Eph. 6:12) *We do not* wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The battle we face is the forces of darkness, lies and deception; and the offensive weapon we are intended to use against these things is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. At the height of the battle Jesus faced in His temptation with Satan, with each attack of the enemy, the Lord responded with "It is written", followed by a verse from God's Word.

For the Corinthians, the specifics of the battle centered in idolatry and sexual immorality. For us, we'd have to individually list out the temptations and deceptions that we personally struggle with.

In reading through different commentaries on the phrase, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" there was some disagreement about what this meant. The original quote was from Ex. 32:6, which says in the Amplified version;

They got up early the next day and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; then the people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play [shamefully—without moral restraint].

I'll read from the commentator (Dr. Constable) who's description of this is what I felt was a solid explanation that included both the Exodus and Corinthian contexts.

What Constable is referring to in his comments is the time recorded in Exodus when Aaron made a golden calf and told Israel to worship it;

That the sin of Aaron and the people was tantamount to covenant repudiation is clear from the account of the making of the calf. The calf was hailed as 'the god ... who brought you up out of Egypt' (Ex. 32:4). Moreover, Aaron built an altar for the purpose of affirmation and ceremony (v. 5), precisely as Moses had done previously on the people's commitment to the true covenant arrangement (24:4). Aaron led the people in breaking the second commandment: They had made a graven image to represent Yahweh (cf. 20:4-6). Aaron's disobedience to the second commandment (20:4-6), which he had received by this time, resulted in his returning to an Egyptian form of worship that repudiated Yahweh's will.

The lewd behavior that followed the feast seems to have been wicked, involving sexual immorality (cf. 1 Cor. 10:7-8). The people were "out of control," (v. 25), or "naked" and "running wild". They had "broken loose" and were "unrestrained". The Hebrew word used to describe the people is difficult to translate.

What makes this even more amazing is that whatever the Corinthians were doing, Paul compared that to the level of rebellion against God that Aaron had brought the people of Israel into.

And in the next few verses, Paul explains to the Corinthians what the consequences were for Israel's sin;

Vs. 8; . . . in one day twenty-three thousand fell

Vs. 9; some . . . were destroyed by serpents

Vs. 10; some . . . were destroyed by the destroyer

That should have gotten the Corinthian's attention; for some, it probably did. But, again, this is the Church Age – what Paul is discussing is possible at any time in our Age just as it was in Israel's dispensation. And we know from the Ananias and Saphira incident in Acts and from 1 Cor. 11:30 that this is exactly what happened to many who rebelled against the Lord in the early Church. Here's 1 Cor. 11:30-31:

For this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep (which refers to physical death). For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

And (Heb. 10:30) . . . The Lord will judge His people.

Paul's whole discussion in 1 Cor. 10 & 11 is a warning to all of us that Christians should be very careful to *not* take God's purpose for us lightly.

Now, before any of us start panicking about this, don't forget the story of the prodigal son, and the dozens of other passages we've looked at that show God's patience, love and willingness to forgive *any* sin of those who walk in transparency with Him. It's only those who persist in ignoring God's purpose, even after being warned, that should be worried.

In the next part of 1 Cor. 10, Paul offers what we might call "a reassurance" when we find ourselves entrapped by temptation.

(1 Cor. 10:12-13) 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 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.

In 1 Cor. 3:1ff, Paul said this about how he came to Corinth:

I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

This 'persona' Paul described, and exhibited in himself, does not fit with the charismatic, confident, personalities of contemporary Christian celebrities that fill out pulpits. The main reason for the difference is that Paul was broken. God took him through so much suffering that Paul knew, not just theologically, but in the most personal ways possible, that he was nothing and Christ was everything.

It's easy to say we believe that, but the Lord is the only one who knows whether our humility is genuine to the core of who we are, or whether we are just doing the best we can to be what we know we're supposed to be.

As we'll see with Paul's thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians, pride prevents us from receiving the fullness of revelation in God's Word that we could have if we were truly broken before the Lord. Men who have been under the work of the Cross fear themselves; they realize their weakness and their tendency for self-reliance.

This is another author's comments on this:

Every instrument of the testimony of Christ has been laid under suspicion and reproach in a measure commensurate with the degree of value to the Lord, and this has meant that, humanly, they were broken to that extent. Paul could say "My tribulations for you, which are your glory" (Eph. 3:13), or "The prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles" (Eph. 3:1), so the measure of our brokenness in the Lord is the measure of enrichment in His people. Revelation only comes through suffering and limitation, and to have it experimentally means sharing the cost in some way. But this is God's way of securing for Himself a spiritual servant.

When Isaiah saw the Lord it had the effect of humiliating him to the dust. We lose all our pride and all our importance when once we see the Lord in glory. "Woe is me...." That is humiliation! Then, after humiliation, there is consecration: "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." And, after humiliation and consecration, there comes vocation: "...who will go for Us?" "Then I said, Here am I; send me."

This is obviously a very painful process, but it is absolutely necessary if we want to go as far as possible in our knowledge of Christ. But as we saw in 1 Cor. 10:13 Paul also gives us a promise as encouragement for us when the storms are raging:

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.

Listen to the Amplified translation of this verse:

For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads] has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and

belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But God is faithful [to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable and strong and powerful to bear up under it patiently.

Let's move to Paul's assertion that all our temptations and trials are what he calls, "common to man". Author Wayne Barber puts it this way:

You may be going through a trial. You may be going through something that you feel like nobody could understand. The main tool of the devil is to isolate you to where you think that you are by yourself. Nobody else knows what you are going through. Well, I want you to know from this verse, you need to think again, because you are not going through anything that is not common to others. There are different degrees and different times, and not every person faces every single temptation, but all men face the same kinds of temptations. Every man and woman alive struggles and falls to the same kinds of temptation. The word for "common" is the word *anthropinos*, which means 'that which belongs to man', that which all mankind can relate to. So, whatever it is you are dealing with, there is somebody else dealing with the very same thing. You are not alone. It is not as if you have been singled out. All of us deal with the same kinds of temptation.

Zodhiates said that "God considers testing necessary, not to lead us into an evil act, but to acquire experience and strength. . . ." And this is a lexicon input on this;

"Temptation" should be translated "testing". And the verb "overtaken" which is *lambano*, means "to take, seize, lay hold of, which has the idea of force or violence. Paul wants us to know that God has not allowed any believer to be tested beyond his ability to bear as His child.

It never feels that way, of course. Even Paul "despaired of life" at one point in his trials. But we are being asked to trust the Lord no matter how impossible things seem; He has work to do in us and if we could see the outcome, we'd agree with Him about how necessary this is.

When you are in the middle of a time of testing, which goes on and on, and everything in you is screaming for it to end, verses like this in 1 Corinthians 10, as well as all the historical examples we have in scripture from Job to Paul, have to become something we hold onto with both hands. The Lord knows how hard it is and how much endurance it will take, but if He delivered us, we would lose, not gain. We have to trust Him with that.

There is not one Navy Seal in the history of that special forces unit that, at some point, didn't desperately want to ring the bell and go home; but there is also not one Seal who did *not* ring it who regretted staying with the training through to the end; because of the honor their endurance brought to them when their training was completed.

We don't know what it will take to break us; we're asked to trust that the Lord *does* know and that He will move according to *that* knowledge.

And as difficult as it is to realize how crucial this is to our advance spiritually, we have to face the reality this author describes related to categorizations within the Body of Christ.

The Cross is a great divide. It divides people into three categories. Firstly, it makes a broad division between those who never get into Life, and those who do. Whether men and women get into Life at all depends entirely upon their acceptance of the Cross. But it divides further. It divides between those who *do* get into Life, those who are saved, and those who go right through to *fullness* of Life, and there is quite a real division there. Whether you like the theory or not, it is a fact. There are many Christians who have entered Life in Christ, that is, who have entered *the way* of Life, but are not going right on to fullness of Life. That is really what the New Testament is about- trying to get Christians to go on to fullness of Life. The Cross divides between those, because, while we come into the *way* of Life by the Cross, we also only come into the fullness of Life by the Cross, and that is another thing- a fuller, deeper application of the Cross. So, the Cross makes three categories, those not in Life, those in Life, and those in Life going on to fullness of Life.

We will have to wrap up soon, but let me give you an overview of the principles we've seen in this chapter so far.

We will never have to experience suffering as terrible as that of our Lord, but as we've also seen in past studies, Christians *do* suffer; and there's always a very important reason that God allows it. As we've seen in Corinthians and in other passages, there are basically three possible responses we can have;

1 Cor. 10 & 11 We can rebel and go back to the world or to embracing a Christianity that is merely a "form of godliness", an imitation of the real thing.

The book of Job – We can see this as opportunity to honor the Lord and dishonor or "put to shame" the devil.

2 Cor. 12 – We can receive, by God's sovereign permission, a messenger of Satan to buffet us (lit. pound consistently, chronically). We can see testing and temptation as an opportunity to advance spiritually.

Our *initial* reaction to all of these could *also* involve three options;

We can ignore the benefits of testing and back away from the Lord.

We can accept what the enemy is doing as being the sovereign right of God to allow it; Job took an *immediate* faith stand.

Or we can do what Paul did: He pleaded with God to remove it, but eventually rejoiced in his suffering once he understood the reason.

Finally, I found an excellent summation of David's life related to what we've been talking about;

The Lord says, "I have found David, a man after my heart." How can this be? Look at David and his sin with Uriah. Look at David numbering Israel and bringing upon the whole nation devastation. Look again at David in weakness bring back Absalom the murderer, without any repentance on the part of the murderer, purely on the ground of natural affection, overlooking more responsibility. Is this a man after God's own heart? These are the failures and weaknesses of the man, but right at the heart of that man there is something God sees which remains all through his life. This man has an eager, consuming jealousy for the Lord's interests, to find a place for the testimony. He is consumed with the zeal of the God's house. Therefore, he is a man after God's heart.

As I've said numerous times, this will always be a *heart* issue for us. We will fail, we will probably have all the responses the Corinthians had (hopefully, we won't murder anyone, but we might want to from time to time).

Failure under temptation never disqualifies us because God's "mercies are new every morning". It's not falling that takes us out of the race we're running in, it's the refusal to get back up. Here's a true story in the form of a poem written by an onlooker that exemplifies this:

"Give up, you're beaten!" They shout and plead,
"There's just too much against you now, you can't succeed."
And as I start to hang my head in front of failure's face,
I remember a children's race, young boys, young men;
And I remember it well.

Excitement, sure, but also fear; it wasn't hard to tell.
And fathers watched from off the side, each cheering for his son.
And each boy hoped to show his dad that he would be the one.
The whistle blew and off they went, young hearts and hopes of fire.
To win, to be the hero there, was each young boy's desire.

And one boy in particular, his dad was in the crowd,
was running near the lead and thought, "My dad will be so proud."
But as he sped down the field across a shallow dip,
The little boy who thought to win, lost his step and slipped.
Trying hard to catch himself, his hands flew out to brace,
And mid the laughter of the crowd, he fell flat upon his face.
Down he fell and with him hope. He couldn't win it now.

Embarrassed, sad, he only wished to disappear somehow.
But as he fell, his dad stood up and showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said, "Get up and win that race!"
He quickly rose, no damage done- behind a bit, that's all,
And ran with all his might to make up for his fall.
So anxious to restore himself to catch up and to win,
His mind went faster than his legs; he slipped and fell again.

I'm hopeless as a runner now, I shouldn't even try to race.
But, in the laughing crowd he searched and found his father's face
That steady look that said again, "Get up and win this race."
So, he jumped up to try again. Ten yards behind the last.
If I'm to gain those yards, he thought, I've got to run, and run fast.
Exceeding everything he had, he regained eight or ten,
But trying so hard to catch the lead, he slipped and fell again.

Defeat! He lay there silently; a tear dropped from his eye.
There's no sense running anymore- three strikes and I'm out- why try?
The will to rise had disappeared, all hope had flown away.
"I've lost, so what's the use", he thought, , "I must live with my disgrace."
But then he thought about his dad; "Get up," an echo sounded low.
"Get up and take your place.

You were not meant for failure here, get up and win the race."
With borrowed will, "Get up," it said, "You haven't lost at all,
For winning is not more than this, to rise each time you fall."

So up he rose once more. And with a new commit,
He resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.
So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been.
Still, he gave it all he had and ran as though to win.

Three times he'd fallen stumbling; three times he'd rose again.
Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end.
They cheered the winning runner as he crossed first place.
Head high and proud and happy; no falling, no disgrace.
But when the fallen youngster crossed the line in last place,
The crowd gave him the greatest cheer for finishing the race.

And even though he came in last, with head bowed low, unproud;
You would have thought he'd won the race, to listen to the crowd.
And to his Dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well."

"To me you won," his father said, "You rose each time you fell."

And when things seemed dark and hard and difficult to face,
The memory of that little boy- helps me in my race.

For all of life is like that race, with ups and down and all,
And all you have to do to win- is rise each time you fall.

(Proverbs 24:16) A righteous man falls seven times, and rises again.