The Example of Those Before

1 Corinthians 10

10:1-11 Former believers (Drank from the same spiritual rock which is Christ).

**10 I don’t want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. 2 In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. 3 All of them ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 10:1-4 NLT**

Up to this point, it seems like Paul is sharing with the Corinthians about their rich heritage in Christ. It almost seems like the book of Hebrews where we can read about the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. But unfortunately, Paul goes on to write…

**5Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.**

**6These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, 7or worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, “The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.”[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+10&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28535b)**] 8And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.**

**9Nor should we put Christ[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+10&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28537c)**] to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites. 10And don’t grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death. 11These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.**

**1 Corinthians 10:5-11 NLT**

The Apostle Paul emphasizes Four main “Evils” that our forebearers of Christ (and apparently the Corinthians) battled with.

1. They Were idolatrous

The people knew the scriptures as recorded in Exodus 32. God had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and Moses, their leader had gone away to commune with God, but:

**32 When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. “Come on,” they said, “make us some gods who can lead us. We don’t know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt.”**

**2So Aaron said, “Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me.”**

**3All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf. When the people saw it, they exclaimed, “O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”**

**5Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, “Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord!”**

**6The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.**

**7The Lord told Moses, “Quick! Go down the mountain! Your people whom you brought from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. 8How quickly they have turned away from the way I commanded them to live! They have melted down gold and made a calf, and they have bowed down and sacrificed to it. They are saying, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”**

**9Then the Lord said, “I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. 10Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation.”**

**11But Moses tried to pacify the Lord his God. “O Lord!” he said. “Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand? 12Why let the Egyptians say, ‘Their God rescued them with the evil intention of slaughtering them in the mountains and wiping them from the face of the earth’? Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people! 13Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=exodus+32&version=NLT#fen-NLT-2452a)**] You bound yourself with an oath to them, saying, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. And I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.’”**

**14So the Lord changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people.**

**But once Moses came down the mountain and saw what was going on…He realized that doing nothing was not an option.**

**27Moses told them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Each of you, take your swords and go back and forth from one end of the camp to the other. Kill everyone—even your brothers, friends, and neighbors.” 28The Levites obeyed Moses’ command, and about 3,000 people died that day.**

**29Then Moses told the Levites, “Today you have ordained yourselves[**[**d**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=exodus+32&version=NLT#fen-NLT-2468d)**] for the service of the Lord, for you obeyed him even though it meant killing your own sons and brothers. Today you have earned a blessing.”**

**Exodus 32:1-14; 27-29 NLT**

1. They Committed sexual immorality

**25 While the Israelites were camped at Acacia Grove,[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=numbers+25&version=NLT#fen-NLT-4449a)**] some of the men defiled themselves by having[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=numbers+25&version=NLT#fen-NLT-4449b)**] sexual relations with local Moabite women. 2These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of Moab. 3In this way, Israel joined in the worship of Baal of Peor, causing the Lord’s anger to blaze against his people.**

**4The Lord issued the following command to Moses: “Seize all the ringleaders and execute them before the Lord in broad daylight, so his fierce anger will turn away from the people of Israel.”**

**5So Moses ordered Israel’s judges, “Each of you must put to death the men under your authority who have joined in worshiping Baal of Peor.”**

**Numbers 25:1-5 NLT**

1. They Tempted Christ (demanding Christ the Savior to prove Himself)

**21 The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that the Israelites were approaching on the road through Atharim. So he attacked the Israelites and took some of them as prisoners. 2Then the people of Israel made this vow to the Lord: “If you will hand these people over to us, we will completely destroy[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=numbers+21&version=NLT#fen-NLT-4319a)**] all their towns.” 3The Lord heard the Israelites’ request and gave them victory over the Canaanites. The Israelites completely destroyed them and their towns, and the place has been called Hormah[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=numbers+21&version=NLT#fen-NLT-4320b)**] ever since.**

**The Bronze Snake**

**4Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=numbers+21&version=NLT#fen-NLT-4321c)**] to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, 5and they began to speak against God and Moses. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?” they complained. “There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!”**

**6So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. 7Then the people came to Moses and cried out, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes.” So Moses prayed for the people.**

**8Then the Lord told him, “Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!” 9So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!**

**Numbers 21:1-9 NLT**

1. They Complained about God’s provision

**41The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. “You have killed the Lord’s people,” they said.**

**42But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the tent of meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared. 43Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the tent of meeting, 44and the Lord said to Moses, 45“Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.” And they fell facedown.**

**46Then Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put incense in it, along with burning coals from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the Lord; the plague has started.” 47So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. 48He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. 49But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. 50Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the tent of meeting, for the plague had stopped.[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=numbers+16&version=NIV#fen-NIV-4245c)**]**

**Numbers 16:41-50 NLT**

Paul shared these four examples with the Corinthians because these four things were exactly what most of them were participating in. If you access your life have you ever found yourself fitting into one of these groups of people?

Have you ever ascribed too much worth to things other than God?

Have you ever misused God’s gift of sex?

Have you ever kind of chewed God out because He didn’t seem like He was showing up for you?

Or maybe you have never done anything like that, in fact, maybe your grumbling right now that God allows people to do those things without punishment.

Grumbling makes God’s list of toxic sins.

Paul’s example wasn’t meant to beat the people up. He shared these examples with hopes that his listeners would see their own sin. And when they saw their own sin, they were to do at least three things.

1. Count on God’s strength to flee from temptation.
2. Consider the punishment they had been saved from by Christ’s sacrifice.
3. Cling to God’s mercy, but never use it as a license for sin.

Our heavenly Father, by providing Jesus as our Savior, is like a parent who has provided everything their kids need. As a kid I had a terrible habit of taking my parents and their provisions for granted.

Using God’s grace as a cover for sin is a little like the kid who gets brand new shoes and runs straight out into the mud. A parent would say, “I just bought those for you.” And the child might reply, “Well, you can just get me some new ones.”

Please remember, Paul wasn’t singling anyone out and neither am I. All of us battle these kinds of attitudes and actions. As the apostle goes on to write:

**12If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. 13The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.**

**14So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. 15You are reasonable people. Decide for yourselves if what I am saying is true. 16When we bless the cup at the Lord’s Table, aren’t we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren’t we sharing in the body of Christ? 17And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body. 18Think about the people of Israel. Weren’t they united by eating the sacrifices at the altar?**

**1 Corinthians 10:12-18 NLT**

He further clarifies…

**19What am I trying to say? Am I saying that food offered to idols has some significance, or that idols are real gods? 20No, not at all. I am saying that these sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God. And I don’t want you to participate with demons. 21You cannot drink from the cup of the Lord and from the cup of demons, too. You cannot eat at the Lord’s Table and at the table of demons, too. 22What? Do we dare to rouse the Lord’s jealousy? Do you think we are stronger than he is?**

**23You say, “I am allowed to do anything”[**[**d**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+10&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28551d)**]—but not everything is good for you. You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is beneficial. 24Don’t be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.**

**25So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience. 26For “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”[**[**e**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+10&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28554e)**]**

**27If someone who isn’t a believer asks you home for dinner, accept the invitation if you want to. Eat whatever is offered to you without raising questions of conscience. 28(But suppose someone tells you, “This meat was offered to an idol.” Don’t eat it, out of consideration for the conscience of the one who told you. 29It might not be a matter of conscience for you, but it is for the other person.) For why should my freedom be limited by what someone else thinks? 30If I can thank God for the food and enjoy it, why should I be condemned for eating it?**

**1 Corinthians 10:19-30 NLT**

We have already talked about meat sacrificed to idols back in Chapter 8, so I am going to skip over that and put together verses 10:23-24 and 10:31-33 NLT and sum it up with a brief summary.

**23 You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is beneficial. 24 Don’t be concerned for your own good but for the good of others…**

**31So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32Don’t give offense to Jews or Gentiles[**[**f**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+10&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28560f)**] or the church of God. 33I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don’t just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.**

**1 Corinthians 10:23-24; 31-33**

Notice Paul does not tell them that they are wrong when they say “I am allowed to do anything.” Before God in the safety of Christ’s imputed righteousness, truly everything is permissible. The imputed righteousness that God has given us in Christ really does clear our account of sin before God, but that does not mean everything is fair game in a way that is beneficial to us and others.

God hates sin, and when we just keep on in it, it is like spitting on His provision for us.

So we can’t just go by what is permissible. Instead we should fix our gaze on doing things that points glory and ascribes worth to God, in order to “do what is best for others so that many may be saved.”

The best way to avoid temptation and sin is to focus on doing what is good and right and true. Think about it, if you wanted to avoid eating cake, do you think it would be a good idea to keep one on the counter, look at it and say, “I’m not going to eat it,” over and over again? Or do you think it a better idea to keep things in plain sight that are healthy to eat?

God saved us to live for His glory. To do everything we do according to His good design. Remember the history lesson, consider who you are and what you have been saved from, and make every effort to flee from temptation and live for God.