

INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. 1 Corinthians 10. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to 1 Corinthians 10.

INTRODUCTION: PARADOXES

Paradoxes are seemingly self-contradictory ideas that when investigated or explained may prove to be true. It's two ideas that SEEM to contradict each other, but IN FACT, are true. Here are some paradoxes:

- The more you try to impress people, the less impressed they'll be.
 - It's true...I've tried.
- The more afraid you are of death, the less you'll be able to enjoy life.
 - Interesting, considering the times we live in.
- The more you learn, the more you realize how little you know.
 - That's from Socrates...so, it's pretty smart.
- The more you try to keep someone close, the further away you'll push them.
 - Like we've learned in every RomCom ever...
- The only certainty is that nothing is ever certain.
 - That one is kinda like Yoda talk!

But there are some paradoxes all throughout the Bible for Christians:

- We see unseen things.
- We reign by serving.
- We are made great by becoming small.
- We are exalted when we are humble.
- We are made free by becoming slaves.
- We gain strength when we are weak.
- We live by dying.ⁱⁱ

TRANSITION

Now, today in our text we find a seeming contradiction, but it actually happens to be one of the Bible's most beautiful paradoxes.

But it'll take us a bit to get there. There's a big set-up. So, stick with me, and let's get to work.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1a

[1] For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,

Now, stop real quick...ok, Paul has been going for the last two chapters, and he's really been setting us up for chapter 10.

So, context,

- Paul first said that he would lay aside his preferences on food sacrifices to idols for his brothers.
- And then Paul said he would sacrifice his rights and freedoms—things that he was actually due—for his brothers.
- And then last week Paul told us he did it all so that he might win some to Christ.

But now he's going to issue a warning. Because as he lays all this out there for Christians to practice,

- we can quickly think WE are strong,
 - and everyone else is weak...
- and that WE'RE good,
 - and everyone else is in trouble...
- and that WE don't have anything to worry about...

but Paul says, "Hold on...I don't want you to be unaware."

And what he's going to do is tell the story of the Exodus and the wilderness generation to use as a sobering comparison to the church in Corinth. So, let's dig in.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-4

[1] For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, 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 drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

EXPLAIN: PROVISION

So, Paul is referring to Israel's Exodus from Egypt and the generation that followed. And he's showing all that God provided for his people:

- God provides his people with a pillar of cloud to direct them, and dry ground as they pass through the sea to protect them.
 - **God provided direction and protection to his people.**

Then Paul talks deliverance through the sea

- as the beginning of their separation from Egypt
- and a renewed identity as God's covenant community,
- and the term "baptism" fittingly represents that experience. ⁱⁱⁱ

Just as our baptisms are an external display that we now identify with Christ's death and resurrection, so **God provided identity to his people.**

And finally, just like he pointed to baptism, he also points to a version of the Lord's Supper by likening it to the way **God provided spiritual food and spiritual drink.** All this is setting up a direct parallel between Israel's situation and the Corinthians.

- God provided so much to the wilderness generation,
- But...verse 5.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:5

[5] Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Well, if you know the story of the Exodus,

- you know that deliverance from Egypt
- did not mean ultimate deliverance.
- Israel had to pass through a time of testing in the desert
- before they could enter the promised land.

And it says that **with most of them God was not pleased,**

- which seems like a bit of an understatement,
- because only two from that generation
- made it to the Promised Land.
- Caleb and Joshua.
- Every other adult died in the wilderness.

And Paul quotes Numbers 14 here, and the ESV softens the blow, but the word for *overthrown* is the same word in Numbers 14 which is translated *to slay*. **They were slain in the wilderness.**

You see, even after years with God providing for every need they had

- Israel turns away from God,
- and turns to idolatry and sin,
- and ends up, instead of stepping into the promised land,
- they end up rotting away,
- slain in the wilderness.

And that's how the Exodus story, God's great deliverance of his people, ends.

Do you see what Paul might be doing here? Well, he makes it really clear. Verse 6.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:6

[6] Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did

EXPLAIN: MAIN POINT

So, now Paul clearly links Israel to the Corinthian church. These things took place as examples for us.

And my main point for the morning is an old idiom:

SLIDE IT HAPPENED...AND IT HAPPENS.

- God saves.
- God delivers.
- God baptizes.
- God provided spiritual food and drink.
- And those same people turn to idolatry and to sin...
- and ultimately are overthrown.

It HAPPENED in Israel...and it HAPPENS in Corinth.

And listen to me: it HAPPENS today.

- People have a conversion experience.
- They live as a Christian for a time.
- They experience God, maybe even in miraculous ways.
- But then they turn away...
- they get into sin...
- And they end up 'overthrown in the wilderness'.
- Gosh, I see this all the time.

IT HAPPENED...AND IT HAPPENS. **BLANK SLIDE**

TRANSITION

And Paul starts making observations about how what happened in Israel, is happening in Corinth.

He's giving them a warning, with the hope that they don't experience the same fate that the wilderness generation did. Verse 7.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:7

[7] 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."

SIN ONE: IDOLATRY

So, Paul lists four sins of the Corinthian Church, and the first one is **IDOLATRY**.

- And Paul quotes from Exodus 32:6,
- which is the story where, in the desert,
- Moses is up on the mountain
- getting the law from God,
- but the people get restless,
- and they make a demand from Aaron:
- *"We don't know where Moses went...*
- *so, make us gods to worship."*
- And Aaron rolls over
- and makes them a golden calf and says,
- *"These are your gods, O Israel,*
- *who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"*

Which to my mind it's like,

- *“Really? That golden calf?”*
- *You just made that, bro!”*

But the text says

- that Israel rose up early
- and made offerings to the calf
- and then sat down to eat and drink
- and rose up to play...
 - which is a euphemism for, essentially, an orgy.

When God's people turn away from God, and worship idols, it leads to gross debauchery. IT HAPPENED AND IT HAPPENS.

Verse 8.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:8

[8] We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.

SIN TWO: SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Sin two: **SEXUAL IMMORALITY**. Now, we don't have to go into this one in depth, since we preached on sexual immorality extensively in 1 Corinthians chapters 5 and 6.

But Paul refers to a story in Numbers 25

- which recounts the Israelites having sexual relations
- with the women of Moab
- and then worshipping the Moabite gods,
- actually, eating meat sacrificed to their idols,
- which unleashes God's fury,
- and 23,000 die in a plague.

You see, not only does idolatry lead to debauchery. But debauchery leads to idolatry.

ILLUSTRATION: KELLER

Tim Keller illustrates this by talking about when he catches up with college students who were home from school.

- He'd ask them to grab coffee with him to catch up on life.
- And when he'd come to the state of their spiritual lives,
- they'd often hem and haw,
- talking about the difficulties and doubts
- now that they'd taken a little philosophy,
- or maybe a science class or two,
- and how it all started to shake the foundations.

At that point, he'd look at them and ask one question,

- *"So, who have you been sleeping with?"*
- Shocked, their faces would inevitably fall
- and say something along the lines of, *"How did you know?"*^{tv}

Sexual immorality leads us away from God...it becomes an idol of sorts.
IT HAPPENED AND IT HAPPENS.

Verse 9:

1 CORINTHIANS 10:9

[9] We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents,

SIN THREE: TESTING GOD

Sin three is TESTING GOD. Testing God is the opposite of trusting God.

- We test God when we stop trusting what he's doing in our lives.
- When we think WE KNOW BETTER than God what is good and right for us.

And Paul refers to Numbers 21

- where the people become impatient in the desert
- and start to question and test God.
- *"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt?"*
- *We hate this food.*
- *There's no water!*
- *We're going to die in this wilderness."*

And God's response is to send snakes among the people to bite and kill them. If you think the Old Testament is crazy...it is!

IT HAPPENED AND IT HAPPENS...maybe not the snake thing...

And the last one is in verse 10:

1 CORINTHIANS 10:10

[10] nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

SIN FOUR: GRUMBLING

The last sin is grumbling, or complaining, or whining. This is closely linked with testing God, but it sums up what happened with Israel.

- They constantly grumbled and complained
- and were destroyed...

This would NEVER happen today...oh...

Well, never me...but a guy I know...he's always complaining...

Verse 11:

1 CORINTHIANS 10:11

[11] Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

IT HAPPENED...AND IT HAPPENS.

TRANSITION

Paul recounts all these things as an example to call out the Corinthians for what is currently happening in their church.

But now Paul introduces the paradox I want us to spend the rest of our time on this morning, and I think it's his main point.

- One half of the paradox is in verse 12.
- And the second half is in verse 13. So, let's read verse 12.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12

[12] Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

That's the first half of the paradox, and that's the warning. **If you think you stand...take heed lest you fall.**

Why?

- Because Israel thought they stood...and they fell.
- And the Corinthians think they are standing...
- but Paul is worried that they might fall.
- IT HAPPENS!

EXPLAIN: FALL

Now, the Greek word for "fall" there at the end of verse 12 is *piptō*.

- And "to fall" in the Old Testament context
- was a euphemism for dying.
- Just like we saw back in verse 8.
 - **We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.**
- That word translated *fell* is actually *piptō*.
- They died.

I bring this up because I think we could read this and soften it to say, "Oh, you just slipped up and fell into sin," as if that wasn't a big deal!

One commentator said this, *"The Corinthians not only need to watch lest they cause others to stumble and fall; they also need to watch lest they fall themselves."*

- They think they are standing fast.
- But they have let their guard down,
- taken their freedoms for granted,
- and are dabbling with things they shouldn't.

They're like thirsty hikers who drink from a mountain stream, unaware of the debilitating giardia that might lurk in the crystal-clear water.^v

What Paul means is that if you are in sin...

- like the wilderness generation was...
- like the Corinthian church was...
 - if you are in sexual immorality,
 - if you are in idolatry,
 - if you are testing the Lord,
 - or are constantly grumbling and complaining...

Not like you just slip up...

- but you are in ongoing sin...
- if you think you're standing firm there...
- Be careful.
- You may fall.
- You may die.

So, what does that mean?

EXPLAIN: SALVATION

Well, this text brings up all kinds of questions about salvation, and I think he's pointing out a certain false security that some have.

If you call yourself a Christian...

- but you have NO real love for God.
- NO real desire to follow his ways.
- You can point to NO evidence that you're growing.
- You can point to NO area in your life where you're deepening.
- You're caught up in sin, and have NO desire to repent.
- NO desire to change.
- NO desire to mature.

But "*you're a Christian,*"

- cause you go to church,
- and you were baptized when you were eleven,
- and that's your religious preference.

If that's true of you. Then Paul's words are for you. **If you think you stand.**

Take heed, lest you fall.

IT HAPPENED AND IT HAPPENS.

- So, can you "*lose your salvation?*"
- Is it "*once saved, always saved?*"

Well, I don't think God loses things...

- **but there are unsaved people**
- **who, for a while,**
- **look like they're saved people.**

Just like Israel was provided for in incredible ways...yet not all were saved.

TRANSITION

The first half of the paradox is a warning.

- Take heed.
- Be careful.
- Careless overconfidence is a dangerous thing.

The first half is a warning. But the second half is a promise...and it's found in verse 13.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

[13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not 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.

So, there's the paradox!

- Take heed lest you fall...
- but God is faithful.

What?

- You should be scarred!
- But God's got you.

So, which is it?

- We must be vigilant in our pursuit of maturity.
- We must be vigilant in our discipleship.
- We must take heed and be humble, lest we fall.

OR

- God is faithful.
- God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.
- God will provide the way of escape.

Which is it?

Well, it's both. It's a tension. It's a paradox.

EXPLAIN: TEMPTATION

Three quick things to note about temptation: first, **YOU WILL BE TEMPTED.**

- It's not a matter of IF
- it's a matter of WHEN.
- That's why diligence is so incredibly important.

The good news is

- temptation isn't falling.
- Ok? Temptation isn't sin.
- But you will be tempted.

Second, **YOU ARE NOT UNIQUE.**

- I know your momma said you were a snowflake
- and a skittle
- and a rainbow...
- but you are not unique in your temptation.

The human bent it to believe that you are the only one who struggles with this-or-that sin. But it's not true. It is common to man.

- This is why being a part of the church is so very important.
- It's why I'm so nervous about the statistics of people
- who aren't connecting with church during the COVID crisis.

Because we come together and confess and repent, and realize we aren't alone in our temptation. And it helps us NOT TO FALL!

And third, **THERE IS A WAY OF ESCAPE.**

This is both good news and bad news.

- The good news is you always have a fighting chance.
- The bad news is, you've got no excuse!

There is no such thing as,

- *"Well, there was just no way out of that.*
- *She just came over,*
- *and it was late,*
- *and the door was closed,*
- *And there was no escaping!"*

There is always a way out!

Most of the time it's called the door!

That's why the next verse caps it all off.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14

[14] Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."

There's the door. Take it! There's a way out...but you have to choose it.

CONCLUSION

So, this is an extremely important passage. Paul's saying:

- learn from the wilderness generation.
- Learn from their mistakes.
- God loved them
- and delivered them
- and provided for them
- and yet....they fell.
- IT HAPPENED.

And the Corinthians are a model...

- God loved them,
- and the Gospel was brought to them,
- and a church was planted amongst them...
- and yet...they were slipping.
- IT HAPPENS.

And so, my prayer today is that maybe some of you would take heed. This warning is meant to get you away from falling...from dying. I don't know what your temptations are:

- Idolatry?
- Sexual immorality?
- Testing and grumbling and complaining against God?
- Those were the Corinthians...
- What about you? Is it something else entirely?

I don't know what your temptations are, but when you are face to face with temptations may you take the way of escape.

Because the paradox is real:

- If you think you're standing firm, take heed lest you fall.

AND

- God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear.

May you live in the tension.

Church, IT HAPPENED AND IT HAPPENS...

Let's pray together.

LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

ⁱ <https://markmanson.net/paradoxes-that-are-true>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.preachingtoday.com/books/art-and-craft-of-biblical-preaching/style/making-most-of-biblical-paradoxes.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

^{iv} <https://christandpopculture.com/who-are-you-sleeping-with-my-conversation-with-timothy-keller/>
^v Garland, David. *1 Corinthians*.