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TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 10A

Chapter 10:1-14

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- At the end of Chapter 9, Paul was discussing his two reasons for choosing to restrain his liberty at times
 - One reason was to demonstrate love for other Christians by not becoming a burden for them
 - Specifically, Paul refrained from taking financial support, though he had a right to expect it
 - He did so to avoid burdening the church
 - But Paul placed greater emphasis on his second reason for this decision
 - He argued that restricting his personal liberty was a strategy for increasing his effectiveness in ministry
 - And greater effectiveness would garner him even greater rewards from the Lord
 - So for Paul, restricting personal liberty was a means to an end
 - He could please his Lord all the more by making these personal sacrifices
 - And by pleasing the Lord, Paul knew he was earning something far more valuable than anything he set aside
- Then toward the end of Chapter 9, Paul came to his central point on Christian liberty

1Cor. 9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- Paul uses an arresting term
 - Paul says he does not wish to be disqualified
 - As we learned last week, he means disqualified from enjoying the benefits of serving Christ
 - Paul preaches to others that they should please the Lord and prepare for their judgment day
 - And he doesn't want to risk a chance he would lose any potential for his own reward
- He says we must discipline our bodies to ensure that positive outcome
 - The discipline Paul is talking about is that of denying our flesh, restricting our liberties, when necessary
 - And doing so purposefully to accommodate the needs of the Gospel
 - Like an athlete that must deny his body certain things while pushing it to perform so that he might take home the prize he desires
- Simply put, it's not enough that we have been given salvation
 - We must work out that salvation to the end that we please the Lord by our choices and decisions
 - We exercise self-control out of love for others, yes
 - But we also do so for our own eternal interests
 - And that was Paul's focus

- Furthermore, if we do not make a point of exercising self-discipline in restraining our liberty, then there's a good chance our lack of self-restraint will eventually become sin
 - One day we're enjoying our liberty by eating meat sacrificed to an idol
 - The next moment, we've become comfortable participating in the idol worship ceremony that precedes the meal
 - One moment we are enjoying watching PG-13 movies
 - The next moment...what will we be willing to accept?
 - Again, the problem isn't that enjoying liberty is wrong
 - The issue is, are we spiritually mature enough to control these desires and even put them aside altogether when spiritual demands warrant?
- Now as we enter Chapter 10, Paul moves to illustrating his concern using an example from the history of Israel

1Cor. 10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;

1Cor. 10:2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

1Cor. 10:3 and all ate the same spiritual food;

1Cor. 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

1Cor. 10:5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

- Paul often uses this phrase “For I do not want you to be unaware...” (*theo agnoeo*) to introduce a new thought as proof of an argument
 - And here's Paul's proof by way of example: the nation of Israel in the desert
 - The Israelites serve as a powerful example of how a failure to restrain sinful, fleshly desires can do destruction in one form or another
 - From their experiences, Paul will then make an application to the Corinthian church
 - Paul starts by drawing our attention to the fact that all these people shared a common set of experiences or knowledge
 - He says the Jewish fathers (or ancestors) were all under the cloud
 - A reference to seeing the physical manifestation of the angel of the Lord in the desert
 - They were under the cloud, because God used the cloud to shield the people from the desert sun during the day
 - It was evidence of God's love, and mercy and kindness
 - Secondly, the people all passed through the sea
 - Going through the Red Sea proved God's power to deliver us from enemies
 - As well as His power to destroy those who oppose Him

- Thirdly, this group was baptized into Moses
 - Paul is using the word baptized in the sense of being baptized into one body
 - The entire nation experienced a type of baptism as it passed through the sea and entered into the covenant of Moses
 - Finally, the entire nation received powerful examples of Christ in the form of manna, the bread of life from Heaven and they drank from the rock that pictured Christ
- So the nation of Israel in the desert can be seen as a picture or example of the believer individually
 - Just as that group experienced God's mercy, deliverance, baptism, a covenant relationship, and communion with Christ, so does the individual believer today
 - While they received those things as shadows, we receive them in their full form
- So then what more might we learn from their experience? Paul goes on

1Cor. 10:6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

1Cor. 10:7 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."

1Cor. 10:8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

1Cor. 10:9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.

1Cor. 10:10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

- In a remarkable statement of providence, Paul says the Lord orchestrated the events of the 40 years in the desert so that His children could learn important lessons
 - We could probably consider this statement all by itself for an entire lesson
 - The people of Israel were brought out of Egypt in such a dramatic way and were ushered through 40 years of experiences for our sake
 - And for the sake of all believers who could benefit from learning of the experience
 - So what do we learn from studying Israel's period of wandering in the desert?
 - Paul says the central lesson for believers should be that we not crave evil things
 - Paul is not suggesting that this generation of Israel were all believers
 - On the contrary, scripture makes clear elsewhere that this generation of Israel was an unbelieving generation lacking faith
 - Nevertheless, the collective experience of the nation holds important lessons for the individual believer when it comes to self-restraint

- In comparing their national experience in the desert to our personal experience in faith, Paul briefly mentions four moments in those forty years
 - First, he says don't be idolaters as some in Israel had become
 - Paul is referencing Exodus 32:6
 - In that chapter the Israelites sit down to observe the Lord's sacrifices in a congregational meal

Ex. 32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

Ex. 32:2 Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

Ex. 32:3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

Ex. 32:4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Ex. 32:5 Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD."

Ex. 32:6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

- We can easily see Paul's reason for raising this example
 - The people wished to engage in a religious meal service
 - In the pagan traditions of Egypt, religious services involved elaborate meals and were often followed by sexual acts with prostitutes who served the worshippers
 - Sound familiar?
 - The pagan temples in Corinth operated in the same fashion
- So Israel longed to eat and play, which is a euphemism for sexual immorality, but they lacked a spiritual leader to lead them in the ceremony
 - Moses was unaccounted for, so the nation enlisted Aaron and asked that he create an idol so they could party
 - It's as if we were dying to have turkey and stuffing, so we demanded that someone invent a reason to celebrate Thanksgiving
 - Notice in v.5 Aaron declares tomorrow will be a feast
 - And then the people proceeded to party
- Can you see Paul's point in this example?
 - When we let our fleshly desires control us, they will eventually lead us into serious sin
 - What starts as a desire for food becomes a desire for sexual pleasure

- And sexual sin became a cause for idolatry
- It's a slippery slope, so any time we give in to our flesh, we can't be sure where it's going to lead ultimately
- The enemy is crafty
 - He knows our weaknesses
 - He will tempt our flesh in one capacity to get us comfortable with living in our flesh
 - Once we are practiced in allowing our flesh to rule our hearts, then he walks us further away from godliness
 - Before we know it, we're giving in to serious sin
- Paul uses three more examples to reinforce the same point, but each adds a new element to the pattern
 - In v. 8 Paul warns us of another time the Israelites were drawn into immorality
 - In Numbers 25 the Israelites followed after their sexual lusts to take daughters of Moab as wives
 - This was a sin in direct disobedience to the Lord's commands
 - Notice how their disobedience began

Num. 25:1 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.

Num. 25:2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

Num. 25:3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel.

- Once again, the sin began with an invitation to sit and eat
- Followed by an invitation to bow down and worship false gods
 - The Israelites were so desirous of the food and the women that there were willing to worship false gods to get what they wanted
- In v.9 Paul reminds us of the episode of the serpents in Numbers 21

Num. 21:4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey.

Num. 21:5 The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food."

Num. 21:6 The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

- Once again, a fleshly desire ruled their hearts and led them to sin against the Lord

- Prompting the judgment of the Lord
- Finally, in v.10 Paul describes a moment from Numbers 11

Num. 11:4 The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat?

Num. 11:5 “We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic,

Num. 11:6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.”

Num. 11:33 While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague.

Num. 11:34 So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy.

- If the pattern isn't clear by now, then we're not paying attention
- Greedy, fleshly desires set a trap for the soul, and the fall inevitably came
- Our liberties offer us limitless opportunities to enjoy the life God has granted us in Christ, but with great power comes great responsibility (to quote Marvel comics)
 - We must live in control of our fleshly desires
 - We must exercise sound and sober judgment concerning when and where to enjoy our liberties
 - And our enjoyment must be self-disciplined to ensure we don't harm others or lead ourselves into spiritual ruin
 - The Spirit gives us everything we need to exercise that control, if only we're willing to rest in Him instead of our flesh
 - But Paul makes clear our success depends on our willingness to endure the challenges that every athlete knows
 - No pain, no gain

1Cor. 10:11 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.

1Cor. 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

1Cor. 10:13 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.

- These events came upon the unbelieving generation of Israel to teach all men an example, especially for those who have received the fullness of Messiah

- If we think we're so strong in our faith that we have nothing to fear in exercising our liberty, then take heed
 - The Israelites fell into temptation and sin time and time again
 - Despite seeing wondrous miracles of God in the desert, nevertheless they couldn't stand against their own flesh
- So only a fool believes he or she can stand easily in the face of temptation
 - The Corinthians were self-assured and confident
 - They believed they could enter the temples, eat the meat, enjoy the party and not get burned
 - But their confidence was a sign of immaturity not maturity
- The mature Christian is the one who recognizes the danger of serving the flesh
 - The mature Christian stays far away from temptation
 - They recognize that every man is susceptible to a fall, just as Paul says in v.13
 - No man is immune to the power of the flesh
 - No one is strong enough to avoid a slip if they entertain their flesh's desires
 - Sooner or later we'll all end up regretting our lack of self-discipline
- Paul says our defense is not cockiness but humility and reliance on the Spirit
 - Even as our flesh brings a temptation, the Lord is ever present giving us an escape, if only we will take it
 - That escape will come in a variety of ways
 - But whatever way it comes will require we take advantage of it
 - Peter echoes this truth with the example of Lot

2Pet. 2:7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men

2Pet. 2:8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 2Pet. 2:9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

- Remember when God provided Lot an escape from the coming judgment, He sent angels to drag Lot and his family out of the city
 - But they deposited him outside the city yet still within danger of the destruction
 - Lot still had a choice to make...return to the city or run to the mountains
- By taking him out of the city, the Lord moved him away from the point of temptation, providing him an escape
 - But Lot had to take advantage of the opportunity
- So then Paul gives us the bottom line to all these examples

1Cor. 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

- When we boil all this down, we end up with a simple rule of thumb
 - Flee from idolatry
 - Yes, we have liberty
 - And yes, we can enjoy in peace things that entrap and deceive the unbelieving world
- But we can't live foolishly thinking that such things have no power to deceive or entrap us too
 - Our flesh still lives for a time, and it has power to draw us away to idolatry
 - If we live in ignorance and without a healthy concern for our flesh, we will grow spiritually lazy
 - More and more, we'll say yes to our flesh
 - And one thing will lead to another
- The church in Corinth wanted Paul's blessing to enjoy the pagan meat in the temples, because they assumed Christian liberty did away with the concerns of such things
 - But Paul reminds the church that liberty is not a defense to the power of the flesh to lead us astray
 - We must remember that the test of obedience and love is not how much we exercise our freedoms, but how well we keep those freedoms under control of the Spirit
- Our best defense is a good offense
 - Flee immorality
 - When you see your flesh drawn by a weakness, then respond like an athlete who is training to win a race
 - Discipline that weakness
 - Train yourself in righteousness so that you might strengthen yourself against that temptation
 - Take whatever steps are necessary to steer clear of the fall you know is coming if you give in to your flesh
 - We often tell ourselves that our sin patterns are unavoidable or beyond our ability to control, but scripture tells us the truth
 - When we find ourselves corrupted by our flesh, our mistake was entertaining the early temptations
 - We said yes to our first desires of the flesh, which then led us to a place where we couldn't say no any longer