

LESSONS FROM CORINTHIANS I Corinthians 9:27-10:13

What a blessing to see the next generation exuberant in their faith and unbridled in their enthusiasm and full of joy in worshiping the Lord. They are so positive and full of life.

When I witness this, I wonder what happens to most of us. [We say, "Well, they're children. That is how children act."] Yes, there is obviously something known as youthful enthusiasm. But it is still a fact that we adults, who have experienced more of God's blessings than any of these in the choir loft, can lose our exuberance, our joy in our faith, our positiveness, our appreciation for our freedom in Christ. I find places in scripture where people who have every reason to be joyous and grateful to the Lord fail to respond the way they ought.

For example, in Luke 17, the story is told of 10 lepers who had the good fortune of crossing the path of Jesus. They cried out for mercy, and He healed all of them. These miserable outcasts from society were fully healed and sent to the priests to receive the pronouncement of "clean" so they could live as normal human beings again. That was a pretty good reason for gratitude of their freedom through Jesus. But the text says that only one returned to thank Him—and he was a Samaritan. If that one could find Jesus and thank Him then all of the others could have as well. That was a 90% failure rate.

In our text today, we find the same high failure rate. In speaking about those that experienced freedom from the bondage of Egypt, Paul noted that rather than responding appropriately, they abused their freedom. Paul specifically says that "all" of them received God's blessings, but God was not pleased with "most" of them. Actually Paul was being generous in his statement. Of the host that came out of Egypt, Joshua and Caleb—only 2—were the ones that received the pleasure of God. Again, this is a high failure rate. ALL the lepers were healed, and one expressed gratitude for their new freedom. ALL of the Hebrews leaving Egypt received the blessings of God. MOST did not respond appropriately in their new freedom.

Although we have experienced and continue to experience God's immeasurable blessings, it seems that we have the tendency to respond like the MOST. We become very presumptuous. We begin to want things outside of God's provision, grumble, complain and test God. That is what this generation fresh from redemption did. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul uses these people as a warning for us. He knows that many in the church in Corinth may have known these stories but believed that most had missed the lessons in the stories. So, Paul is warning them lest they become "disqualified" in their Christian lives. He ties this passage with his last statement at the end of chapter 9.

Let's read the passage including 9:27.

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful

that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it [1 Corinthians 9:27-10:13].

Let's look at this passage for its lessons to us.

Paul begins by recounting the blessings of God for the Hebrews in terms of redemption, His presence, His sustenance and provision.

The Hebrews had been in bondage for 400 years. The present generation is under great oppression. The time of God's redemption has arrived. Now Paul recounts the blessings of God to the "ALL."

1. They all were under the cloud. They all were blessed by the presence, protection and guidance of God.
2. They all were baptized. They didn't get wet. Only the Egyptians got wet. This means that they were separated from their former world and now belonged to God. This happened with Moses who was God's representative.
3. They all ate the same spiritual food and drink. We know that they received the provisions of manna, quail [Bojangles] and water. Physical food was spiritually provided. And this physical provision of food should have made a spiritual difference. Paul says that they drank from the spiritual rock which was Christ. Paul is emphasizing all of the blessings of God that comes through the conduit of His Son, the true Rock. [We know they got water more than the times that Moses spoke to the rock and hit the rock. God was their constant provider]. Remember—ALL of them experienced this. Therefore, they all should have recognized God's power, goodness, grace and provision and been awash in gratitude and commitment. It should be even more so for us "***on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come***" [1 Corinthians 10:11].

But what was the response of MOST of these people?

1. They desired things outside of the divine provision [vs. 6]. Having been given all they needed, they began to desire more beyond God's provision. Adam and Eve suffered from the same ailment. God blessed them with all they needed, and they believed they needed more [to become like God knowing good and evil]. In getting the more, they wound up with less. Overreach always leads to defection. It always leads to leanness of heart. It leads to disqualification.
2. They became idolaters [vs. 7]. They had the only God they needed, and they began to give their allegiance to something else. God was just not enough. Later after they entered the land, the sites of idolatrous worship were called "high places." We establish those same types of things in our lives—careers, possessions, plans that God is not prompting, etc. They steal our worship and allegiance. We have a way of trading the living God for stuff. We find money for the latest gadgets and wants but cannot find money nor time for God.

A key phrase here that Paul pulls from the story of the golden calf in Exodus is this: ***they sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.***

We love a God who requires nothing of us. Yahweh was too demanding. He requires sacrifice. We love to take and not give, be served rather than to serve. We love religion made easy. It makes me feel so good. I get what I want and contribute nothing.

Like the Israelites and the Corinthians, we think we can play around with idols and they will not affect us. "We can handle them."

It leads to disqualification.

3. They put God to the test and grumbled. They pushed God to the limit, questioning His character and goodness. They were dissatisfied with what they had and demanded more. They murmured. **To murmur is to give audible expression to unwarranted dissatisfaction.**

Murmuring is one-sided. It always stays on the negative side. They grumbled about the manna and water. They wondered why they ever left Egypt. They grumbled about the food. They longed for the variety of food they had in Egypt. They wanted different sides—cucumbers, leeks. They wanted more garlic in their green beans. Which do you want, freedom from Egypt with manna and water or your old menu with miserable bondage? They wanted some of both. We deserve to have it all. They were absorbed with themselves.

Whatever we think God owes us, it does not compare with what He has already given us and is giving us.

Folks, we have been redeemed from damning and deadening bondage. We have been included in the family of God. We have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ. We have a glorious future ahead of us. We have His presence with us always. We are supplied with sufficient grace. Yet, we complain and in our bitterness list what we think we deserve and what God has failed to do for us. God has not served up enough for me. If you are a Christian, then you are in the ALL. But do we then act like the MOST?

This is what led to their disqualification. That was something that Paul greatly feared. He did not fear suffering, persecution or even death. He feared being disqualified.

What does he mean by disqualification? In the story with the Israelites it was certainly a setting aside, even death. Paul is not talking about us losing our salvation. Disqualification in the race is more like:

- Losing our ministry
- Losing our reward
- Failure to bless people
- Failure to reach people
- A loss of our witness and effectiveness

There are those today who bless no one. They are Christians today who are not ambassadors. They are deterrents. We grumble to the point that no one wants to be around us. Our grumbling gives people the wrong impression of the strength, joy and consolation that the love of Christ affords.

We become defectors. We lose the vision of the greatness of God. We see big people and fortified cities and doubt His power. We become disqualified.

There should be about us a spark of life, evidence of a new creation, the joy of a blessed people. But, spiritually speaking, we can become like dead carcasses in the desert.

We all have the tendency to desire what we should not, to create idols, to test God and grumble. But we don't have to. A defeated Christian has no one to blame but himself. Take the route of the exodus. Be triumphant by taking God's way through.

Are we living the life Christ died for us to live? Are we truly living for the sake of the Gospel?

Challenged by these lessons from the Hebrews, I think we need to do the following:

1. Repent and ask for forgiveness
2. Revisit our redemption and recount our blessings. That will render murmuring senseless.
3. Remember that God is sufficient. With Him, I need nothing else.
4. Fear disqualification.
5. Be determined not to be included in the MOST. We must live with discipline every day. The Olympics have reminded us of that. The athletes that win have to be incredibly disciplined. One of our gold medalists in track said in answer to how she prepared—I was a people pleaser. I had to learn to say no and stick with the discipline.

He is the God Who redeems from bondage, provides for His people and leads us to the land of promise. Follow Him.

