

# Chapter Ten

## THE PROBLEM OF PRESUMPTUOUSNESS (10:1-33)

### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why would Paul bring up the failure of the Israelites right here?
2. Why are idolatry and immorality usually coincidental?
3. When is "the end of the ages"?
4. Are all temptations common to all men?
5. In what way is the "cup" which we bless a "participation" in the blood of Christ?
6. Was it possible for the Corinthians to be "partners" with demons?
7. Are *all* things really lawful for a Christian?

### SECTION 1

#### Illustration (10:1-5)

**10** I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same supernatural food <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

**10:1-4 Privileges:** The Corinthians are given a short review in Israelite presumptuousness. The descendants of Jacob ("Israel") were delivered from Egyptian bondage under the privilege of great, supernatural works. They were *immersed* (Gr. *ebaptisanto*) or surrounded by *water* in the cloud and the sea to protect them from the Egyptians. God gave them miraculous guidance in the unknown wilderness by a cloud and a pillar of fire. He sustained them by supernatural food and drink (cf. Exod. 13:1—17:16). God chose them for a messianic destiny. Since the Messiah was in their loins, God gave them the privileges of the Messiah's supernatural sustenance. It was the Anointed One of the Father who actually gave them the miraculous water in

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the wilderness. Jesus later made it plain that it was not Moses who gave them the bread from heaven, but God himself (John 6:32-33), and man's life is perpetuated not by physical bread but by the supernatural bread—the Word of God, even Jesus.

The ancient Israelites presumed these initial privileges meant God would surely continue to give them security without any need for an exercise of faith and holiness of life on their part. Hebrews 3:7-19 tells us why they became overconfident and presumptuous—pride and the deceitfulness of sin. Later Jews were so smug as to believe that as long as they had the Temple in their midst, God would not punish them for blatant sin (Jer. 7:4-11).

The Greek word *pneumatikon* is usually translated *spiritual*, but is correctly translated here *supernatural* (see comments on I Cor. 2:14-16). The emphasis of the context is the supernatural sustenance the Israelites were privileged to enjoy. The food and water they consumed was real and physical enough, but its origin was supernatural. The supernatural Spirit of God and Christ was with the Israelites through their journey to the promised land (see Isa. 59:21; 63:11-13). But God's Spirit was with them there in an even more important way. He provided the Israelites with *spiritual* bread and drink through Moses' teachings about the Messiah (see Deut. 8:3; 18:15). That "supernatural" Rock (the Christ) "followed" them in deed and word wherever they went in the wilderness. They were being sustained physically and spiritually by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God (through Moses).

**10:5 Perfidy:** This is the point Paul wishes to illustrate. Divine privileges obligated the recipients to respond in holiness and love. The Israelites were privileged, by God's grace, to receive supernatural and spiritual fellowship with the Creator above and beyond all other people. But they were unwilling to exercise self-control, holiness and love for their Benefactor. They "sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance."

Those who are Christians (including apostles) have privileges and liberties beyond anything the Israelites ever enjoyed. Most of the Israelites (all of responsible age except Joshua and Caleb) God destroyed in the wilderness. They never went into the promised land! They failed because they used the freedom from bondage God gave them for occasion to indulge their own fleshly desires. They would not control themselves and sacrifice the flesh for the greater messianic goal set before them in the teaching of Moses.

The Christians at Corinth had been baptized into Christ, set free, protected and sustained. They had heard Paul and other Christian teachers emphasize their freedom in Christ. They had been taught, and now believed, that an idol was nothing. They had been taught that all of God's creation was good and "everything belonged to them" (I Cor. 3:21-22). Paul evidently felt the Corinthians (especially the "strong" brethren) were dangerously close to becoming as presumptuous as the fleshly-minded Israelites were after their release from bondage.

There is a *risk* in freedom. When people are made free they are, by the nature of freedom itself, made vulnerable to options. Free people are autonomous (self-ruled) and may no longer be controlled by outside force. The only thing forced by freedom is *responsibility*. There is always the risk with freedom that people will "use their freedom as a pretext for evil" (I Peter 2:16). While there is risk in freedom, the alternative, trying to produce righteousness and morality by force of law, is unacceptable. Righteousness cannot be wrought by force; it can only be produced in a matrix of freedom to choose motivated through the compulsion of faith and love.

Of course, *God* must *reveal* to man precisely what kind of thinking and acting constitutes righteousness, goodness and morality. God has, by the redemptive work of Christ, made right thinking and acting possible. But God cannot, and will not, make man's choice for him. That is the *risk* God takes when he sets us free in Christ. The risk itself is *not* bad. Man could never *grow* into the potential for which he was created if the freedom to choose was not there. When man becomes proud and presumptuous, disaster is certain. That is when man rejects God's *revelation* (which is all wise and all powerful) directing him to true righteousness and goodness.

Often God reveals to man what righteousness is by revealing and warning against unrighteousness. That is what the apostle Paul does in this dissertation. He warned that overconfidence (which is really a lack of faith in God) makes man vulnerable to the temptations of *immorality, idolatry and insensitiveness*.

## SECTION 2

### Immorality (10:6-13)

6 Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is

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written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance." <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; <sup>10</sup>nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup>Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup>Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

**10:6 Imperative Instruction:** The actual, historical experiences and divine judgments upon Israel in the wilderness *became* (Gr. *egenethesan*, aorist verb) warnings for us, not to *ardently desire* (Gr. *epithemetas*) evil as they did. The word *warning* is *tupos* in Greek. It is the word from which we get the English word *type*. A "type" is "the *imprint* left when a die or other instrument is struck." John's gospel uses the word *tupos* when reporting Thomas' statement that he would not believe in the resurrection of Jesus unless he saw the "print" of the nail in Jesus' hand. Paul is saying that God recorded the history of Israel's forfeiture of its privileges and its fall in the wilderness to *strike* an indelible *tupos* (imprint or image) of the consequences of presumptuousness and overconfidence. The lesson is *historical*—not mythological, or allegorical, or theoretical.

Israel's divine judgment in the wilderness is separated from us by more than three thousand years. Israel's circumstances, technologically and culturally, differed from ours today like light and darkness. Our privileges, both spiritual and physical, surpass theirs. However, human nature and the human predicament are exactly the same. Man still cannot come to virtue and goodness without the grace of his Creator. Man still is tempted to be presumptuous, overconfident and independent of his Creator. So, man still refusing to learn from history, dooms himself to repeat it.

**10:7 Idolatry:** Idolatry is *immoral*. "Moral" means, "that which is right" and "immoral" means, "that which is wrong." It is wrong and immoral to worship other gods. The *first* commandment of the Decalogue is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod.

20:3; 20:23; Deut. 5:7). No object, thing, creature, human being, angel or spirit (except the Holy Spirit of God) is to be revered, worshiped, adored, exalted, prayed to, trusted in, or looked to for eternal life. To do so is idolatry. That which a man trusts and serves or puts first or gives the essence of his life to is his god. Jesus stated an unequivocal truth: "No man can serve two masters." No man can obey contradictory orders from two masters. No man can continue that way; sooner or later a man's motives and goals force him to choose which master he wishes to please. Then he will despise the other for interfering. The issue is: Man is so created that he takes on the nature of that which he worships (see Hosea 9:10; Ps. 115:3-8; Rom. 1:18-32).

**10:8 Illicit Intercourse:** The Greek word *porneuomen* is translated *immorality* (RSV) and *fornication* (KJV) and is the word from which we get the English word *pornography*. It probably refers to illicit sexual intercourse. The Israelites apparently indulged in fornication and adultery as they worshiped the golden calf (see Exod. 32 and Deut. 9); Paul may be referring to their fornication at the time of Balaam and Balak (see Num. 24-25).

We have already learned from this letter (ch. 5-7) that all forms of illicit sex were commonplace in Corinth, and that the Christians had a difficult time overcoming what was so socially acceptable by their heathen contemporaries. The seven churches of Asia Minor were also beset with this temptation to sexual perversion (cf. Rev. 2:14-15; 2:20-23). The Roman empire is characterized or symbolized in the early centuries (100-500 A.D.) as "the great harlot" (Rev. ch. 17-18). The Gnostic cult within the first and second century church taught that since all matter or all that is physical is evil, and all that is mental or spiritual is holy, so long as you did not think evil you should never be concerned about misusing your body. One could only sin with the mind, according to the Gnostics, not with the body. Gnostics said as long as you know or think what is right you are righteous no matter what you do with your body. Ancient Gnosticism has crept into the twentieth century Christian church under the guise called "situation ethics." Situation ethics says whenever a person does the most loving thing in any situation he has acted morally. Classic illustrations of this principle have pictured sailors, having been deprived of sexual release for months at sea, being "loved" by prostitutes because they have "done a good thing" in satisfying the sailor's sublimated sexual urges when he has come ashore on liberty. Some Christians have rationalized illicit sexual relations with persons other

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than their spouses by declaring they are “helping” their illicit partners find “love and tenderness” and relief from “frustration” for the first time in their lives.

Sexual intercourse with a person outside the bonds of matrimony, or with a person other than one’s singular spouse, is immoral in any circumstance. It is immoral because God has declared it to be so in his Word. No amount of human reasoning or feeling can change or temper that divine edict!

**10:9 Incredulity:** Unbelief is immoral. Paul warns, “Do not put the Lord to the *test*.” The Greek word translated test is *ekpeiradzomen*, which is literally, *overtest*, or, *test beyond what is acceptable*. God does want us to put the promises he has revealed to us in his Word to the test. At least as far as reason and propriety will allow. He does want us to test his Word to confirm its historicity and accuracy.

But to keep asking God to prove himself and his promises *beyond* the Word is to put him to the test! The Israelites did this when they asked for more proof than the Lord had already given of his presence among them (cf. Exod. 17:7; Deut. 6:16; Num. 21:4-6; Heb. 3:7-19).

This same unbelief appears to have been a problem with the Corinthians. It is demonstrated by their clamoring for the continuance of miraculous gifts which were given exclusively to create belief and were to “pass away” (see I Cor. ch. 12-14). At the same time the Corinthians shunned the gifts designed to edify and which were to abide. When the evidence is sufficient, demanding more from the Lord is to “put him to the test” and is immoral. Jesus warned the Jewish rulers who kept asking him for more “signs” that they were committing the *unpardonable sin*.

The Israelites in the wilderness had every opportunity and privilege God could offer to create faith and commitment in their hearts. But they asked for more. The Corinthians had every opportunity and privilege Christ could offer to give them liberty and freedom. They seemed to be demanding more. Paul warns them they are putting the Lord to the test. The New Testament is Christ’s final and complete “Bill of Rights” for the church. Any Christian who presumes to demand more is putting the Lord to the test.

**10:10 Ingratitude:** Christians are not to *grumble*. The Greek word is *egongusan* (Eng. *gong*) and is an onomatopoeic word, i.e., a word which represents the significance by the sound of the word, like the English word *murmur*. In the papyri the word is used of the impudent complaining of a gang of workmen. The word is almost always used

with the connotation of private or nearly inarticulate *complaining*. The Israelites were inveterate complainers (Num. 14:1-3; 14:27; 16:41; 17:5, 10; 20:2-13; see also Matt. 20:11; Luke 5:30; John 6:41, 43; 6:61; 7:32; Acts 6:1; Phil. 2:14; I Peter 4:9). It often appears that those most blessed and privileged are the most presumptuous and complaining. *Ingratitude* is the mother of all manner of wickedness (see Rom. 1:21ff.). Moses warned the Israelites against ungrateful presumption (Deut. 8:11-20). Paul is here warning all Christians about presuming upon the Lord's grace by complaining. Grumbling is immoral!

**10:11-13 Indolence:** Paul repeats his use of the Greek word *tupos*, type or imprint, in reference to God's historical dealings with the presumptuous Israelites. The RSV translates *tupos* with the word *warning* because the Christian age was the ultimate purpose for God's dealing with Israel as he did. The judgments and redemptions God worked upon Israel were recorded ultimately for the Bride of Christ—the New Testament church. Paul says they were *written* (Gr. *egraphe*, Eng. graph, engraved, graphically) for our *instruction* (Gr. *nouthesian*, combined word from *nous*, mind, and *tithemi*, to put; literally, a putting in mind). Our *instruction* is to be more than teaching, it is indoctrination—we are to have it put into our minds so that it becomes a part of our mentality or way of thinking.

The next phrase is, in Greek, *eis hous ta tele ton aionon katenteken*, or in English, *upon whom the end of the ages has come*. It is an extremely significant phrase because it is so decisive in stating apostolic eschatology in one declaration! It *clearly* declares the Christian age as the goal of all past ages. The Greek word *katenteken* is a perfect tense verb and may be translated, "has come down in the past with a continuing result." The decisive word in the whole phrase, however, is the Greek word *tele*, translated, *end*. It is the word from which we get the English prefix, *tele*, or *telo*, meaning, end, perfect, final, complete. The Greek word *teleios* means "having reached its end, finished, completed, perfected or final. The Christian age, begun on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17ff.), is the *final* age. There will be *no more* ages or eras or dispensations. The only great event in the framework of time yet to come is the *end of time*, at which point Jesus will come again visibly to deliver the faithful living and dead to glory and to judge and deliver the unfaithful living and dead to Hell. The church age is the kingdom age. There is *no* kingdom dispensation yet to come. Paul's use of the perfect tense verb *katenteken* and his use of the

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noun *tele* settles the issue of Christian eschatology once for all. All the previous dispensations or ages of history were pointing toward the Christian age as their goal. The coming of the Christian age means that the goal has been reached, that the last phase of redemption has begun. So Paul is urging the Corinthians that self-discipline is now imperative. God has no other plan of redemption than the one in the New Testament. God has no other revelation than that written down in the New Testament. God has no other time or age in which he will work with mankind than this age. "Behold, now (in the Christian age) is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day (or age) of salvation" (II Cor. 6:1-2). To wait for or hold out to others any hope of another time-frame (or dispensation) after this age in which God will offer salvation to any group of people is presumptuous. This phrase has behind it inspired, apostolic authority. It is in complete harmony with all the rest of the Bible in teaching that the Christian age (the church age) is the last age of time. There is no millennium (in the sense of a latter dispensation) yet to come. If there is any millennium at all in the framework of time, we are now in it.

Paul's purpose in making his unequivocal statement about the Christian dispensation being the last of God's dispensations in time is to *prove* his argument about the necessity for Christian resistance to temptation in this earthly phase of life. There is no other probationary or proving phase of life. We are becoming what we shall be. *Therefore*, let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. Let anyone who thinks *privilege* secures his standing before God, take heed lest he be indolent toward the *responsibilities* involved. To be indolent is to be lazy, to deliberately avoid responsibility or exertion; indolence is slothfulness. The Corinthians were prone to be slothful in exercising Christian charity and brotherhood toward "weaker brethren." They were arrogant in their liberty supposing such privileges secured their spiritual superiority. They presumed they "stood" while the weaker had "fallen."

Some Corinthians had clearly rationalized their arrogant disregard for "weaker" brethren by claiming they were participating in things they just could not quit. They probably argued that their old habit of eating at the feasts honoring idols was just too ingrained to be given up. They plead, our temptation is unique—no one knows how strong this temptation is. Besides, they knew an idol was no god so they were free to participate. Let the "weaker" brother look out for himself. He should get rid of his scruples and grow up to our level



of spirituality, they probably argued. Paul's answer was that *any* temptation may be resisted; *any* test endured.

The Greek word *eilephen*, translated *overtaken you*, is third person, singular, perfect tense, indicative mood, active voice. It means Paul is indicating these Corinthians had *already* been taken in the temptation of presumptuous arrogance and it was *continuing* in their lives. The apostolic revelation is that *every* temptation is *common* to mankind. The Greek phrase *ei me anthropinos* is translated "that is not common to man." *Anthropinos* literally means "is human." Now the devil may use different tools or agents in different cultural milieu or in different historical times, but his temptations to rebel against God generally fall into three or four general categories ("the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," I John 2:16). Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) essentially in these three categories; Eve and Adam were tempted in the Garden of Eden in these three categories (Gen. 3:1-7). The Corinthians could not excuse their weaknesses by claiming their temptations were unique. No man can!

On the positive side, every human being who wishes may have the help of God for every temptation he faces. God will not permit any man to be tempted beyond the availability of help. Notice that the Bible does *not* promise any man (especially Christians) that they will have *no* temptation. As a matter of fact, temptation is one of God's ways of disciplining his children. God does not want his children to do evil, nor does he push them in that direction (James 1:13-15). But he does want them to develop spiritual maturity and strength and this can only be done as his children wrestle with and conquer temptation (see Heb. 10:32-39; 12:1-17; James 1:2-11; II Cor. 1:3-11; 12:1-10). Jesus, fully human as he was fully divine, proved in the flesh that all temptation is common to mankind and that every temptation may be overcome if human beings will avail themselves, by total faith, of the help of God. Jesus never used his divinity nor his miraculous power to extricate himself from a temptation. He always relied on the word of God in total commitment to God's faithfulness (see Matt. 4:1-11, et al.).

With every temptation God allows he makes available an attendant way of escape. The Greek text has the definite article *ten* before the noun *ekbasin*. In other words, Paul says, ". . . with *the* temptation will also provide *the* way of escape." It is not *a* way of escape, but *the* way of escape. Every temptation has its own way of escape. The

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temptation and the way of escape come in pairs. God sees to it that one does not occur without the other. No man can plead "not guilty" by saying the way of escape was not made available because Paul says God sends with every temptation the escape *that you may be able to endure*. If a Christian sins it is not because he did not have the way to escape it; it is because he did not *avail* himself of the way of escape. Sin cannot overpower a person unless the person allows it. God expects all men to *resist* temptation (Prov. 1:10; 4:14; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 6:13; II Peter 3:17). God encourages all men to seek his help (Heb. 2:18; II Peter 2:9; Heb. 4:14-16, etc.). Great men of faith have resisted (Abraham, Gen. 14:23; Joseph, Gen. 39:1-9; Job, Job 2:9-10; the Rechabites, Jer. 35:5-6; Daniel, Dan. 1:8; Christ, Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; Peter, Acts 8:20). Spiritual indolence is inexcusable!

### SECTION 3

#### **Indulgence (10:14-22)**

14 Therefore, my beloved, shun the worship of idols. 15 I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? 19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22 Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

**10:14-18 Gregariousness:** Paul is not teaching a lesson on Christian communion or the Lord's Supper here. He is using Christian communion as an *analogy* or an illustration of the principle of *fellowship*. It should be logically apparent to any thinking individual that the congeniality of dining and drinking with someone indicates the diners are like-minded, agreed in aims and purposes. This was certainly

true in ancient cultures more than in modern American culture. People do not participate, continually, at meal-tables with their enemies; at least they are not that congenial with enemies by their own free choice. For example, when Christians eat and drink with Christ at his Supper they are testifying to all they are in "fellowship" with Christ. They demonstrate they have freely chosen to *participate* in what he is, in what he is for and against, and in what his aims and purposes are. As Paul will show, the Corinthians, by attending the pagan feasts dedicated to idols were testifying to all they were in "fellowship" with that for which the idol stood.

This passage in no way teaches the idea that the emblems of the Lord's Supper become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Neither does it teach that should we miss participation in the emblems due to circumstances beyond our control we lose contact with the blood of Christ. The death of Christ becomes efficacious to us through obedient faith, to be sure, but a person might have perfect attendance at the Lord's Supper and still lose contact with the blood of Christ *if* he is trusting in the ritual to make him meritoriously fit for salvation. The Pharisees never missed a tithe, never missed a fast, never missed a regulated time of prayer, but they were trusting in their own self-righteousness for approval before God rather than in God's mercy. The real issue here is not the *observance* of the Lord's Supper, *per se*, but that of *divided loyalty*. A man cannot *participate* with Christ and *participate* (or indulge) with the devil at the same time. A man cannot serve two masters. A man cannot serve God and mammon.

Another illustration is presented. The priests of the old covenant gave testimony to the fellowship they had with God when they participated in the ritual of offerings upon the altar of God. They did not partake, literally, of the altar—the altar itself was emblematic of the spiritual fellowship they had by faith. This meaning must be applied to all physical acts of New Testament Christianity. There is nothing supernatural or miraculous in the water in which a believer is immersed. The participation the believer has with the efficacious death of Christ is by faith. Immersion in water, in obedience to the command of Christ, symbolizes that faith. Refusal to be immersed, since that is the express act commanded in the New Testament for demonstrating initial faith, would symbolize unbelief. Partaking of immersion in water and the Lord's Supper testifies to, demonstrates and symbolizes the spiritual (unseen) reality of the believer's oneness with Christ. But the things themselves have no efficacy because

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*things* are amoral. Persons are moral. The efficaciousness of Christ's death is appropriated through the exercise of a person's faith. Proof that the altar *itself* contained no efficacy in which priests participated is clearly established by the prophets of the Old Testament who denounce the unbelieving priesthood of their day as enemies of God all the while they are performing the rituals at the altar.

**10:19-22 Guilt:** The preceding principle is exactly what Paul says he is trying to communicate to the Corinthians. Is the food, *per se*, offered to idols anything? No! Are the wooden or stone or metal images, in themselves, anything? No! A person is not defiled by touching an image or a piece of food sacrificed to an image. The issue is that what those pagans deliberately, willingly, and with personal, moral choice sacrifice to images is really (by their own understanding and choice) sacrifice to demons. These pagans know that the stone image is not a god in itself, but they are worshipping the personal being (an evil being) which it represents.

These "strong" Christians at Corinth had lost sight (from their misunderstanding of Christian liberty) of the fact that deliberately joining in the festivities and meals around the altar to an idol indicated they were willing to participate in the worship of the evil being represented by the image. They may have been "strong" enough not to have thought of their actions this way, but everyone else (including Christians more sensitively scrupulous) saw in it Christians willing to join in the worship of demons.

An idol or image may be only a piece of wood or stone, but it is a ready tool for the devil and his demons by which to deceive and seduce men into unbelief. We repeat—things are amoral. But evil persons may use things to corrupt and condemn men. Although Christians may understand that a thing is neither right nor wrong in itself, when they participate in the wrong use of an object, they become partners with the evil person who is using that object to destroy goodness. This is not guilt by association, but guilt by participation. Can we buy, sell, attend, defend things and places devoted to sin and destruction of mind and body without sharing in the devil's work?

All a person has to do to become a partner of the devil and his work is to refuse to become a partner with Christ and his work! Some people think they may be neutral, not an enemy of Christ, yet not a friend of the devil—so they think. Wrong! Jesus said (Matt. 12:30-31) "He that is not with me is against me; he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." Paul says it, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons." To refuse to surrender to the Lordship of

Jesus is not neutrality—it is the enthronement of self. The person who rejects Jesus as king, makes himself king. To worship man is idolatry and, actually, “demonolatry” (see Rom. 1:22-25). Rejection of Christ is immoral because it is a rejection of absolute truth. To refuse to participate in the work of Christ is to join in the work of the demons of hell. There is no middle ground!

## SECTION 4

### Insensitiveness (10:23-30)

23 “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. <sup>24</sup>Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. <sup>25</sup>Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>26</sup>For “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” <sup>27</sup>If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>28</sup>(But if some one says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience’ sake—<sup>29</sup>I mean his conscience, not yours—do not eat it.) For why should my liberty be determined by another man’s scruples? <sup>30</sup>If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

**10:23-24 Carelessness:** As mentioned earlier, with Christian liberty there is risk. There is always an ever present danger that the Christian will become selfishly concerned foremost about his liberty and unconcerned about the scruples of his brother. Thus Paul repeats the fundamental principle of Christian liberty, “All things are lawful . . .” qualifying it with, “but not all things are helpful.” The Greek word *sumpherei* is translated, *helpful*, but means literally, *brought together*. It is often translated by the English word *expedient*, and is more accurately understood by the word *advantageous*, or, *profitable*. Paul goes on to say, “All things are lawful, but not all things build up.” The Greek word *oikodomei* is a word from the construction trades, *oikos*, house, and, *demo*, to build. One might even translate the phrase, “. . . not all things are *constructive*.”

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The liberty of the Christian is not for the sake of self-indulgence. Christ set men free to reach their highest potential. Their highest potential is in the service of others—to be helpful, to build people up to do constructive things for others, so they may be reborn in the image of Christ. “He who would be greatest among you must be the slave of all” (Mark 10:44).

Actually, Paul is not saying a Christian is free to do anything he wishes, participate in every human behavior, partake of any object on earth, or even think anything he wishes to think. Christian freedom is limited by the revealed (Biblical) word of God. When Paul says, “All things are lawful” the immediate context must be remembered. The context is the specific discussion of *eating meat sacrificed to idols*. Paul declared Christ had set all Christians free from the legal restrictions of the Mosaic law concerning foods. If the law of Moses had not been superceded, no Christian could eat meat which had been butchered by a pagan lest he be ceremonially unclean. But the Mosaic restrictions no longer applied. Such *food* was not contaminated. Paul is saying “All foods formerly prohibited by the Mosaic law are lawful” (see I Tim. 4:1-5). He was not saying, “All actions are lawful.” But while all foods were lawful, the Christian might sin partaking even of lawful food if he should wound the conscience of a weaker brother by doing so.

Life can never be at a standstill. If it is not growing or developing toward the higher—if it is not being constructive—it is declining toward the lower. What is not used for growth will become atrophied and eventually destroy and be destroyed. Christian freedom that is careless and unconcerned about helpfulness and growth, inevitably contributes to destruction. Paul expressed this principle graphically in Romans 14:19 “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual up-building” or in Romans 15:2, “let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.” And now to the Corinthians, the shocking words, so diametrically opposed to modern, worldly “me-ism,” “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.” The Christian is not simply to help his neighbor if the opportunity to do so happens to present itself. The Christian is to *seek* good for his neighbor. The Greek verb *zeteito* is present, imperfect, active, meaning the Christian is to go on and on and on *seeking* good for his neighbor. That is the Christian’s job! It may be of significance that Paul does not limit his exhortation to the Christian here to seek the good

of a "brother." He literally wrote, "No one the thing of himself let him go on and on seeking, but the thing of the other." The word *other* is the Greek word *heterou* which denotes generic distinction or difference in character. It is translated *neighbor*. Christians are to put to practice the limits of love on Christian liberty toward all men.

**10:25-27 Complication:** With the issue of Christian liberty and scrupulousness, comes the temptation upon the stronger to implicate the weaker in behavior contrary to the weaker one's conscience. Paul states the principle by which the Christian conducts himself properly and then he illustrates it with an hypothetical situation. First, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience—for the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." The Greek word *makello* translated *meat market* is found nowhere else in the New Testament. It is probably a word coined by the Greeks from the Latin word *macellum* which meant "a bench or stall for marketing merchandise, especially, meats; it came to designate a slaughterhouse" and since warfare usually turned a town into a "slaughterhouse" or a "shambles" that is how the word came to be translated *shambles* in archaic English. A drawing of archaeological discoveries in the ancient city of Pompeii shows both the slaughterhouse and the meat-shop next to the chapel of Caesar. This confirms the suggestions of our text that there was a very close connection between the meat-market and pagan idolatry. It would have been very difficult for any one, even a Christian, to buy meat in such a market without being immediately associated with worshiping at the temple of the idol.

So, writes Paul, the helpful or constructive (edifying) thing for a Christian to do, should any plate of meat be set before him, would be to refrain from questioning whether the meat came from the pagan "meat-market" or not. The Greek clause, *meden anakrinontes* (translated, *discerned* in I Cor. 2:14-15), translated here *do not question*, means literally, *do not carry on an investigation*. It is a legal term. Paul is not, of course, forbidding all questioning of right and wrong. He is not discussing the conscience of the eater at all—but the conscience of the server. The instruction is that the guest is not to implicate the conscience of the host by asking questions about the meat set before them.

Out of pure worldly arrogance, a strong, more sophisticated person may be tempted to implicate a weaker (more scrupulous) person

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just to elevate his own image of "wisdom" or "sophistication" by exposing the scruples of the more conscientious person. Paul says this is not fitting Christian conduct. It is not right for a strong Christian to exploit the scruples of a weaker brother or a pagan intending to display his own "knowledge" or "freedom" by agitating for such a comparison.

It is significant that Paul is setting forth proper ethical behavior of the Christian toward the unbeliever. There may be some Christians who think unbelievers do not deserve to be treated ethically. It is also interesting there is an assumption that the Christian would wait to be invited by the unbeliever to his home and would not push himself into the pagan's fellowship uninvited. He says, *kai thelete poreuesthai*, "and if you wish to go. . . ." He does not command them to go, or even encourage them to go—but to go if they wished. And if they accept the invitation, Christian helpfulness, Christian purpose to edify, yes, Christian love, requires that no complicating implications be raised. To do so would be immoral!

Christians will not try to destroy weaker, even unbelieving, persons by irritating or ventilating consciences, without positive instruction in what is right and wrong so that edification will result. Conscience is a functioning characteristic—not a diagnosing or circumscribing characteristic. The conscience functions on the basis of what the mind diagnoses as right and wrong. The conscience does not tell a person *what* is right and wrong, its function is to *judge* the heart for having *done* either the right or the wrong. *Information* as to *what* is right and wrong comes from revelation—from the word of God, the Bible. For the Christian to go into a home and begin to fuss and cross-examine an unbeliever as to how abominable it is to serve meat purchased in an idol-market, is to proceed to destroy the unbeliever. No Christian is to use his "knowledge" or his "liberty" to destroy another.

**10:28-30 Callousness:** The questions arise, "What if a Christian conscientiously believes it is not wrong for him to eat meat from the pagan meat-markets and there is an unbeliever present who believes it is wrong for the Christian to do so?" "And, what if the unbeliever says to the Christian, 'This has been offered in sacrifice'?" Is the Christian to reply, callously, "If my eating offends you or bothers you, that is your problem, not mine. I know it is not wrong so I am going to eat it!"? Paul says an emphatic, No! The Christian must sacrifice his liberty of conscience to the scruples of even an unbeliever.



Out of consideration for the possible salvation of the unbeliever, and even for the sake of the unbeliever's over-scrupulousness, the Christian is not to eat.

With all the freedom in Christ and with the liberated conscience of the believer comes the danger of callousness on the part of the person who knows an idol is not a god. It is often true that the non-Christian has a much stricter opinion of the proper behavior of a Christian than a fellow-Christian has. So the Christian must be willing to sacrifice his "rights" even when the unbeliever is excessively scrupulous. If a Christian is insensitive and disregards the scruples of an unbelieving friend, he almost inevitably damages his influence for Christ with that friend.

The final sentence of verse 29, "For why should my liberty be determined by another man's scruples?" is *not* a cry of rebellion on the part of the "stronger" brother. Verses 29b and 30 are rhetorical questions from the apostle Paul, in anticipation of the answer in verses 31, 32, and 33. The Greek expression, *hinati gar he eleutheria mou krinetai . . .*, is stronger than the most English translations present it. It might be translated, "To what end or purpose is my liberty to be determined by another man's scruples?" J. B. Phillips has it correctly translated in *The New Testament In Modern English*, "Now why should my freedom to eat be at the mercy of someone else's conscience? Or why should any evil be said of me when I have eaten meat with thankfulness, and have thanked God for it? *Because*, whatever you do, eating or drinking or anything else, everything should be done to bring glory to God." Why should the strong Christian brother be willing to make such sacrifices as to surrender his freedom to someone else's conscience? Or, conversely, if what the strong Christian eats is something for which he is able to thank God, and he is slandered for it, why is it proper that evil has been spoken of him? *Because*, any action that violates another man's conscience does not bring glory to God; and that includes even an action for which a strong Christian may give thanks to God.

**10:31-33 Conclusion:** Paul is ready to move on to another "problem that is plaguing the saints" but before he does he wants to sum up what he has said about Christian liberty. The Greek verb *poieite* (English, *do*) is used twice in verse 31. In that Greek form it may be either present indicative or present imperative. It appears Paul uses it both ways in this verse. It might be paraphrased, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you are continuing to do, I command

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you to do all to the glory of God.” The application of the actions of a Christian is as wide as the total sphere of the Christian’s movement in society. The actions of a Christian will have influence on everyone who sees him, hears him, or makes contact with him in any other way (see Rom. 14:7-9). And this is particularly true of the influence a Christian may have on unbelievers. In the Christian, the unbelieving world is seeing an attempt to live out in the flesh the personality or character of God and Christ. God is glorified when Christians live according to the principles of self-sacrifice and love enunciated by Paul in these chapters (8, 9, 10).

Strange as it may seem, there are Christians who, while being careful not to offend an unbeliever, are careless about offending a brother in Christ. That is somewhat like the behavior of certain persons toward their immediate family members—showing deference and politeness to strangers while being rude and insensitive toward father, mother, brothers and sisters. So, Paul makes a point of saying, “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the *church* (Gr. *ekklesia*, congregation) of God.”

Paul never compromised on matters that were essential to one’s belief in Jesus. He never compromised on matters of moral behavior clearly delineated in the scriptures. He would not even compromise on a matter of indifference (circumcision) when the Jews insisted that it was a matter of covenant relationship to Christ. So, those areas are *not* in the scope of his statement, “. . . just as I try to please all men in everything I do. . . .” He did accommodate himself to the scruples of others in matters that were opinions and not essential to covenant terms with Christ. Paul did not curry the favor of men. His primary goal in life was to please God (Gal. 1:10; I Thess. 2:5-6). A better translation of the Greek word *aresko* would be “seems proper.” Paul is saying, “. . . just as I try to behave as seems proper toward all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.” Paul would do anything, short of apostasy and immorality, to save a man. He would sacrifice any of his privileges or “rights” to win men to Christ. He imitated Christ. He commands (Gr. *ginesthe*, imperative mood, *Be!*) all Christians to be imitators of him as he is of Christ. Verse 1 of chapter 11 should be considered the closing statement of the discussion of chapter 10. May God grant us the power and the motivation to do everything possible to win men to Christ!

## APPLICATIONS:

1. God gave great privileges to the Israelites he did not give to others—they defaulted. *What about Christian's privileges?*
2. Since the Old Testament events are warnings to us, should we not study them more frequently?
3. What responsibilities are incurred by the privileges of freedom?
4. What "idols" are you tempted to worship?
5. Unbelief is immorality.
6. We must make constant, deliberate and overt expressions of thankfulness, because ingratitude is the most heinous of all sins.
7. Do not be lead astray—the church age is the last age there will be.
8. God makes a way to avoid every temptation to sin known to man. The question is, Do we believe God?
9. Taking the Lord's Supper is more than participating in a ritual. It is a weekly oath or testimony by the Christian that he is like-minded and of the same purpose as Christ.
10. To be insensitive to another person's moral reservations or scruples is a sin for the Christian.
11. To implicate another person with guilt by questioning or belittling another person's scruples is wrong.
12. Every Christian who desires to glorify God must agree that his liberty is to be determined by the scruples of others!
13. The Christian must be willing to give up anything, or to do anything short of apostasy and immorality to win men to Christ.

## APPREHENSIONS:

1. Why does Paul give a short review of Israelite history?
2. What kind of privileges did God give Israel in the wilderness?
3. What kind of responsibilities are demanded as a response to such privileges?
4. What is the risk of freedom?
5. How were the experiences of the Israelites *types* of all human experiences toward God?
6. Why is idolatry almost always associated with illicit sexual behavior?
7. What is "putting the Lord to the test"? Do Christians today do that? How?
8. Why are Christians warned against "grumbling"?

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9. When did the "end of the ages" come? Why is it significant that we understand this? Why do so many people today insist the "end of the ages" is yet to come?
10. Are there any temptations unique to just you?
11. Are there any temptations for which there are no escapes? Why, then, do men fall into temptations?
12. Can a Christian eat food sacrificed to an idol without participating in the worship of demons?
13. Are *all* things lawful to a Christian? What does Paul mean by his statement?
14. How careful must the Christian be about criticizing and ridiculing another person's scruples?
15. Should a Christian condescend to behaving according to a weaker brother's more rigid scruples?
16. What is the purpose in allowing another person's scruples determine one's liberty?
17. Should we do anything, short of apostasy and immorality, to win others to Christ? Give up anything which is merely a matter of opinion?