

**“Raising the Stakes”**  
**1 Corinthians 10:1-13**  
**September 22, 2002**  
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**Text Comment**

We are still in the section in which Paul is dealing with the controversy in the church regarding the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols. But we are now in what is an important digression in the Apostle’s argument. He has urged on them the importance of loving regard for the conscience of other believers. He has illustrated that spirit he wants to see in them by recollecting his own behavior among them, the various ways he sought not to put any hindrance in the way of the gospel, even though this meant considerable sacrifice on his part. And he finished chapter 9, in a transitional paragraph, by urging on them, again by his own example, a holy seriousness about their Christian lives, dropping, as it were as a bombshell, in the last line of the chapter, the veiled warning that people who claim to be Christians but who do not live like Christians may well discover when it is too late that the Lord took much more notice of their disobedience than he did of their profession of faith. It is this warning that he now proceeds to elaborate.

- v.1 Note the highly significant use of “our” before forefathers. Paul is writing to a largely Gentile church and, at this point, is discussing a question of importance only to Gentile Christians, viz. eating meat offered to idols. Jews would never have eaten such food in any case. Yet Paul is saying that, spiritually speaking, the generation of Israel that left Egypt at the exodus was the ancestry of these Gentile Christians in Corinth. The people of God is one and it is the ancestry of the covenant, not of blood that matters. Or, as Paul puts it elsewhere, even Gentile believers of Christ are the circumcision and are the Israel of God.
- v.2 Paul is making the point, obviously, that the wilderness generation had all the sacramental provision that the Corinthian Christians had, that baptism and the Lord’s Supper is not sufficient for salvation. It is likely that there were Corinthian believers who were tending to that fatal error, to trust their participation in the sacraments more than a living faith and the obedient life that flows from it.

By the way, this verse often comes up in the polemics of the mode of baptism, that is whether baptism must be performed by immersion as some Christians claim. Israel was baptized, but it was not immersed. In fact, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Scot writer put it famously this way: “1. The Israelites were baptized, both adults and infants, for the apostle declares it. 2. They were not immersed, a fact [to] which Moses and other inspired writers testify. 3. The Egyptians who pursued them were immersed. 4. The Israelites had baptism without immersion, and the Egyptians immersion without baptism. ...”  
[In John Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 253-254]

- v.4 The food was manna, the drink, water from the rock. The comparison, of course, is with the Lord’s Supper, that becomes Paul’s subject later in this chapter. Paul, quite

characteristically, mixes his metaphors and uses “Rock” now as a familiar OT image for God. And, as often elsewhere in the NT, he says that the person of the Godhead with whom Israel had to do in her history, the one who provided for them in the wilderness – just as Jude says the one who brought them out of Egypt in the first place – was none other than God the Son, whom we know as Jesus Christ.

- v.5 This is Paul’s point. All of those advantages meant nothing because the people were not faithful to God. The Corinthians too had seen God’s mighty power at work, they had witnessed miracles. But this will do them no good if they do not have and practice a living, working faith in Christ.
- v.6 The word Paul uses and that the NIV translates “examples” is the word “types.” It is from this word that we get “typology.” In the interpretation of the Bible, typology refers to the fact that since God is the same always and everywhere and since he controls human history and acts in similar ways at various times in that history, he often provides persons, or events, or things that foreshadow later developments in salvation history. We are accustomed to thinking of the Passover and exodus, of the tabernacle, of King David, for example, as “types,” because they foreshadowed Christ and his saving work. And, without a doubt, the Bible teaches us to think in just this way.
- v.7 The example taken from Exodus 32 is, of course, apropos. We are, remember, still talking about banquets in pagan temples. A cultic meal in an idol’s presence is what happened at the foot of Sinai and the same thing was happening in Corinth.
- v.8 Sexual immorality, we have already learned, was a problem in the church and, as we said some weeks ago, was frequently a problem at the temple banquets.
- v.9 Paul may well have chosen this example because of some of the congregation’s insistence on their *right* to eat in the temples. To insist on this right was to *test* God, a dangerous thing to do. In v. 22 he will speak of actions that “arouse the Lord’s anger.”
- v.10 In the case referred to, either from Numbers 14 or Numbers 16, the people grumbled first against Moses. Paul may be making reference to criticism *he* has received from some of those in the congregation. Their grumbling against him is like the grumbling of the Israelites against Moses.
- v.11 All of that Israelite history is intended to be a lesson for these Gentiles in the age of Pentecost. The fact that Christ’s work has been accomplished and nothing remains but the time that must pass until the consummation of all things, does not mean that the spiritual issues of life are any different now than long ago. We still live in the same spiritual world they lived in. So we must learn the lesson of their history and take it to heart.
- v.12 Taking Paul’s argument together, it appears that the one who thinks he is standing firm is the one who thinks himself free to attend pagan feasts in the temples because he is, after

all, a participant in the Lord's Supper. Paul is going to say, in the next paragraph, that this practice is idolatrous and must be abandoned.

- v.13 Before his next section of commandment and warning, Paul gives his readers encouragement. If they truly desire to be faithful to the Lord in their conduct, he will enable them. He brings in the matter of temptation, he treats the spiritual problem of the Corinthians as a problem of yielding to temptation, in part because, as we will learn in the next paragraph, he sees the devil himself standing behind what is happening in the church there.

In his immortal book *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Richard Baxter, the great Puritan pastor and author, wrote this.

“Seriousness is the very thing wherein consists our sincerity. If thou art not serious, thou art not a Christian. It is not only a high degree in Christianity, but the very life and essence of it. As fencers upon a stage differ from soldiers fighting for their lives, so hypocrites differ from serious Christians.” [In *Practical Works*, 46]

And, of course, chief among those things that real Christians are serious about is their own salvation. They do not take a matter of such eternal importance for granted. They do not imagine that the everlasting destiny of their souls – to ruin or to immeasurable joy – is something they should be careless of. They do not think that what counts for ever should be treated as of little importance compared to the fleeting interests and pleasures of this world.

And that unassailable logic and utterly reasonable conviction is what lies beneath Paul's warnings here. These Corinthian believers were putting their souls at risk. In their headlong rush for the approbation of their worldly friends, the enjoyment of the pleasures of sophisticated Corinth, and their desire for worldly advancement, they were conducting themselves in a manner that anyone should have been able to see was inconsistent with a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. They were sliding into that way of thinking, as multitudes of church people have done before them, in which faithfulness in the ordinary round of Christian worship, in attendance at the Lord's house on the Lord's day, participation in the sacraments, is considered sufficient protection. Doing that, they were beginning to feel, rendered them otherwise at liberty to pursue their own goals without particular concern for the honor of Christ or the fulfillment of his purposes in their lives. That is the first effect of sin and of being sinful; it makes people foolish, self-destructive fools.

We are well used to hearing the OT prophets protest against this viewpoint when it became the thinking of generations of Israelites, and we find the same protest in the New Testament. The Letter to the Hebrews, which we are studying in the evenings, is, in large part, a protest against precisely this acceptance of a modest outward and ritual conformity in the place of a living, loving, obeying and serving faith in Jesus Christ. And, once out of the era of Holy Scripture, we find the same need for Christian preachers to address this same temptation, obviously a temptation “common to man.” The Reformers, the second Reformation men – the Puritans – , the men of the Great Awakening, all had before them Sunday by Sunday people who were “at ease in Zion,” in the prophet Amos' famous phrase. These people were complacent because they

imagined themselves safe, spiritually secure, and they were falsely complacent because their lives did not confirm that their faith in Christ was real, genuine, and authentic.

How much this mistake is possible, how easily it can be made, how many people make it, are all confirmed by the large number of Christian ministers through the ages who entered the ministry and conducted the Christian ministry as unsaved men, only later to realize that they *were* unsaved, and came to Christ in true and living faith. Think of Henry Lyte, the author of such exquisite hymns as *Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven, Jesus I my Cross Have Taken*, and *Abide with Me*. Lyte had been an Anglican priest for several years when the death of a brother clergyman awakened him to serious thought about his own soul. The other man was a man like Lyte, a time-server, a merely professional clergyman, like so many others in the Church of England. But now he was dying and he was afraid. He instinctively felt that his sins were not forgiven and that he unprepared to die. Lyte couldn't help him, but the two men together went looking in the Bible to see if they could discover how men were saved and, in the process, both of the men came to living faith. Lyte's clergyman friend died in real faith at full flood. As Lyte said of him, "He died happy under the belief that though he had deeply erred, there was *One* whose death and sufferings would atone for his delinquencies..." And he says of himself as a result, "I was greatly affected by the whole matter, and brought to look at life and its issue with a different eye than before; and I began to study my Bible, and preach in another manner than I had previously done." [Taken from Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, 169; Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology*, i, 700.]

Henry Lyte had been a moral man before he became a Christian, he had been a religious man. He was a Christian minister for goodness sake. Every Sunday he was not only in church but presiding at the table of the Lord and preaching from the Word of God. But he was not a Christian, not really, and he came to realize that and put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ and became, as all Christians do and must, a changed man. Before his conversion, minister though he was, he would never have written those lines we find in his great hymn: "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven; who like me his praise should sing?"

And that story can be repeated many times over. We could speak of Thomas Chalmers who was a professional Scottish Presbyterian minister for some years before he found Christ in truth and replaced his bare religious observance and public morality with a living confidence in his Savior and a burning desire to serve him for love's sake. It has often been said that it was the conversion of Thomas Chalmers that was the beginning of the renewal of the Scottish church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Or, better still we could speak of William Haslam, the famous Anglican priest who was converted by his own sermon. He was preaching, as all Anglican preachers do, on the text appointed for that Sunday, which happened to be the Lord's inquiry to his disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" And in explaining that the Jews as a whole had false views of Jesus and did not understand who he really was, he realized that he had never had a true grasp of Christ himself and had never believed in him as salvation requires. And while he was preaching his sermon faith came to him and the change was so obvious that even the congregation noticed it. "The parson's converted," one man shouted, and the resulting pandemonium brought an end to the service.

If we were to describe what characterized such men in the days before they became followers of Christ, notwithstanding the eminent religious activity of their lives, it was that they did not take the question of their soul's salvation seriously. They did not regard the matter as of overwhelming importance. They were complacent, self-assured, and easy-going about salvation and spent their concern, their interest, their zeal on other things.

Well, says Paul, the Bible gives us ample warning against such a state of mind, such an indifference to salvation, such a carelessness about what salvation requires and how it is detected in an individual's life. Take the supreme example, he says.

The exodus was the OT's ultimate type or example of God's work of salvation. His people were in bondage, a bondage they could not themselves break. They were hopeless in their slavery. And then God, in his mercy and love, intervened with works of surpassing power. He sent the plagues that finally broke the Egyptians' will to hold the Israelites in slavery. Then when the Egyptians had a change of mind and pursued the departing Israelites, he went behind them and before them to protect them. He parted the waters of the Reed Sea and brought Israel safely across on dry land and then buried forever the pursuing Egyptian army in those same waters. And, once that great host found itself in the wilderness, the desert, he provided for them again and again. Manna to eat, and, on one famous occasion, quail; and water from rocks. Through forty years their clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on their feet. [Deut. 29:5] Israel saw all of this with her own eyes. They beheld the glory of God and witnessed his great power being unleashed on their behalf. Was there ever so favored a generation?

But notwithstanding all this, they did not really believe. Their behavior in any number of instances demonstrated that they lacked true faith in God and the love for God that comes from that faith and the love for one another that is another of its marks or evidences. Why the taste of the Passover lamb was hardly out of their mouths, they were barely dry from the spray of the Sea that had wetted them as they passed through the parted waters to safety, the echo of God's terrible voice from the top of Mount Sinai had scarcely died away before they were saying things and doing things that were the very opposite of what faith and love require. The temptations common to man found them even in that desolate wilderness and they put up no resistance and their lack of faith was found out. Temptation turned a people who had been delivered from bondage in Egypt on eagles' wings into an ordinary collection of Ancient Near-eastern idolaters and fornicators. And that proved that all of God's favor notwithstanding, they were not saved and would never see either the Promised Land or the heavenly country of which it was the sign and seal.

What is the application of that history? Well, says Paul to these Corinthian Christians, if you should find yourself doing the same things that Israel did in those days: playing with idolatry, practicing sexual immorality, grumbling against the Lord's messengers, and testing the Lord by insisting on your rights over and above his law and his name and his honor in your life, well then, *look to your salvation!* Those were the very things that Israel did and that proved her *lack* of true faith and that she was not really saved after all. It is the easiest thing to think you are safe with God when you are not. The number of people who have committed that mistake is very, very large in the history of mankind. If a refusal to believe at all, in any form, has slain its

thousands, spiritual complacency has slain its ten thousands. So, when you find in your lives the very things that characterized the lives of a generation of people we know were *not* saved, even though they were, as we would say today, members of the church and participants in its life, it is time to take stock, or as Paul puts it, “to be careful that you do not fall.”

So far Paul has berated them for conduct unbecoming a Christian. Now he raises the stakes and warns them that their conduct, at least the conduct of a number of them, must raise the question whether they are Christians at all. It is not enough to profess faith. Jesus made a great point of teaching us that. One must *live* his or her faith. True faith, as the Bible is always saying, works through love – love for God and for man, a love that is expressed in humility, in obedience, in service, and in a spiritual mind. “Be careful,” says Paul, that this is true of you and that anyone can see that it is true. “Be careful” that you do not presume on God’s grace without being serious about embracing such a magnificent, life changing wonder for yourself. “Be careful” that you are not substituting outward acts of religious conformity for a true, living, working faith in Christ. There are ways to tell the difference, but you must care to examine yourself in light of those ways.

Richard Baxter, whom I mentioned before, has a work entitled *The Character of a Sound Confirmed Christian as also of a Weak and Seeming Christian*. The Puritans liked long titles. In this work he compares the character and conduct of three types of people: the hypocrite – the one who professes to be a Christian but is not in fact – , the weak Christian, and a strong and mature believer. With typical Puritan and Baxterian thoroughness he compares them with respect to 60 different particulars, such as faith, love for God, the service of God, repentance, obedience, delight in God, sense of sin, and so on. Among those 60 points of comparison is this matter of temptation. The hypocrite, the seeming Christian, Baxter writes, is usually quite blind to the whole issue and uncaring. He hardly knows that he is being tempted and hardly thinks that he has succumbed to temptation and he lives under the sway of it. He is more concerned about others’ sins than his own and he never worries that he may not be saved or that his life may cast his profession of faith in doubt.

The weak Christian, on the other hand, is a soldier of Christ and is engaged in offering his life to Christ in love and service. He very often falls prey to temptation, often even before he realizes that he is being tempted. But, then Baxter describes the mature, strong Christian.

“A confirmed Christian is acquainted with the deceitfulness of man’s heart, and the particular corrupt inclinations that are in it; and especially with his own; he is acquainted with the wiles and methods of the tempter, what are the materials which he makes his baits of, and what is the manner in which he spreads his nets. He sees always some snares before him. And what company soever he is in, or what business soever he is about, he walks as among snares, which are visible to his sight; and it is part of his business continually to avoid them. He lives in a continual watch and warfare. He can resist much stronger and subtle temptations than the weak can do. He is always armed, and knows what are the special remedies against each particular snare and sin. And he carries always his antidotes about him, as one that lives in an infectious world, and in the midst of a froward and perverse generation, from which he is charged to save himself.”  
[*Practical Works*, 718]

I remember reading about the revival in the northeast of Scotland in 1860, a revival that marked Alexander Whyte for the remainder of his life. One minister who felt the effects of that revival said that their living sense of God's presence, grace, and power produced in them such a watchfulness, such an alertness to temptation, such a desire not to grieve the Holy Spirit so mightily at work among them that it was as though they were men "walking on ice." Well, that was the Corinthians problem. They were not as men "walking on ice." They were far too much rather as men "relaxing by the pool." But that is no way to care for the eternal salvation of your soul. Not when mighty forces within you and without you are ranged against that salvation.

If you care to be saved, as you should, my friends, as you should care for your salvation above all other things, then you will care to live a life like that life that saved people live. You will want to know that your profession of faith in Christ is a genuine one. That is Paul's point. And if you care to live that life, you will care about how you conduct yourself in the world – the matter of eating in pagan temples is but one example of that – and you will care about how you treat others and contribute to their salvation and put nothing, nothing at all in the way of that salvation.

Charles Kingsley got Paul exactly right in his famous verse:

God! Fight we not within a cursed world,  
Whose very air teems thick with leagued fiends –  
Each word we speak has infinite effects –  
Each soul we pass must go to heaven or hell –  
And this our one chance, through all eternity  
To drop and die, like dead leaves in the brake...  
Be earnest, earnest, earnest; mad if thou wilt:  
Do what thou dost as if the stake were heaven,  
And *that* thy last deed ere the judgment day.