

# Meats and Idols, Knowledge and Love – Part 5

## Examples for Us – *1 Corinthians 10:1-13*

**Introduction** – There are several challenging parts in the letter to the Corinthians and we come to one of them now. We must learn to think as Paul does regarding the Old and New Testaments, or the two administrations of the Covenant of Grace. For many evangelicals, we tend to draw contrasts in the very places where the New Testament writers draw parallels. The Bible is one grand story of the salvation of God's people. One plan. One people. And understanding this rightly gives us a better grip on overcoming our current and daily temptations.

**Context** – Remember, Paul is responding to a letter from the Corinthians, and this section (Chs 8-10) deals with an appeal by the Corinthians for Paul's support of an enlightened understanding that idols are meaningless and therefore it doesn't matter to partake of the meat or the sacrificial meals. In 8, Paul raised his loving concern for the weaker brethren who could fall back into idol-worship if they saw the strong partaking of those meals. In 9, he argued from his own example that while he was free, he was glad to sacrifice his own rights for the sake of the gospel. Chapter 10 hints at another argument the letter from the Corinthians probably had in mind – that their participation in the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper provided a spiritual blessedness that made them immune to any harm from associating with pagan worship. Countering that, Paul tells the story of Israel, "*our fathers*," and the example they are to the Corinthians in having such a crass presumption upon the grace of God.

**Brothers and Fathers** (v1) - The Exodus is a great story of Israel, whose legacy the Corinthians (and all Christians) have inherited. Paul draws parallels for us, the covenant people of God. We are participants in the greater Israel, having been brought out of our slavery to sin, and into the promised freedom of Christ and the new humanity. We have participated in and experienced the powerful spiritual signs of God's favor, grace, and sustaining power. Paul wants the Corinthians (and us) to see that we are his *brothers* (even though Paul is a Jew, v1), and the patriarchs, like Moses and the community of the first Exodus, are our *fathers* (v1).

**Parallel Baptism and Communion** (vv1-4) – The Corinthians may have boasted that they had baptism and the Supper, but Paul makes clear that so did the Mosaic community. Five times he says of that community, "*all*." The cloud and the sea spoke of the presence of the living God and the passage of slavery to freedom (v1). They were baptized, identified by God as His people, in that cloud and sea, and they all ate spiritual food and drink.

**Partaking of Christ** (v4)– Being baptized in Moses gave them access to Christ (v4). This community, the men, women, and children alike, were marked and were being fed by Christ. In fact, their sacramental drink was Christ. Covenant baptism and communion state this for us today as well (this is Paul's basis for his argument – the similarity, the parallel): God is gracious, to us and to our children (Acts 2:39). For the covenant people of God, His face is turned towards us from the very beginning, His favor radiates towards us even when we don't understand a thing about His love or can't yet demonstrate that we know anything. We love because He loved us first. That is the blessing of being in Christ. It is very important to note this as we consider how we are to think of our covenant children, the objective participation in the covenant, and the warnings that follow.

**Apostasy from the Past** (vv5-11) – Just as there are continuities between Israel and Christians regarding partaking of the covenant, so there are continuities regarding apostasy (vv5-6). These four warnings align with the temptations and sins the Corinthians needed to deal with, and they have much application for our day and age as well.

**Idolatry/Sexual Immorality** (v7) – Israel lacked patience while waiting for Moses, which led to idolatry and sexual immorality. Paul chooses the text specifically indicating that the people *ate* in the presence of the golden calf (Ex 32:6b).

**Idolatry/Sexual Immorality** (v8) – Then there was the worship and eating before Baal of Peor, provoked by the sexual enticements of the Moabite women as suggested by Balaam (Num 25:1-9).

**Testing Christ** (v9) – The wilderness journey was long, they became discouraged and impatient and spoke against the Lord, Who then sent fiery serpents (Num 21:4-9). Paul interprets this as “*testing Christ.*”

**Grumbling Against God’s Leaders** (v10) – In Numbers 16, the sons of Korah grumbled against Moses and the ground opened up and swallowed them. Paul’s epistle hints of the Corinthians complaining against him (i.e. 5:9-11, 9:1-2) challenging his apostleship.

**Upon Whom the Ends of the Ages** (v11) – The wilderness wanderings were for 40 years, as was the period the Corinthians were living in, from the crucifixion of Christ until the destruction of the Temple and the end of the Old Covenant Age. Both were living during a time of transition, the end of an age.

**Beware** (v12) – This caution is for those who would stand on a false understanding of theological truths. They had been blessed with baptism, the Lord’s supper, and with Christ Himself. But so had Israel. So, for instance, we know that God’s election is sure and cannot be altered. But covenantal standing is a different matter, and pride comes before the fall (Prov 16:18). To claim assurance of salvation while walking and living in idolatry, sexual immorality, or any unrepentant sinful lifestyle, is to court disaster with the living, jealous God.

**Common Temptation** – The point in v13 is often lost because the verse is memorized and claimed without considering the context. The point is that all temptations reduce to one common denominator. Right after Paul says this and says that God will provide a way of escape, he says in the next verse to flee from idolatry (v14). This is the root sin. All the examples reduce to the temptation of idolatry, *which is placing a created thing in the spot that only the uncreated God should occupy. Idolatry is the attempt to get from a finite thing what only the infinite can supply* (Wilson). Lust, idolatry proper, fornication, tempting Christ, and murmuring – covenant members will not go to heaven with these. Let go, and look to the bronze serpent on Moses’ staff, to the crucified and risen Lord Christ.

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