

Experience Must Be Balanced by Caution ([1 Cor. 10:1-22](#))

Paul reminded the experienced believers who were strong in the faith that they had better not grow overconfident in their ability to overcome temptation. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" ([1 Cor. 10:12](#)). Paul used the nation of Israel as his example to warn the mature believers that their experience must be balanced by caution. He gave three warnings.

First, he warned that privileges were no guarantee of success ([yv. 1-4](#)). Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the power of God, just as the Christian believer has been redeemed from sin. (In [1 Cor. 5:7-8](#), Paul had already related Passover to salvation.) Israel was identified with Moses in their Red Sea "baptism," just as the Corinthians had been identified with Christ in their Christian baptism. Israel ate the manna from heaven and drank the water God provided, just as Christians nourish themselves on the spiritual sustenance God supplies ([John 6:63, 68; 7:37-39](#)). However, these spiritual privileges did not prevent the Jews from falling into sin.

There are dangers to maturity as well as to immaturity, and one of them is overconfidence. When we think we are strong, we discover that we are weak. The strong believer who eats in the temple may find himself struggling with an enemy who is too strong for him.

Paul did not suggest in [1 Corinthians 10:4](#) that an actual rock accompanied the Jews throughout their wilderness journey, though some Jewish rabbis taught this idea. It was a *spiritual* rock that supplied what they needed, and that Rock was Christ. Sometimes the water came from a rock ([Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:7-11](#)) and at other times from a well ([Num. 21:16-18](#)). God provided the water.

Paul issued a second warning: good beginnings do not guarantee good endings ([yv. 5-12](#)). The Jews experienced God's miracles, and yet they failed when they were tested in the wilderness. Experience must always be balanced with caution, for we never come to the place in our Christian walk where we are free from temptation and potential failure. All of the Jews twenty years old and upward who were rescued from Egypt, except for Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness during their years of wandering ([Num. 14:26ff](#)).

We can hear some of the "strong" Corinthians asking, "But what does that have to do with us?" Paul then pointed out that the Corinthian church was guilty of the same sins that the Jews committed. Because of their lust for evil things, the Corinthians were guilty of immorality ([1 Cor. 6](#)), idolatry ([1 Cor. 8; 10](#)), and murmuring against God ([2 Cor. 12:20-21](#)). Like the nation of Israel, they were tempting God and just "daring Him" to act.

Paul certainly knew his Old Testament, and his readers would recognize the events referred to. The "lusting" is found in [Numbers 11:4ff](#), the idolatry in [Exodus 32](#), and the fornication in [Numbers 25](#). The Israelites often tempted God, but perhaps [Numbers 21:4-6](#) was the reference Paul had in mind. For their complaining, see [Numbers 14](#) and [16](#).

This kind of sin is serious and God must judge it. Not only did some of these rebels immediately die (see [1 Cor. 11:29-31](#)), but those who remained were not permitted to enter the Promised Land. They were saved from Egypt but were not privileged to claim their rich inheritance. Paul was not suggesting that his readers might lose their salvation, but he was afraid that some of them would be "castaways" ([1 Cor. 9:27](#)), disapproved of God and unable to receive any reward.

I heard about a pastor who gave a series of sermons on "The Sins of the Saints." One member of the church, apparently under conviction, disapproved of the series and told the pastor so. "After all," she said, "sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the life of an unsaved person."

"Yes, it is," the pastor replied. *"It's worse!"*

We must not think that because the Jews were under the Law that their sins were worse than ours and therefore dealt with more severely. Sin in the church today is far more serious, because we have Israel's example to learn from, and we are living "at the end of the ages." To sin against the Law is one thing; to sin against grace is quite something else.

Paul's third warning was that God can enable us to overcome temptation if we heed His Word ([yv. 13-22](#)). God permits us to be tempted because He knows how much we can take; and He always provides a way to escape if we will trust Him and take advantage of it. The believer who thinks he can stand, may fall; but the believer who flees will be able to stand.

Paul had already told his readers to "flee fornication" ([1 Cor. 6:18](#)); and now his warning is, "Flee from idolatry" ([1 Cor. 10:14](#)). He explained the reason why: the idol itself is nothing, but it can be used by Satan to lead you into sin. Idolatry is demonic ([Deut. 32:17](#); [Ps. 106:37](#)). To sit at an idol's table could mean fellowship ("communion, partakers") with demons. Paul was again enforcing the important doctrine of separation from sin ([2 Cor. 6:14-7:1](#)).

He used the Lord's Supper as an illustration. When the believer partakes of the cup and loaf at the Lord's table, he is, in a spiritual way, having fellowship with the body and blood of Christ. By remembering Christ's death, the believer enters into a communion with the risen Lord. In [1 Corinthians 10:18](#), Paul pointed to the temple altar and sacrifices as another illustration of this truth. The application is clear: A. believer cannot partake of the Lord's food (the Old Testament sacrifice, the New Testament supper) and the devil's food (the idol's table) without exposing himself to danger and provoking the Lord.

"Are we stronger than He?" ([1 Cor. 10:22](#)) is directed at the strong Christian who was sure he could enjoy his liberty in the pagan temple and not be harmed. "You may be stronger than your weaker brother," Paul intimated, "but you are not stronger than God!" It is dangerous to play with sin and tempt God.

Freedom Must Be Balanced by Responsibility ([1 Cor. 10:23-33](#))

At no time did Paul deny the freedom of the mature Christian to enjoy his privileges in Christ. "All things are lawful"—BUT not everything is profitable, and some things lead to slavery ([1 Cor. 6:12](#)). "All things are profitable"—BUT some activities can cause your weaker brother to

stumble ([1 Cor. 8:11-13](#)). In other words, it is a mark of maturity when we balance our freedom with responsibility; otherwise, it ceases to be freedom and becomes anarchy, lawlessness.

To begin with, we have a responsibility to our fellow Christians in the church ([1 Cor. 10:23-30](#)). We are responsible to build others up in the faith and to seek their advantage. [Philippians 2:1-4](#) gives the same admonition. While we do have freedom in Christ, we are not free to harm another believer.

Paul applied this truth to the impending question of meat offered to idols. He had already warned against a believer *publicly* participating in pagan feasts ([1 Cor. 8:9-13](#)), so now he dealt with *private* meals. In [1 Corinthians 10:25-26](#), he instructed the believers to ask no questions about the meat purchased at the market for use in their own homes. After all, everything comes from God (he quoted [Ps. 24:1](#)) and all food is permissible to the believer (see [Mark 7:14-23](#); [Acts 10:9-16, 28](#); [1 Tim. 4:3-5](#)). The mature believer can enjoy in his own home even meat sacrificed to idols. Even if meat purchased at the regular market originally came from the temple (which was often the case), he would not be harmed.

But what about those times when the believer is the guest in the home of an unbeliever? Paul handled that problem in [1 Corinthians 10:27-30](#). If the Christian feels disposed to go (Paul did not make this decision a matter of great import), he should eat whatever is set before him and ask no questions (see [Luke 10:8](#); [1 Tim. 6:17](#)). However, there may be present at the meal one of the weaker brothers or sisters who wants to avoid meat offered to idols, and who has done some investigating. If this weaker saint informs the stronger Christian that the meat indeed has been offered to idols, then the stronger saint must not eat it. If he did, he would cause the weaker believer to stumble and possibly to sin.

Paul anticipated the objections. "Why should I not enjoy food for which I give thanks? Why should my liberty be curtailed because of another person's weak conscience?" His reply introduced the second responsibility we have: *We are responsible to glorify God in all things* ([1 Cor. 10:31](#)). We cannot glorify God by causing another Christian to stumble. To be sure, our own conscience may be strong enough for us to participate in some activity and not be harmed. But we dare not use our freedom in Christ in any way that will injure a fellow Christian.

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But there is a third responsibility that ties in with the first two: *We are responsible to seek to win the lost* ([1 Cor. 10:32-33](#)). We must not make it difficult either for Jews or Gentiles to trust the Lord, or for other members of the church to witness for the Lord. We must not live to seek our own benefit ("profit"), but also the benefit of others, that they might be saved.

When Paul wrote, "I please all men in all things" ([1 Cor. 10:33](#)), he was not suggesting that he was a compromiser or a man-pleaser (see [Gal. 1:10](#)). He was affirming the fact that his life and ministry were centered on helping others rather than on promoting himself and his own desires.

Before we leave this important section, we ought to note the fact that Paul probably appeared inconsistent to those who did not understand his principles of Christian living. At times, he

would eat what the Gentiles were eating. At other times, he would eat only "kosher" food with the Jews. But instead of being inconsistent, he was actually living *consistently* by the principles he laid down in these chapters. A weather vane seems inconsistent, first pointing in one direction and then in another. But a weather vane is always consistent: it always points toward the direction where the wind is blowing. That is what makes it useful.

Are there some things that a mature Christian can do in the privacy of his own home that he would not do in public? Yes, provided they do not harm him personally and he does not tempt the Lord. I know a couple who, when their children were small, eliminated all games from their home that used either cards or dice. When their children were more mature, they were permitted to play those games.

As Christians, we *do* have freedom. This freedom was purchased for us by Jesus Christ, so it is very precious. Freedom comes from knowledge: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" ([John 8:32](#)). The more we understand about the atom, for example, the more freedom we have to use it wisely. However, knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise, it will tear down instead of build up.

The strong Christian not only has knowledge, but he also has experience. He can look back and see how the Lord has dealt with him through the years. But he must be careful, for experience must be balanced with caution.

Take heed, lest you fall!

The strong Christian knows that he has this freedom, but he also knows that freedom involves responsibility. I have the freedom, for example, to take my car out of the garage and drive it on the highway; *but I must drive it responsibly*. I am not free to drive at any speed on my street; nor am I free to ignore the traffic signs along the way.

Out of these chapters come several "tests" we may apply to our own decisions and activities.

"All things are lawful," BUT—

1. Will they lead to freedom or slavery? ([1 Cor. 6:12](#))
2. Will they make me a stumbling block or a stepping-stone? ([1 Cor. 8:13](#))
3. Will they build me up or tear me down? ([1 Cor. 10:23](#))
4. Will they only please me, or will they glorify Christ? ([1 Cor. 10:31](#))
5. Will they help to win the lost to Christ or turn them away? ([1 Cor. 10:33](#))

The way we use our freedom and relate to others indicates whether we are mature in Christ. Strong and weak Christians need to work together in love to edify one another and glorify Jesus Christ.

Chapter Nine.

Be Wise About... Church Order

[1 Corinthians 11](#)

Since Paul had some negative things to say to the church later in this section, he opened it on a positive note by praising the church. Two matters in particular merited praise: the church remembered Paul and appreciated him, and the church was faithful to keep the teaching that had been given them. The word *ordinances* simply means "traditions," teachings that were passed on from one person to another ([2 Tim. 2:2](#)). The traditions of men should be avoided ([Matt. 15:2-3](#); [Col. 2:8](#)), but the traditions that are given in the Word of God must be observed.

One of the biggest problems in the Corinthian church was disorder in the public meetings. Some of the women were assuming more freedom than they should have; there was disorder at the Lord's Supper; and there was confusion in the use of the spiritual gifts. The church had been greatly enriched with spiritual *gifts*, but they were sadly lacking in spiritual *graces*.

Paul could have tried to solve these problems by issuing apostolic edicts, but instead he patiently explained the spiritual principles that supported the teachings he had given the church. He founded his arguments on the Word of God.

Paul dealt with three particular areas of confusion in their public worship.