**A Set Apart People**

(1 Cor. 10:1- 11:1)

8/20/23 Pastor Fred

Main Idea: We as God’s children should represent God well by being set apart from the world. May we learn from past failures of over-estimating our rights, which led to disunity and even temptation of idolatry. Instead, may we be united in the Lord, who is faithful and has set us free. May we be willing to surrender our rights for the sake of unity in the body.

INTRODUCTION

What is given in life is that we will all make mistakes. The key to life is what we do after we make a mistake. The only way we can gain experience is if we learn from our past mistakes. First and foremost, are we aware of the mistakes that we have made? Since last November, my mother has moved in with me. I knew that there would be adjustments for both Ellie and I. We determined ahead of time that what was important for us and what was not important. Many decisions were based on preference. We prepared our mindset ahead of time. Indeed, there were clashes. Sometime, we handled it well and sometimes, we could have handled it better.

I was getting impatient with my mom when she misinterpreted what I said or she kept asking me about something that I just told her. It frustrated me because I felt she was not listening to me properly. I began to get upset. Ellie pointed out that I was being impatient and my mom was not doing it on purpose. She is just old and cannot hear me well or forgets what I have said. Realizing that my tone and volume were not good, I had to make some changes. When my mom mishears me, I say to myself, “She did not do it on purpose. I need to give her grace.”

We all make mistakes, but are we going to learn from it? Last week in chapter 9, Paul used himself as an example of a mature Christian. He disciplined himself to serve God by putting others above himself. Here in chapter 10, Israel is contrasted to Paul as an example of immaturity, where they overestimated their rights and showed a lack of self-discipline. Paul begins in this chapter by pointing out various mistakes that their forefathers made, reminding them to learn from it.

We face many challenging decision-making each day. How can we make the right decision? It is not so much determining what is right from wrong, but determining what is the difference between good verses better? How do we make decisions that are not black and white, but gray? Paul is reminding the Corinthians lessons that they need to learn from the past. I have printed out a sermon outline in your bulletin to follow along. I have divided my message this morning into two sections: First from verses 1-10, Looking back, may we learn from past failures that led to Israel’s destruction. Second from 11-31: looking forward, may we learn to be united in Christ that leads to deliverance. A wise person is one that learns from past mistakes. Let us take a look at what led Israel to their failures. As we look back, may we first understand the advantages enjoyed by Israel before we examine the apostasy committed by Israel that led to their destruction. [ Let us read 1Cor. 10:1-4. “For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” ]

1. Looking Back, may we learn from past failures that led to Israel’s destruction (10:1-10)
   1. The advantages enjoyed by Israel (10:1-4)

Paul starts out by saying, “I do not want you to be unaware.” Wake up guys, learn from your past. Recall what has happened to your forefathers. Don’t be ignorant of the past history. The Israelites were greatly blessed by God- where they were set free from the bondage of the Egyptians, where they were slaves. God sent Moses to deliver them out of the hands of Pharaoh. God demonstrated his power and authority by disciplining the Egyptians with ten plagues. Afterward, God used Moses to lead His people to the Promised Land.

On their way to the Promised Land, God provided five advantages enjoyed by Israel.

First advantage, all the liberated Israelites enjoyed the supernatural guidance and protection from God through the pillar of cloud. During the day, there was a pillar of cloud leading them. When the cloud stopped, they stopped. When the cloud moved, the Israelites moved. It is a demonstration of God’s presence. Wouldn’t that be cool if there was a pillar of cloud guiding us each day?

Second advantage, all the liberated Israelites passed through the sea and experienced God’s power and deliverance as the Lord parted the Red Sea enabling them to walk on dry ground. When the Egyptian soldiers chased them, the Lord closed up the sea and the soldiers drowned. God protected His people. Could you imagine if God performed a miracle when you were in trouble? What a blessing.

Third advantage, all the liberated Israelites were all baptized into Moses. The word baptized has the understanding of “identification.” The Israelites were able to identify and shared in the deliverance of God through Moses’ intervention and leadership.

Fourth advantage, all the liberated Israelites enjoyed spiritual food. God provided supernatural bread from heaven called manna for His people while they were going through the wilderness for 40 years. That is a long time. God provided for their daily substance.

Fifth advantage, all the liberated Israelites enjoyed spiritual drink as they were going through the wilderness. We need to remember that there were about 2 million Israelites; that is a lot of food and water from the Lord. Can you imagine if you stop by McDonald and ordering 2 million burgers and 2 million cups of water?

These liberated Israelites were not only set free from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, but God was with them guiding them, protecting them, and providing for them. They received all kinds of advantages as people of God. Similarly, the Corinthians had a lot of advantages as being people of God. The Corinthian believers were also liberated from the bondage of sin because of Christ’s substitutionary atonement on the cross. We have been delivered from the penalty of sin and the power of sin. The Corinthian have experienced the miraculous deliverance. The Lord has promised to be with them. The Corinthians had been baptized into the body of Christ. They have the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Jesus is the bread of life and is the living water. Christ promises to provide for their needs. Both the Israelites as well as the Corinthians have a lot of advantages as being people of God. However, these advantages or rights or spiritual privileges did not prevent the Israelites from falling into sin.

Paul had the Corinthians to look back to learn from the failures that led to Israel’s destruction. We have seen the advantages enjoyed by Israel. Now let’s look at the apostasy committed by Israel in vv. 5-10. “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil 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 rose up to play. We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousands fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.” In spite of all the advantages enjoyed by Israel, it did not guarantee them success. Sadly, most of them experienced God’s judgment as they turned away from God. We see this in verse 5, where God was not pleased with the Israelites. They disqualified themselves from entering into the Promised Land. Even Moses was not permitted to enter. Only Joshua and Caleb and those under twenty years old were permitted to go into the Promised Land. There are consequences to falling into idolatry.

* 1. The apostasy committed by Israel (10:5-10)

We might hear some of the “strong” Corinthians asking, “But what does that have to do with us?” Paul wants to make clear to Corinthians that the past history was to be an example and warning to them. This was repeated two times in verse 6 and 11. Paul is saying learn from your past. APPLICATION: It is important for all of us to reflect more. Take a step back, particularly when there is a problem. Ask ourselves, what lessons can I learn from this incident? How would I do things differently next time because that same scenario will take place again? Too often, we make the same mistake over and over again.

There were four areas that were pointed out in this section that led to judgment from God, namely, idolatry, sexual immorality, testing God, and grumbling. When the Israelites disobeyed, they received punishment. If you want to avoid judgment, avoid these sins.

As you recall, when Moses went up to Mt. Sinai to receive the Law, which also consists of the Ten Commandments,the people got impatient waiting for Moses to come back down. When he did not return for an extended period of time, the people brought their gold to form a golden calf so that they could worship it as the Egyptians did. Not only that, but they also indulged in sexual immorality, tested God and grumbled. When their expectations were not met from God, they were tempted to turn away from God to idols.

ILLUSTRATION; May we be aware that Satan is out to do all that he can to turn us away from God. One effective way is to get us to over-estimate our abilities as well as our rights. May we not grow overconfident in our ability to overcome temptation - thinking we are spiritually mature and we can handle it. Paul used the Israelites as his example to warn the mature believers that their experience must be balanced by caution.

APPLICATION: We do not need to worship a golden calf to be considered as worshipping idols. Idols are anything that sits on the throne of our life. Studying can be our idol. Our kids can be our idol. Video games can be our idol. Money can be our idol. Serving in the church can be an idol. Pursuing retirement can be an idol.

What might have caused them to fall into these sins although they experienced so many advantages or rights or privileges as being children of God? I believe one the Israelites as well as the Corinthians were overconfident of their rights as liberated people. They over estimated their rights and advantages. This can be seemed in verse 12, “Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” Paul warned the Corinthian Christians to be careful. When they become prideful over their faith, they are most vulnerable to falling or yielding to temptation. If we are not careful, we can fall into idolatry like the Israelites did.

APPLICATION: It is easy for us to compare ourselves with others concerning our spirituality. I am more spiritual because I go to church, SS, sm grp, and serve. May we be careful not falling into being self-righteous. Where we will rely on ourselves instead of God.

[ As we looked back, we have learned from past failures that led to Israel’s destruction. Now looking forward, we learn to be united in Christ that leads to deliverance. Here we will focus on three sub-points: the faithfulness of God, the fellowship with God, and the freedom in God. Let’s examine first the faithfulness of God. ]

1. Looking forward, may we learn to be united in Christ that leads to deliverance (10:11- 11:1)
   1. The faithfulness of God (10:11-13)

We are in a spiritual battle. None of us are exempt from Satan’s temptations. Temptation is not sinful; the sin comes when the person gives in to temptation. Although we are tempted, God assures us with a wonderful promise based on His faithfulness. Let us read v.13, “No temptation has overtaken you that is no common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

In the midst of temptation, we need to rely on our Lord, who is faithful. We are not alone. We can be assured that God is with us. When we realize our weaknesses and God’s strength, then it will be natural for us to turn to our Lord to resist the temptation. God is not always going to remove the temptation. By facing it and remaining strong, we will grow in our faith. We are comforted to know that whatever temptation we face, God is still in charge and he will not allow it to be too strong where we cannot stand up against it. There exists no temptation that a believer cannot resist. God promises to give his people the strength to resist and to show us a way out. May we thank the Lord for not giving me something too difficult to handle.

ILLUSTRATION: This was a very extra busy week for me. I knew I was going to be tight all week long with no margins. As I was working on my sermon yesterday, my mom was behaving in an unusual way. She was extra tired, imbalanced, and confused. While watching TV, she fell asleep. When I tried to wake her up, she was unresponsive for 5 minutes. I was getting scared as to what is happening. I took her to ER. I claimed God’s promise that he will not let me be tempted beyond my ability, but he will provide the way of escape. She had a mini-stroke and she stayed overnight in the hospital for observation. I thank God for giving me the strength to get all my preparation today.

No matter whatever temptation or trials that we are in, God is there for us. May we seek Him out and claim His promises because He is faithful.

[When we unite with God, then it will lead to deliverance. It starts with the faithfulness of God. The more we know God, the more confidence we have in Him. When we unite with God, we also fellowship with God. We go back to the issue of eating idol meat as the context of I Corinthians 8,9, and also here chapter 10. How do we apply our Christian rights to eating food sacrificed to idols? He gave advice in three areas: 1] meat in the pagan temple (vv.14-22) 2) meat in the marketplace (10:25-26) 3) meat in the home (vv.27-30). His advice on the first scenario is to flee from idolatry.

* 1. The fellowship with God (10:14-22)

Because the Corinthian believers had a background of worshipping in a pagan temple, it would not be wise to be in a pagan temple. It could draw them back into former sins. They should run from such temptations. In v. 14, it said that we should flee from idolatry. Paul in the next several verses speaks of the intimate experience of participating in the Lord’s Supper, where we are united with Christ as well as with the other believers. This section from 14-22, it talks about oneness. When Gentile believers sit at an idol’s table could mean fellowship with demons. Let’s read v.20, “No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. We as children of God should fellowship with God and not demons.

The Apostle Paul talks about the importance of the Lord’s Supper, where we partake the bread and cup in remembrance of what Christ did on the cross. By remembering Christ’s death, the believer enters into a communion with the Lord. As Jesus has said, we cannot serve two masters. We cannot partake the Lord’s food and the devil’s food without exposing himself to danger and provoking the Lord to anger.

One of the ways that hinder Satan’s power is to by uniting believers together. God provide greater power when believers are united together with Christ for the Lord’s Supper. Satan is doing all that he can to divide the church. But when we are united, then it shows the world that God is real.

[ We not only look back to learn from past failure, but we need to look forward to learn to be united in Christ. We do this in three ways: Understand the faithfulness of God, the fellowship with God, and thirdly, the freedom in God. ]

* 1. The freedom in God (10:23- 11:1)

Truly, we do have rights as children of God. The question is how we choose to exercise our rights. Rights are to be respected, but never demanded at the expense of God’s mission. Our rights need to be respected, but not need to be exercised. Indeed, we are set free from the bondage of sin; we are no longer under the Law, but under grace. Paul gives us some guidelines as to how to exercise our Christian liberty or Christian rights. Let us read verse 23-24, “All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.” What believers can do? What are some limitations?

* + 1. What believers can do (10:23)

Yes, all things are lawful or profitable, but not all things are helpful or beneficial or build up others. Too often, we tend to look out for ourselves. How does this benefit me? What is it in for me? But our Christian behavior needs to be focus on love. We are to love our neighbors. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.” We saw how Paul in the previous chapter said in 1 Cor. 9:19,”For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.” Paul sees the bigger picture of God’s mission to win the lost and to be a good testimony for God. Ultimately, we want to glorify God.

What might be beneficial for us might be a stumbling block to a weaker brother. May we not over-estimate our rights. But may we be considerate of others. Yes, the Christian brothers can partake the idol meat because it is just meat. We have the liberty to do so. There are various gray areas that Scripture does not talk about.

ILLUSTRATION: Some Christians make up standards that are not in the Bible. The Bible says that excessive drinking of alcohol is wrong. However, that does not mean that one cannot drink alcohol. That is a wisdom issue. We have the liberty to drink some wine, but we are not to get drunk. There is a difference between what believers can do vs what believers should do. However, if we are having dinner with a former alcoholic, we have the right to drink wine, but we should give up our rights to drink a glass of wine because it might stumble this brother.

* + 1. What believers should do (10:24-11:1)

There are different scenarios. We have mentioned earlier that believers should not eat meat at the idol temple because it is fellowshipping with demons. In verse 25-26, “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 the fullness thereof.” In public restaurants, eat whatever is served to you. Even if it is idol meat because we know that idol meat does not mean anything.

However, in the next couple of verses, there is a different scenario that we might withhold our Christian liberty. Read v.27-29a, “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. But if someone says to you “This has been offered to sacrifice, then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience. I do not mean your conscience, but his.” Here is a situation where several believers are eating a meal at the home of an unbeliever. One of these believers warns his fellow believers that the meat they had been served had been offered to an idol. Therefore, the stronger believers, although they know that this really does not make any difference, should refrain from eating the meat out of consideration for the conscience of that weaker believer because of the association with temple worship. The weaker brother came out of an idol temple worship and they see eating meat offered to idol is sin. Nothing we do should cause another believer to stumble. We do what is best for others, so that they might be saved. Let us read vv.31-33, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything to do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many that they may be saved.” Instead of projecting our standards onto others, we be sensitive of others, where we are willing to withhold our Christian liberty for the sake of others.

We as God’s children should represent God well by being set apart from the world. May we learn from past failures of over-estimating our rights, which led to disunity and even temptation of idolatry. Instead, may we be united in the Lord, who is faithful and has set us free. May we be willing to surrender our rights for the sake of unity in the body.