

We have been through a lot as a church over the last nine weeks, wouldn't you say? We've had extended discussions about God's vision for sexuality: how it is more challenging than any other vision out there, but at the same time more dignifying and satisfying than anything else. We've talked about the reality of sexual brokenness, that in some way or another, not a single one of us has lived into God's perfect standard when it comes to sexuality and relationships. The pain of those mistakes often impacts us at a deep level, but God's grace reaches deeper still. We've talked about God's wisdom on gender and homosexuality. We've talked about pornography and what it looks like to have a rigorous commitment to purity and integrity. We've talked about honoring God while single, dating, and married.

Today, in our last week, we'll put a bow around everything by talking about God's call to holiness. We'll see that God reminds us through his Word that it's not enough to learn about God's righteous standards when it comes to sexuality and relationships. God expects us, with his help, to implement those standards and live them out in our lives. When it comes to sexuality and relationships, the world is confused and doing whatever it wants. God wants us to have clarity and resolutely decide to do what he wants. In our passage today, 1 Corinthians 10, we'll learn from those who came before us to find motivation and encouragement to live faithful lives in the present.

As you are turning to 1 Corinthians 10, let me ask you, how many of you can fill in the rest of this sentence: "Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Paul is going to remind his readers about the history of God's people. As you read through Israel's story, you see there were several times they were in a difficult situation, just like we are, and oftentimes they made a mistake. God wants us to learn from their mistakes and choose a better course.

Most of you know that I am from Kentucky. Not only does Kentucky's basketball program have eight national championships, but it has more players in the NBA than any other program. Right now, twenty-seven of their athletes are playing at the next level. Years ago, one of the local legends from Kentucky made it to the next level and had a great career. He made over 90 million dollars. He retired, then through bad investments he lost every single penny. It was such an unfortunate turn of events. But that athlete is now paid to meet with other players who are drafted, tell his story, and help them not repeat his mistake. He says, "I was in your shoes and this is what happened to me. Learn from my example and don't repeat it in your own life." That is, in effect, what the apostle Paul says to the Corinthians in this passage. Let's take a look:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors 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 in the wilderness. 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 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 Christ, 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. (1 Corinthians 10:1-10)

There's a lot to those ten verses, but I think this is the most helpful way to summarize them: in the past, even though our ancestors experienced God's grace, when temptation came they fell into sin and faced horrible consequences.

Let's talk about each one of those elements. First, Paul isn't talking about what happened to random people who we don't know, people who are disconnected from us by five degrees of separation; he's talking about our ancestors. Realize what a profound statement that is. Paul is writing to Gentiles who were not biological descendants of Abraham. They were not, by birth, part of the people of God, but he says when they placed their faith in Jesus, they became grafted into God's family, heirs to the promises, heirs to the covenants, Abraham's true offspring. Paul is saying, "Now that you are in the family, I want to remind you of our family history." Many people these days are into genealogy. They do ancestry.com and trace their family back twenty generations. They find out when their great, great grandparents came over to the US. They learn Thomas Jefferson was their third cousin and that Napoleon was their uncle. When they learn the story of their ancestors, they feel connected to them. Paul says, "I want to remind you of the story of your ancestors. Let me tell you what happened to the people of God."

He says they **experienced God's grace**. If you look at verses 1-3, you'll see four specific ways the Israelites experienced God's grace:

- They were all under the cloud.
- They all passed through the sea.
- They all ate spiritual food.
- They all drank spiritual drink.

Paul is referring specifically to the people who God set free from Egypt. When they left Egypt, they didn't know which way to go, but God's presence was with them to protect and guide them. There was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, which meant every second of the day they could look up and be confident that God's presence was with them, keeping them safe and pointing them in the right direction. He says they passed through the sea, recalling the time when the Israelites were at the shore of the Red Sea with the Egyptian army behind them, ready to either kill or capture them, and with nowhere to go. God opened the waters, and with a wall of water on their right and a wall of water on their left, they passed through the sea on dry ground. When they got to the other side, although they knew where to go because they had the cloud guiding them and they knew they were safe because the army was destroyed, they thought they might die in the wilderness from dehydration or starvation. But God provided water from a rock. God miraculously sent them quail to eat and every morning when they woke up, on the ground they found manna, a type of bread God supernaturally provided for them.

Paul is saying our ancestors experienced God's grace in every way imaginable! They saw a cloud miraculously guiding them, the sea miraculously parted, water miraculously coming from

a rock and food miraculously appearing every single day. There was not a single conceivable reason they had to doubt God's existence, God's goodness, or God's love. Not a single conceivable reason to disobey or dishonor God. They had all the evidence anyone could ever want, encouraging them to follow God's desire for their lives.

But when temptation came, they fell into sin. As Paul gave four examples of how God manifested his grace among the Israelites, he now gives four examples of how God's people ignored that grace and chose to sin:

- Do not be idolaters, as some of them were.
- Do not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did.
- Do not test Christ, as some of them did.
- Do not grumble, as some of them did.

Each of these statements is a reference to a specific story that took place in which God's people were tempted and some of them fell into sin. This first reference to idolatry is from Exodus 32. Moses was on top of mount Sinai, receiving the ten commandments and learning how God wanted his people to worship him. He was gone for forty days; during that time the people got restless. They went to Aaron, Moses' brother and second in command, and said: "Moses has been gone a long time. Maybe someone happened to him up on the mountain. We don't know if he's ever going to come back and tell us how to worship God, so can you make us an idol to worship?" They took off their earrings and necklaces, melted them in the fire, and formed a golden calf. They started dancing, got drunk, and had an orgy.

It wasn't simply idolatry—it was sexual immorality. Consider Numbers 25, which tells of the time when the Israelites were near Moab. The Moabites were afraid of the Israelites, so they went to a witch doctor of sorts named Balaam and bribed him with an enormous sum of money to put a curse the Israelites. This witch doctor tried to put a curse to God's people, but every time he opened his mouth, he blessed God's people. The Moabites were so frustrated—they wanted curses, not blessings, on the Israelites. But the witch doctor was like, "I tried, but God's favor is on them. No matter how hard I try, I can't curse them." So God's people seemed to be safe. But then the Israelite men started mingling with the Moabite women, having sex with them, and then worshipping the Moabite gods. The strength of sexual temptation was the pathway to sin and idolatry. Although the witch doctor couldn't put a curse on God's people, because they chose to embrace sexual sin, they brought a curse on themselves.

It wasn't just idolatry and sexual immorality, they tested Christ. In Numbers 21 we read that after being in the wilderness for decades, after almost forty years of God miraculously providing food and water for his people, the Israelites complained that they didn't have enough to eat and drink, they didn't have the variety they liked, the food was not quite up to their culinary standards. Can you imagine if you did the grocery shopping and cooking for someone for four decades, and then after forty years they just started whining and moaning about the quality of your cooking? They spit out the food you prepared for them like Gordon Ramsey on a cooking show? Some of you moms are thinking, "Yes, I can vividly imagine that happening; it happens in my home every night." They were ungrateful for all God provided for them.

And it wasn't just their idolatry, sexual immorality, and testing; they also grumbled. Numbers 14 tells of what happened right after the Israelites sent spies into the promised land to see what it was like. The spies came back and said, "We've got some good news and some bad news. The good news is that the promised land is all we could have hoped for and more—it's lush and beautiful, flowing with milk and honey. It's the perfect place to settle down and raise our families. The bad news is, the people living there are like giants—they are so big we look like grasshoppers compared to them. Their cities are fortified, their armies are strong. We have no chance to take the land." They grumbled and complained against God and Moses: "Why in the world did you take us out of Egypt? We should have stayed as slaves under Pharaoh rather than coming here to die in the wilderness." Grumbling, moaning, whining, and complaining—so dishonoring to God.

It's not only that when temptation came they fell into sin; it's that they faced horrible consequences. For the idolatry, 3,000 people died. For the sexual immorality, 23,000 people died. For testing Christ, they were bitten by poisonous snakes. For grumbling, they died outside the promised land; the Bible says that their bodies were scattered in the wilderness rather than being able to enter the promised land and receive their inheritance. These are not good or light-hearted consequences. These are serious and intense results of neglecting God's grace and choosing sin.

Paul doesn't want that to happen to us! He is telling us to wake up, open our eyes, learn from history, so we don't repeat it. He wants us to apply the lessons from the past so we can better honor God in our lives today! Over the last two months I've had a number of people reach out to me to express their displeasure over certain things I've taught. They've said a teaching was too harsh, the bar was raised to too high a level, it was too heavy a burden to put on them or someone they love. I hate to offend anyone, but I'm not teaching my opinions. I'm reading you what God says. He has high standards for his people. He expects us to rely on the strength he provides to honor him and obey him. He rewards those who follow his commands, and there are serious consequences if we don't. And God wants us to learn from those who came before us.

Most of us at some time or another have seen a sign like this on the interstate (watch the online sermon to see the sign). What are state officials doing here? They are saying, "Other people weren't paying attention on the road. They were texting or driving too fast or not wearing their seat belts. Some of them died. Don't be another statistic. Learn from their mistakes and drive safely!" Do you know what is sad? There are 28 states in the U.S. that put up signs like this. They have had absolutely zero impact on reducing accidents and deaths. People pass by, see the sign, and say, "Oh, how terrible." And then they keep doing what they were doing anyway. God's word tells us not to do that when it comes to temptation and sin. Don't just read what happened to people—learn from their experiences and live differently!

1 Corinthians 10:6 says, "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." A similar theme is picked up in verses 11-13:

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to

mankind. 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 endure it.

Just as God's people of the past were tempted, we are going to be tempted. If you think that temptation is not going to come, you are delusional. The enemy is coming after you. He wants to ruin your life, tarnish your testimony and legacy, and destroy your walk with Jesus. We have to have a game plan for how we are going to respond to his temptation. In these verses Paul tells us, in addition to learning from those who fell before us, we must do five things to consistently grow in holiness.

1. Remember God's grace. Paul says we are those "on whom the culmination of the ages has come," meaning as much as the Israelites had signs of God's miraculous presence and power, we have so much more. They had a cloud, but we have the Holy Spirit inside of us. They walked through the Red Sea into freedom from slavery to Egypt, but we've walked through the waters of baptism into freedom from slavery to sin. They drank water and ate manna in the wilderness, but every week we receive communion and receive the body and blood of Christ, the Son of God, who gave his life to take the punishment we deserve, who died in our place so we could have eternal life. When temptation hits, remember all that God has done for you, all he has given to you.

2. Humble ourselves. Paul says, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" In the Proverbs God's word tells us, "Pride comes before a fall." If you think you are immune to temptation or that you'll never fail, you are likely closer than you can imagine to a massive mistake. Think about what happened on December 7, 1941. There was a world war going on; the US was resourcing certain countries and sanctioning others. We thought, "We are on our own continent; no one is going to attack us." Because of a mix of pride and ignorance our guard was down. We lost over 2,400 people and nineteen ships in one of the worst days in American history. What happened to America eighty years ago can happen in any of our lives if we don't humble ourselves. On multiple occasions I have heard seasoned, experienced, well-respected pastors get in front of an audience of other pastors and say, "We have to be faithful. When I started in ministry there were twelve of us who were best friends and all of them have sinned and disqualified themselves or have tapped out of the ministry. I'm the only one in the starting group left." I have heard multiple people give that motivational speech, and then in short order seen them have to step down from ministry themselves because of a secret sin in their life that got exposed. We cannot take a single ounce of confidence in the flesh. Our only standing ground before God is the ground of his sovereign grace. If we want to live holy lives, we have to depend upon on his grace on a daily basis.

3. Normalize our experience. Paul says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind." This is such wise and poignant advice. I can't tell you the number of times I've counseled someone who has been struggling and as they describe their circumstances, they talk as if the force or the weight of the temptation they are facing is greater than anyone else has ever experienced in life: the temptation to pursue this relationship, the temptation to look at pornography, the temptation not to give generously, you name it. Everyone thinks they are unique, and their temptation is

uniquely difficult. Paul bursts our bubble and says the last thing that anyone in 21st century America wants to hear: “You’re not a special snowflake.” Don’t fool yourself. Don’t delude yourself. Everyone faces temptation and even the most powerful temptation you’ve ever faced has been faced by others. Don’t dramatize or exaggerate your experiences—normalize them. Once you’ve normalized your temptation...

4. Know for certain you can overcome temptation. Paul says, “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” The temptation might be strong. It might be really strong. It might be really, really, really strong. But God has given you this promise: it will not be more than you can handle. Having this mindset of victory is so crucial. Ask any athlete—if you walk into a contest thinking you are going to lose, you’ve almost certainly sealed your fate. But if you walk in with humble confidence, knowing that if you execute the game plan well, you have what it takes to win, that winning mindset is more than half the battle. When temptation hits, no matter what it is, don’t think “Here we go again; I’m powerless against this pull.” No! Think, “God has promised me in his word this temptation won’t be stronger than what I can handle. With his help, I can overcome this.” That leads to the final point:

5. Rely on God. Paul says, “When you are tempted, God will provide a way out so that you can endure it.” God will not leave you in this on your own. He won’t let you be tempted beyond what you can handle, and when temptation comes, he will be there with you, providing everything you need to be faithful in that moment. You are not alone. Sometimes when temptation hits it feels like we are in a car that just crashed into a lake and is going under. We see the water filling up to the ceiling and there is nothing we can do to escape, so we take our last breath and assume it’s over. That’s what it feels like. But because God is with us and is faithful to us, even when temptation hits and it feels like we are going under, there is also an open window. God always makes a way of escape, and if we have our eyes open and are willing to take it, we can swim to safety. God always, always provides a way out, a path toward faithfulness.

I know when it comes to talking about the things we’ve discussed the past nine weeks, when it comes to the discussion we’ve had today about holiness and purity, it’s hard, but hard doesn’t mean bad. When I got home from church on Wednesday this week, I told Keren I was going up stairs to put on clothes so I could work out. Hudson, my three-year-old, asked what I was going to do. I said, “I’m going to do a lot of push-ups, sit-ups, and pull-ups. Then I’m going to run a few miles. Then I’m going to come back and do a bunch more push-ups, sit-ups, and pull-ups.” Hudson looked at me and said, “That sounds hard. Why would you do that?” That’s a great question for a kid to ask. When it comes to living into God’s holy standard, waiting for marriage to have sex, waiting for the right person to date, cultivating your dating relationship in a God-honoring way, embracing singleness as a gift, having a Biblical perspective on gender and sexuality, putting Christ first in your marriage, those are hard things. God raises the bar high. When Hudson asked me why I would do a hard thing I said, “It’s hard, but it’s good. It’s good for my heart, it’s good for my lungs, it’s good for my muscles, it’s good for my immune system, it’s good for my mind. It’s hard, but it’s good.”

You might be thinking when it comes to the standards God sets for sexuality and relationships, “That’s hard. Why would anyone do that?” God says, “I know it’s hard. But trust me, it’s good. And not only is it good, but I’m going to give you the strength to do it.”