

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

Chapter 10: The Big Grumbling Block

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

- This chapter begins with the word “for”, connecting what came before to what is following after. He takes us to the account of the people of Israel being delivered through the Red Sea from Exodus chapters 13 and 14.
 - Exodus 13:21 states there was a misty cloud of water that was over the Israelites when they crossed the Red Sea.
 - Exodus 14:21-22 states that Moses stretched his hand over the sea, it divided and the people passed through with water on both sides of them.
- They left Egypt, passed through water on every side and came up on the other side freed from their slavery and oppression. The comparison is called baptism and that Corinthian Moses was Paul. He preached the gospel, their prison of sin, passing through water (baptism) and coming up to freedom to a new Master, Whom is Christ.
- It is in the last verse that the comparison takes a nasty turn, for the delivered Israelites ended up not being pleasing to God, for they were “laid low in the wilderness”.

1 Corinthians 10:6-13 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.” ⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- The key to understanding the passage is the phrase “evil things that they craved”. These people had been delivered as a national baptism and in only fifty days they had returned to their evil idolatry. Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments and before he came down they had already played the harlot with the golden calf (Exodus 32:1). They panicked without their leader and went back to worshipping in the same idolatry that they left in Egypt.
- How did they do this? How could they consistently turn from the living God and live a life of unbelief? In chapter 8 Paul addressed the fact that there were some in the church that were eating meats sacrificed to idols and the result was a being stumbling block to the weaker brethren. In chapter 9 Paul lays a humbling block of personal sacrifice that all Christians must be prepared to undertake for the common good of the church. In chapter 10 he will deal with another type of block that the church must be on the lookout for, the

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Big Grumbling Block. The people of Israel fell away because of their cravings which led to their grumbling.

- They grumbled when they were first thirsty on the other side at the Waters of Marah. *Ex 15:24 So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”*
- They grumbled when they did not have the delicacies of Egypt. *Ex 16:2-3 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ The sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the LORD’S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*
- They grumbled when they were thirsty once again a few days later. *Ex 17:3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”*
- They grumbled when they first surveyed the Promised Land and found great armies. *Numbers 14:2-3 All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³ “Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?”*
- They grumbled against the leadership God had chosen. *Numbers 16:11 “Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD; but as for Aaron, who is he that you grumble against him?”*
- They grumbled against the entire plan of God. *Ps 106:24-25 Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe in His word, ²⁵ But grumbled in their tents; They did not listen to the voice of the LORD.*
- God would not put up with the root of their grumbling. *Numbers 14:22 “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, ²³ shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. They had fallen in love with that which they were freed from.*
- Paul warns these brothers that were eating meat sacrificed to idols that they had better watch out because they will also fall from their Promised Land just like the their predecessors. God provides a way to escape called staying away, but they are going to have to take that exit. Yes, some miss some of pagan barbeque from their old life and if not yet, the others will soon be.

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. ¹⁶ Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot

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partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.²² Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

- There is something evil at the core of what these individuals do when eating the meat sacrificed to idols. Paul is reminding them “Of course the idols are fake, but because it is rooted in the false doctrine of the demons, they are at risk.” FLEE IDOLATRY!
- Solomon reminds us that one cannot walk on hot coals and not be burned. They also cannot walk on the hot coals of idolatry and not be burned (Prov 6:28). They eat meat offered to idols and nothing good will come of it for their longing will only lead them into trouble. “But I have a right to eat that meat! I want to eat that meat! I grew up eating these barbeques, don’t try and stop me because I have a right” Be careful with that right because it might end up leading you right back to the “Good Ole’ Days” that really were not so good. If you don’t believe it, go ask Israel!

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.²⁵ Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake;²⁶ for the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains.²⁷ If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience’ sake.²⁸ But if anyone says to you, “This is meat sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake;²⁹ I mean not your own conscience, but the other man’s; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience?³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?³¹ Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.³² Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

- Not only could the grumbling Christian fall while thinking he has his rights to certain things, he can actually become ineffective to reach out to his old circle of idolaters. It is not so much the conscience of the one eating, but of the pagan that seemingly knows that you have no problem with the paganism.
- I grew up in a tavern, playing cards, pool and being surrounded by a culture that embraced drunkenness. One afternoon while playing dice with some friends, a local Methodist preacher with good intentions came into the bar and had a beer in an effort to invite some others to worship the next day. What he saw was an attempt to show the non-religious that he was just a regular guy trying to reach out to some souls. What the patrons of the tavern saw was justification of their drunkenness.
- This is the same with the pagan that invited a person over to his house for some idol-sacrifice meat. It might have been a steak to a well-intentioned brother, but to the pagan it sent mixed messages that perverted the gospel of Christ. Once we cross the line and become useless to the lost to reach out to them, we have nowhere to go but down.
- There are only three things we can do with an unbeliever, 1) Convert them, 2) Become like them or 3) Leave them alone. When they ate meat knowingly sacrificed to idols, they were becoming like them. This was something that totally undermined the plans of Christ. This soul is one again at risk of being converted back to the world.

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1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

- We are told by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:15 to “*rightly divide the word of truth*”. The chapter divisions and verse numbering was put into the text many centuries ago in order to assist us to better knowing this word of truth. Prior to that time, the reader processed the text as a large hand-written text, with the divisions to be determined by thorough understanding. There are many areas of the Bible where the divisions into chapters did not properly line up with the “*rightly divided*” word, with this being one of them. Verse 11:1 is a carry over to what came before and not what comes after. The word “*Now*” in verse 11:2 is a dead give away to this principle.
- In other words, Paul is saying be willing to do all things for the sake of the gospel, even if that means to not be a stumbling block to the saint and even the “ain’t” (he who has yet to make the gospel commitment). Paul was not asking them to make a sacrifice that he was not already making himself.