

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Things Which Disqualify Corinthians 10:1-13

It is not uncommon for Christians who believe in the eternal security of the believer, (and I believe this doctrine) to become smugly secure in the outworking of this precious truth in the life. A person may falsely reason, "I'm secure in Christ. I'm saved and can't be lost. If I sin a little, surely God will be gracious and forgive me." How often we take advantage of the compassion and mercy of a loving God, not realizing that He requires holiness of life from his people. We often forget that a Christian can be disqualified from the spiritual race.

Paul tells us that he was running the spiritual race that he might not be disqualified.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 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 (I Cor. 9:24-27).

The Apostle Paul exercised rigorous, strenuous self-discipline and self-control over his body in order to run the race and win the prize which included final salvation and the receiving of rewards, spiritual crowns which he would throw at the feet of Christ at the final Judgment Seat of Christ. The word "disqualified" is the Greek word *adokimos* which means "to test and disapprove or reject." Paul has in mind the loss of rewards for a Christian and may indirectly imply total rejection or reprobation by God as an unbeliever. Certainly the context is about receiving rewards as a Christian for faithful service, but the word might also include a reprobate or a castaway; that is a person who is faking Christianity, who fails to persevere and who will ultimately abandon the Christian faith by turning away from Christ and going back into the world. By mere outward appearance, it is hard to tell a true Christian out of fellowship with Christ from a mere professing Christian whose heart has never been subdued by the sovereign Christ. Only God knows for sure who the elect are, and we can only surmise who the elect are by their profession of faith in Christ and the spiritual fruits which flow from the life.

Apparently some of the Christians at Corinth had become smugly secure in their Christian life. They were abusing their Christian liberties. They had become somewhat careless and reckless in their Christian conduct. Furthermore, they were not very interested in pursuing a life of holiness, so Paul exhorts them to get on with the Christian race lest they be disqualified. Paul uses Israel in I Corinthians 10:1-13 as an illustration of a whole generation which was disqualified from the spiritual race because of godless conduct.

I Corinthians 10:11 says, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." All that happened to Israel happened for a definite purpose that we who are Christians might learn from them. Therefore, this section of Scripture is not just for the Corinthians but for the whole church of Christ Jesus.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF ISRAEL'S FAILURE 10:1-5

Israel's Privileges (10-1-4)

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, many of the Corinthians thought they knew everything. They considered themselves very spiritual, believing they had arrived in Christian maturity. Paul had to remind them about the Israelites who failed to exercise self-discipline and self-control in their spiritual experience and the whole nation, twenty years old and up, was disqualified. Paul will go on to show how the Israelites had tremendous blessing and spiritual privilege but blew it because of unbelief and disobedience.

That our forefathers were all under the cloud.. . The cloud is a reference to the Shekinah glory which hovered over the camp of Israel, shining by day to guide them and becoming a pillar of fire at night to protect them. The cloud is a symbol of God's presence with Israel as He led them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and in the desert for 40 years.

Israel is a type or illustration of the church. Each Christian enjoys the constant presence of Jesus Christ as spiritual Israel, for Christ said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

And that they all passed through the sea. Every Israelite, from the newest infant to the most elderly, passed supernaturally through the Red Sea. All were miraculously delivered from Egypt, escaping the dominion of Pharaoh and slavery.

This, again, is the privilege of every Christian, for every believer as spiritual Israel, has been delivered from the bondage of sin. The Bible says, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect" (I Pet 1:18-19).

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. The secondary meaning of the word "baptism" is "to identify with." Israel was not immersed into Moses or the Red Sea. Every Israelite was identified with Moses who was God's appointed leader over them.

Every Christian is spiritually identified with Jesus Christ, his or her supernatural leader, and is put into indissoluble union with Him at the moment of conversion. Christ, therefore, becomes the Christian's head or leader.

They all ate the same spiritual food. Every Israelite ate the manna which was a heavenly and supernaturally provided by God to sustain and strengthen them.

Every Christian has the privilege of feasting upon Jesus Christ by faith. Christ said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn. 6:35). As Christians, we are dependent upon Christ for spiritual sustenance and strength.

And drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. At the beginning and the end of the 40 years journey, God provided water for the Israelites in a supernatural way. There was a literal rock, and from that rock flowed an abundance of water. The rock, Paul says, was Christ. This does not mean a rock was rolling behind the children of Israel all through the desert. The water came from the rock, but the source of the water was provided by the pre-incarnate Christ, the second person of the Trinity. What Paul is saying is that whenever the symbol of the rock appears in the Old Testament, it is a reference to the person of Christ. In the Old Testament, the Rock was a title for Jehovah, so Paul is saying that Christ is the Jehovah of the Old Testament; that is, He is full deity come in the flesh.

Notice the repetition of the word "all." Israel had great privileges, great blessings, but they became complacent in their spiritual experience. The point is obvious that the spiritually privileged can fall into sin regardless of how privileged they are. Furthermore, believers may experience miracles as did Israel but still God was not pleased with them because of unbelief. Some people think because God has done some special things for them that anything they do is O.K. with God. How wrong they are!

Israel's Punishment (10:5)

Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. The Bible says 600,000 men left Egypt, and if women and children are included, about two million Israelites came out of Egypt. Of those 20 years old and over only two entered the promised land - Joshua and Caleb. Multiple thousands of these Israelites died in the desert. Why? Because of unbelief and disobedience. They were disqualified from the spiritual race. From the border of Egypt to the border of Canaan, their bodies were scattered and strewn all over the desert. This was God's judgment against rebels. What calloused hearts these Jews had! Even Moses did not make it into the promised land because he became angry with the Israelites and disobeyed God's specific command. He struck the rock instead of speaking to it to get water. What was so bad about that? Anytime believers disobey God, there are consequences, especially those in leadership.

Try to picture hundreds of thousands of dead corpses littered and strewn all over the desert. These Israelites died physically because of the judgment of God. Were they believers or unbelievers, possessors of professors, true saints or false saints? We cannot know the answer to that question for sure, but God knew. By their lives, we cannot tell whether they were saved or unsaved, but God knew and only eternity will tell for sure. Nothing specifically is said about their eternal destiny because that is not the point of the story. The point is that these things happened as an example and warning to Christians. Whatever their spiritual condition, they were a presumptuous generation. It is my opinion that many of the Israelites were truly saved, but only God knows the motives of the human heart. The only way we can know whether a

person is a true believer is by the spiritual fruit which comes from one's life. If some of these Israelites were believers, they were disqualified from the race and God either put them on the shelf so as to have no useful life of service or He brought them physical death for their unbelief and disobedience. God can and does remove His power from a rebellious Christian who fails to obey Him, and he can check him out of the world if the rebellion continues.

This may also indirectly refer to God's wrathful judgment against professing believers who were never regenerate, never truly saved. Of the two million who left Egypt, it would be difficult to tell who were and were not true believers. We do know there was a mixed multitude even among the Israelites. And a mixed multitude went up also with them (Exo. 12:38 ASB).

INSTRUCTION AS TO WHY ISRAEL FAILED 10:6-11

Craving for Evil Things (10:6)

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Israel had been out of Egypt for about a year and camped at Mt. Sinai for a period of time. In unbelief, they began to lust. An inordinate desire began to swell up in them. They began to crave the flesh pots of Egypt.

The rabble (mixed multitude) with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but manna!" (Num. 11:4-6).

They wanted the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic of Egypt. Actually, it was lousy slave food, but in their unbelief and complacency that which was bad was remembered as good. The Israelites began to complain about the heavenly food manna. They craved the old way of life in Egypt. They were camped at Sinai, but their hearts were in Egypt. God was so displeased with this unbelief that thousands died by His judgment of a plague and their corpses were littered all over the desert.

Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food (Num. 11:35).

How appropriate this example was for the libertine Corinthians who were toying with the idea of going back into some form of pagan temple worship which they had been delivered out of by the power of Christ. Abusing their Christian liberty they were flirting with idolatry. They were lusting after the meats offered to idols in the pagan temples. This longing to go back into the old, unconverted life would disqualify them if they really did it.

Christian, how many times have you said, "I would like to go back and do a few things I did before I became a Christian. I feel so confined. I know it would be sin, but it is fun and God will forgive me." To take this kind of attitude is to be presumptuous Christian, presuming on the grace of God, and it may disqualify you from the spiritual race. God is displeased and heartbroken when we long to go back into that old life from which Christ delivered us by His own precious blood. Don't blame God when you give in to your sinful desires. God does not tempt us with evil but we yield to sinful desires.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (Jms. 1:13-15).

Participating in Idolatry (10:7)

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." According to Exodus 32:6, Israel was guilty of idolatry when they made the golden calf. While Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, the people got tired of waiting after 40 days, so they had a pagan, idolatrous feast. This was a wild party that ended in an orgy. The Israelites did not believe they were idolatrous when they made the golden calf. They did not see it as a violation of the second commandment which says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Exo. 20:4). They probably rationalized that the golden calf was only an aid to the worship of Jehovah. Yet, 3000 Israelites died and more were disciplined because of this incident. The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died (Exo. 32:28).

Paul was warning these Corinthians to avoid any type of idolatry, for they were being enticed back into the pagan temples. They probably didn't think this was wrong but God did. In fact, in I Corinthians 10:21, Paul said that to go back into idolatry of any kind was to get mixed up with demons. Idolatry of any kind would disqualify the Corinthians from running and winning the race.

In I John 5:2 1, Christians are told, "Dear children, keep yourselves, from idols." What is idolatry? In the truest sense, idolatry is the worshiping of a false God. By application, it may be the worship of a physical object or the worship of some mental concept. Anything which takes the place of Christ in our lives is idolatry. An idol is anything we love more than Christ. Many Christians bow down mentally and worship their homes, cars, boats, children, mates, sports figures, rock-and-roll artists or a movie star. This is idolatry of the mind and it is just as serious as bowing to a stick or stone. Idolatry of the mind can easily ensnare us and keep us from winning the race. Idolatry can and will disqualify us!

Participating in Sexual Immorality (10:9)

We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. The Israelites had come up to the border of Canaan, the promised land, and instead of trusting God to go into the land, they fell into sexual immorality. While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices of their gods (Num. 25:1). Israel began to commit fornication with the daughters of Moab and joined themselves to the pagan god Baal-peor. Why? Because of unbelief. This displeased the Lord and judgment came in the form of a plague and 23,000 died in one day and another thousand died before the discipline was all over.

Some of the Corinthians were flirting with temple worship and with the temple worship came sexual immorality. Surely, this would invite the judgment of God on them.

We Christians live in a sexually corrupt country. America has bowed its knee to the god of sex. If we Christians choose to participate in this evil life style, God will be displeased and may disqualify us from the spiritual race. Are a few moments of pleasure worth this severe discipline?

Testing the Lord (10:9)

We should not test the Lord, as some of them did -- and were killed by snakes. The Israelites challenged Moses and God with their griping and complaining about the faithfulness of God.

But the people grow impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died (Num. 21:5-6).

They hated the desert, so they began to repudiate the faithfulness of God. In their repeated griping, carping and complaining against God and their failure to rest in God's faithfulness, the Israelites pushed God to the limit of His patience and it displeased Him. They put God to the test. They wanted to see if He would really discipline as He promised He would do. They wanted to see how far they could go in negative attitudes before God would lower the boom. God brought judgment on them and many were disqualified.

Some of the Corinthian Christians were testing the Lord with the questionable conduct in doubtful things. They wanted to see how close they could get in libertinism and pagan idol worship without being burned by God. They were in danger of being disqualified.

Christians today are constantly testing God, trying to push Him to the limit in patience to see how close to the fire they can get without being disciplined. They see how much sin they can get away with. They play games with God. They test Him in the areas of materialism, worldly attitudes, recreations, sexual morals, church attendance and a thousand other areas. God will only let the Christian go so far before He lowers the boom. Testing God displeases Him, and our testing becomes a basis for disqualification from the spiritual race.

Grumbling Before the Lord (10:10)

And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. This is a reference to Numbers 16 where the young men, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, grumbled against the authority of Moses. They brought a rebellion to the camp. They were unhappy with the Leadership of Moses.

(Korah, Dathan and Abiram) became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD'S assembly?" (Num. 16:2-3)

They refused to submit to Moses who was appointed by God, so in reality they refused to submit to God. This displeased Jehovah-God and the ground opened up and swallowed these three young men and their 250 followers. Then God killed 14,700 more by plague because they were grumbling in their rebellion. They had a negative spirit. They refused to submit to God and His ordained leadership. Those who rebelled were disqualified.

Grumbling is a sin just as serious as idol worship, sexual immorality, and having it your way over God's. Grumbling places a barrier between a person and God. It also drives a wedge between him and the other people against whom he grumbles (Knofel Staton, I Corinthians).

ADMONITION TO PERSEVERANCE IN HOLINESS 10:11-12

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. Paul is saying that Israel is a type or example for the church. The culmination of all past ages has been brought to an end in the church age. Christians are the people whom God, the Lord of history, had in mind when these events took place and were recorded in the Old Testament. The lessons the past ages teach us on how to live as Christians are invaluable. Remember, he who fails to learn from spiritual history is doomed to relive it.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fail! Now Paul gives a stern warning to the Corinthians. They were smugly complacent in their election. They were abusing their Christian liberties because they knew they were eternally secure in Christ. They were cocksure of their position and privileges in Christ, so much so that they were living recklessly. Paul says, "Watch out, lest you fall!"

Christian, don't get complacent and smugly secure or the devil or the flesh or the world will sneak up on you to entice you to sin so you will fall spiritually. The kingdom of darkness is trying to assault you and overcome you so as to discourage and defeat you. The devil would like nothing better than that you should fall and be disqualified. You are under attack. You are in a battle. You are running a race that must be won. You are fighting a war with a clever and ruthless enemy whose devices are clever and whose strategies are subtle. The moment you think you have it made spiritually, you are the target of the fiery darts of Satan. He can trip you and trap you in a thousand different ways. This all may result in disqualification which involves being set on the shelf for service or being checked out of this world by physical death. Take heed, Christian, lest you fall!

No matter how strong you think you are, no matter how many sins you have overcome in the past, you should not let down your guard, you should never assume that you are beyond temptation (Table Talk).

APPLICATION OF GOD'S PROMISE TO TESTING 10:13

No temptation (testing) has seized you except what is common to man. As soon as Paul gives this stern warning to persevere in holiness of life, he gives a comforting promise to those Christians who have a tender conscience, thinking that they are so sinful they would immediately be disqualified from the race. The word "temptation" in my opinion could be better translated "testing." Paul's encouragement is that our testings are not unique to us, for all men have testings. We are not the only ones going through a particular trial. Others have gone through it or are going through it so they can comfort us in that trial.

And God is faithful. Whatever the testing, struggle or trial, we Christians know God is faithful to His promises and character to see us through the trial. We may not always be faithful in the way we handle testing but God is always faithful. God is far more concerned about our spiritual growth than we are.

He will not let you be tempted (tested) beyond what you can bear. Every trial which comes our way as Christians is somehow in the sovereign will and control of God, and He

will not allow that testing to ultimately destroy us. He may through testing bring us to breaking point but He will give grace in time of need. God knows how much testing we can handle and how much we cannot. He uses testings in our lives to develop our faith and Christian character.

One of the basic principles of training athletes is to get them to perform beyond their natural capabilities. This is done by applying more and more controlled pressure so the athlete will think he can do more than he can actually do, and before long, he is doing it. This is what God does with us. He allows more and more pressure to be put on us to teach us to trust Him alone so the life of Christ can be manifested in us. He says He will never give us more pressure than we can handle. If you are under some pressure or trial and feel, "I can't take it one second longer," I have good news for you. Yes you can, for God will not allow you to be tested above your ability to take it.

But when you are tempted (tested), he will also provide a way out... God promises a way out, a way of escape from testing. What is that way? It is a life of faith, dependence, trust and obedience. Israel failed because of unbelief. The way of escape is to cling to God's faithfulness. He will provide a way out of the sticky situation.

So that you can stand up under it. Notice Paul does not say God will take us out of the testing. He might do that, but this verse says God will give us grace to stand up under it, to endure it. He will deal with our attitudes. He may not change our circumstances, but He will change our minds about the circumstances so we can endure it, persevere through it and push on in holiness so we will not be disqualified from the spiritual race.

CONCLUSION

If you are without Christ as Savior and Lord, Christ invites you to come to Him and get into the spiritual race. Jesus says,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Christ lifts the burden of sin off our backs, so lightening the load that we can run the spiritual race with dexterity and confidence. Christ invites you to run the spiritual race. This race is for real, and those who choose to follow Christ are in for the most exciting adventure in the world. Will you bow to Christ as your Lord and Savior?