

Themes Of I Corinthians (Part 4)

Fleeing From Sin

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One of the greatest failings of modern Christianity comes to the fore for us during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Christians of the world seem to understand the meaning of Passover fairly well in that they believe the Jesus Christ came into the world to pay the price for our sins. They understand that. That is not hard. But that is about as far as it goes.

Some understand that the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice—that He is the Creator God who died for us—puts them under obligation. Since that has happened, they are now His to do with as He wills. He is their Lord and Master, and that they must follow His will—do what He says.

But, it seems like only in rare circumstances a new Christian of this world truly tries to go one step further, and that is to stop sinning and to do good.

Now, this comes because of their teaching that is given through this world's Christianity—free grace, and eternal security. These concepts essentially say that Jesus has done it all for us. Beyond that, God's guarantee of salvation is unconditional. Those are the two things. Free grace is that Jesus has done it all for us, and eternal security is that God's guarantee is unconditional.

After a person accepts Jesus as his personal Savior, there is really nothing required of him, except perhaps, maybe, continue to believe, and to continue to be a good person (whatever that means). They have rejected His standards—the Ten Commandments, and the Law of God—and so, what is being a good person supposed to mean? I guess it is whatever they decide a good person means.

The blessed assurance of heaven awaits them. Is grace not amazing? (And then they go off and do whatever they will to do.)

Now, I have exaggerated things just a bit, but not very much, actually.

Protestant theologians seeing such things as overcoming sin, and doing good works to be very prominent in the scriptures, will "hem and haw" about them, and admit that they are in the scriptures, and yes, we should be doing them. But the essential thrust of modern Christian theology, as a whole, is that little or nothing is required of a Christian,

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except to believe. We have all heard, "Just believe in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." This idea, just that you have only to believe in the Name of the Lord Jesus, **is dead wrong**. The important word in there is the word, "just." "Just (only) believe in the Name of Jesus!" But, if that is only as far as it goes, salvation is not guaranteed, and probably will not be given.

This world's Christian theology seems to have misconstrued the fact that Christianity is a relationship founded on a covenant. They understand that it is a relationship but they seem to always forget the covenant part. They will mention it, but they do not seem to really grasp it.

I know this because they do not do it. A covenant is something you do! It is an agreement, like the marriage covenant. When you get married you come before the preacher, and in the presence of many witnesses each side agrees, and makes a vow, to uphold the agreement of the marriage, which is that they will honor each other, one will support each other, one will be in subjection to the other, etc., whatever the vow consists of. It is a promise. It is an agreement.

After the ceremony, you sign a license, and that puts a legal stamp on it, because you have the peoples' signatures there saying that they agreed to be married to one another till death do they part. It is a contract; it is a covenant; it is an agreement.

That is what a covenant with God is. It is a contractual agreement which defines the goal, the purpose, and in this case, salvation, redemption, and Eternal Sonship in the kingdom of God. We are all working toward that goal. The covenant also defines the responsibilities and the obligations of the parties (plural). Not just one side, but both sides. Each side must perform its covenanted duties for the project to be a success. Both sides.

What this world's Christianity has done is minimize or ignore the Christian's side of this bargain. They minimize it to the point of, "*all you have to do is believe.*" And, then they say that Jesus has fulfilled all the other obligations for us.

No, He has not! He has fulfilled the obligations that He has been required to fulfill. Being God, and having the great character of outgoing concern that He has, He goes above and beyond! However, this does not negate our responsibilities under the covenant.

There are things that we must do. To say that Christians do not have any obligations under the covenant, and that Jesus did it all for us, is just not true. It is not so. You cannot find that concept in the Bible.

Now, another part of true Christianity that the Christianity of this world has rejected is the keeping of God's Feast Days. If they had kept the feast of the Days of Unleavened Bread, which we are doing now, and begin to understand its meaning, they might (if God was merciful to them) soon realize one of their primary obligations under the New Covenant. That is, to overcome sin, and to live righteously in Christ—like Christ.

This is the next theme of I Corinthians, which I am giving today because it fits so nicely. Using the words of Paul, this theme is, "Fleeing from Sin."

Turn back to Exodus 12. We were here last week, but it is good to do it again. It is some of the same scriptures as last week, however there is a bit of different emphasis this time.

Exodus 12:15-17 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them, but *that* which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe *the Feast of Unleavened Bread* [and notice the reason], for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

Exodus 13:3-10 And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this *place*. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day [today] *there shall be* a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying [and listen to this], '*This is done* because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its

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season from year to year.

Now, last week, last Tuesday, I made a point of emphasizing the removing of leaven, and the eating of unleavened bread on each of these seven days.

Today, I am emphasizing the leaving from Egypt. There were two things that they had to do. First thing was to get the leaven out, eating unleavened bread. And the second was to "get out of town"—get out of Egypt. On this last day of unleavened bread, they had to get out of Egypt. They had to go!

Notice, if you go back for a moment to Exodus 12:17, it says, "On this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt." We have to remember that He gave these instructions before they left. These are part of the instructions for choosing out the lamb, eating the lamb, putting the blood on the doorposts, and instructions regarding the First Day of Unleavened Bread, too.

When you get to chapter 13, about verse 3, He said, "By strength of hand the Lord brought you out...." In addition, when he talks about, "When you go into the land, your son will ask you," and then it says in verse 9, "For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out."

The verb tenses change. This shows us that first, there is the promise in chapter 12 of redemption and freedom, while in chapter 13, which is after they have left, and we understand the fulfillment has occurred. The Might of God successfully, brought them brought out of Egypt. The promise (and the fulfillment) is here. By verse 9, He is actually promising them to bring them into the Land. They will be able to look back and say, "The LORD has brought us out!"

Now remember what I said that the overall theme of I Corinthians is. God is faithful, chapter 1, and verse 9. God is faithful. He said that He would bring them out; He brought them out; and in time, they were able to see that, yes, indeed, He has brought them out with a strong arm.

So, we saw in verse 5 that He promised to bring them into the Promised Land. This is an assurance of His continuing presence and work on their behalf, and of His strength to fulfill His promises completely, to protect them from the dangers of the wilderness, to guard them against the enemies who would come against them.

In essence, He is promising to continue to be faithful. He never stops being faithful. We

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can always count on Him to fulfill His promises—His part of the covenant. He never fails. He is always "Johnny on the Spot." (God on the Spot!)

He never leaves us, nor forsakes us. He promises that! When His word goes out from His mouth, it comes back to Him accomplished. We can have faith, trust and great confidence with boldness knowing that that is true. He always does His part. What does that mean?

It means that if there is failure anywhere along the line, God is not responsible. It means that there is something wrong that we have done, not with what He did.

Now, in both of these promises, as we saw in Ex. 12:17, and 13:3, and 13:5, that God said He would bring them out, and He would bring them to the Promised Land—the land of Canaan.

If this was all that we had to go on, if these were the only parts of scripture that we could turn to, we might assume that He picked the children of Israel up in His hands, and carried them away, and dropped them down. Or, He had this huge eagle prepared, and they all clamored onto the eagle's back, and they flew to Canaan. Or, there was this huge heavenly chariot parked outside Pharaoh's palace in Rameses, and all the Israelites got on, and they flew like Elijah into the place prepared for them. Or, maybe like the Arabic legends, it was a flying carpet large enough to hold two and a half million people, plus their livestock.

Now all this was silly, was it not?

This is not what happened. Even though God said He would bring them out, and He would bring them to Canaan, He did not do the work for them. He would put forth His strength and power to make it possible for them to go out, and for them to come back in. But, each of the promises required the Israelites **to walk**. It was the old "shoe-leather express" to Canaan. They had to use their own efforts to go out, and to be brought into Canaan. They had to walk out of Egypt, and they had to walk every step of the way through the wilderness to enter the Promised Land.

This is where we can come to an understanding of just what the proportions are between what God does, and what we do.

It was by a great, outstretched arm that God brought them out of Egypt. He changed the Pharaoh's mind. He gave them ten plagues. He killed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. He did a great deal of the work! He was the One who appeared in the cloud, and they

followed it. He was in the pillar of fire behind them to keep the Egyptians away by night there at the Red Sea.

We could go on and on about all the things that God did. He supplied their water, their food; and He also kept their shoe leather, and their clothes from wearing out. He did this, and He did that—fought their battles for them—gave them meat when they craved it.

And what did Israel do? They walked. They moved forward. When the cloud rose up, and started moving off, they rose up, broke camp, and walked after it. They followed it wherever it went. They had to move! If they did not move, they would not get there.

The Days of Unleavened Bread, then, not only remind us that we are to put out sin, and remain unleavened, they also teach that to reach the Kingdom of God, we have to walk. We have got to use that energy from the unleavened bread. We take it into our self, if we do not walk, it will just go to fat. However, if we walk, and we exercise this life, we make progress toward the Kingdom of God.

The Christian walk is the same thing. We must move forward cooperatively with God. He supplies a great deal of the energy, but we still have to get off our bottoms and walk. I am going to ratchet up the walking now.

I Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for an imperishable crown*. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Paul obviously is using metaphors from sports, here. You have to remember that he was speaking to Corinthians. And, Corinthians were the hosts of the Isthmian Games every two years. Remember, I told you that they had a stadium just north of the city where they honored Poseidon. The people of Corinth, having athletes coming in there for these games every two years, were very knowledgeable about these particular sports which took place at these games—Olympic type games such as boxing, wrestling, javelin throwing, and non-Olympic contests such as singing. And the people attended these games and knew what was going on. They understood what it would take for an athlete to win one of these events.

Whether Paul was talking about running a race, or he was talking about boxing, it was something they could easily grasp. The Corinthians were very familiar with them. Paul could make his point. Overall, he was emphasizing that a Christian must be disciplined. That is what he gets to in verse 27. A Christian, just like an athlete, has to discipline himself. He has to train. It is not just something where we can go out there all flabby and win. A certain amount of work must be done in order to win the prize. It is very clear. I do not see how these theologians can miss something like this.

Paul is talking about not just going out and participating, but his thrust is that each one has to go out to win. Not just to say, "I started," but to say, "I have finished and beat the rest of the crowd." He is talking about going through the rigorous training to make sure that one is in top shape to win the prize. It is practice, practice, practice to achieve the prize. It is denying the self. It is denying whatever would break training.

This immediately shoots down the Protestant idea of eternal security. Yes, we can lose! When there is a race, there is a winner, and there are losers.

This also shoots down free grace, because self-discipline is arduous. There is nothing easy about training for an Olympic sport, whether running, or boxing (or bobsledding)—pick your race—pick your sport. It does not matter. Those men and women who participate in those games have to be the best—their best. Those who win are, indeed, the very best. That is what Paul is trying to describe. A Christian has to have the mindset to go out and work so hard to win the prize that he will be the very best Christian ever, and win prize. There are no half-measures here.

Running a race is different from a boxing match. They are two very different disciplines.

The sport of running emphasizes speed over distance. There are some strategies one could use, some techniques one can learn, but basically when you get down to it, running is about speed over distance. It may be a short distance like a dash or sprint; or it could be a long distance race like a marathon. It is still a race. And it is still speed over distance. You might need a burst of speed, or you might need stamina for the long haul. Still, it is the first one to reach the finish line, the one with the most speed over that distance who will win the prize. Speed over distance.

Now, the most common race that the Corinthians were aware of was called the stadion—from which our word "stadium" comes from. The stadion was about 200 yards in distance. It was about 192 meters in these Isthmian Games. It was a sprint. That is the race that Paul was drawing the Corinthians to.

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They actually ran at least two of these stadions in these isthmian games. One was a part of the pentathlon the other was the stand-alone race.

The Corinthians would have easily understood Paul's use of the race as a teaching tool.

And we know that the apostle Paul thought that Jesus Christ was coming very soon. He believed that Jesus was going to return at any time. Therefore, he considered the race that needed to be run by these Christians to be a sprint. "Get to the finish line as fast as you can." I know you cannot speed up time, however the idea was that we had to train quickly to get into shape fast because the distance (the time) was short.

We needed to make our "games" of Christian living quickly, because Christ was about to appear. If we are going to fulfill our Christian goal, to be in the image of Jesus Christ, we would need to build up that image quickly.

Later in Hebrews 12, Paul writes about a longer race, more like a marathon. Perhaps by this time, his views had changed a bit, and he thought that Christ would come a bit later, maybe not in his own lifetime.

Either way we would like to look at it, it is still speed over distance. It means that we have to gage how fast we have to go. We have to see the signs of the times. We must always be in training, putting on the image of Jesus Christ. That is really where the race is—putting on the character of God.

Sometimes both are required of us—the short distance spurt, and the long distance marathon. We have to know when. Nevertheless, we all run a race, and we need to run to win as if there were only one prize.

Now, this does not mean that there is competition among us, but there is only one prize for you, and one prize for me. We have to make sure that we run so we get the prize Jesus will give us as we cross the finish line individually.

Now, some folks are older, and therefore their race, now, is going to be like a sprint. Some people are younger, and their race might be more like a marathon. We do not know. You could die tomorrow. It is a fact of life. Will you have won? That is why Paul is saying that we always have to be in training. We have got to get as far along the course as we can. We do not know the time that we have.

So, what about the other metaphor—boxing. We do not have very many pugilists among us. It is not something that we enjoy. Some of you might like to watch boxing, but it is an

entirely different discipline than running.

Boxing combines strength with strategy, coordination, and endurance. Sure, you could have a Mike Tyson, or some such person, who beats everybody by sheer brute strength. That is one way to do it. But really the best boxers are smart and intelligent. They map out a match. They know just how much energy they can put out over twelve or so rounds they have to go. They are thinking. They cannot give up all their energy in the first round or two. What if it goes longer than that? The other guy may be conserving his energy, and is going to wear you out.

The best boxers are smart, deliberate, resourceful, and very efficient. They are not out to kill their opponent. They are out to win the match, usually by point. Boxing is not a blood sport anymore, either professional or Olympic. It is one of winning a prize. That is why they are called "prize-fights." They win a belt, and become the champion. They win money. They are not out to kill their opponent; they are out to win the prize.

What do they do? What is their mental state going in? They want to be the last man standing. They want to place the punches in the best places. They want to score the most points. Winning by decision is the same as winning by knockout. It is the same thing. There might be a bit more glory in a knockout, but a win is a win.

The smart boxers protect themselves throughout the match. They throw only meaningful punches. They try not to miss. Missing takes them out of balance. It puts them into a bad position and it wastes energy. They conserve their energy so they can have it to use in the later rounds. They will have a decided advantage if they accomplish this. They can then take charge and win the match.

Now, since we are fighting stronger spiritual forces, our boxing match is not a death match. Just like boxing is not a death sport. When we go out to do spiritual boxing, we have to emphasize self-control, and endurance.

We are not going to knock Satan out! We are not going to be able to knock out the world! We cannot even knock out our own human nature. We have to outlast it, standing with our integrity!

So that means, when we are fighting the Christian fight, we have to make sure we protect ourselves, do not throw foolish punches, do not get off balance, and that we conserve our energy for the later rounds. We want to be the last one standing—and to stand!

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This brings us back to self-discipline. If we are going to struggle, or as the word is here, compete, or agonize (verse 25) for the prize, then we must be disciplined. We must exercise self-control.

In the next verse, he says that the goal is not uncertain, haphazard or without purpose. We are not just running for the sake of running. We are not just fighting for the sake of fighting. We have a goal, and it has been very clearly delineated for us.

So when he says, "I run," he has that goal firmly fixed in his mind, and he is disciplined to keep his eyes on that goal—to keep running for all he is worth. And when he also says, "I fight, but not as one who beats the air," it might be shadow-boxing, but I believe that the real meaning is "I fight, but not as one who misses his mark, or aim."

If we are actually going to "throw a punch," make sure it lands on target. Otherwise, we are not fighting properly. We are fighting a phantom; we are throwing punches at phantoms. I think what he means, here, is that when we go out to kill something bad thing in our life—some sin in our life—we had better make sure we follow through and kill it.

We cannot throw a punch just haphazardly and hope that it hits. We had better have that as our target and we had better get rid of it. Strike it down! There is not enough time; there is not enough spiritual energy to be foolishly trying to do all these things in a haphazard manner.

Paul is saying to be direct, be forceful; hit your targets—which means that you have to have a strategy, you have to be thinking, you have to be really analyzing what needs to be struck down.

Then he says, "I discipline my body." This is really an interesting word picture. The word "discipline" is only used one other time. It is used in the parable of the unfortunate widow, where the unjust judge basically says that this lady browbeats him. "I'd better give a decision in her favor," because, "she wearies me." This is how it is translated.

Well, the word picture, here, is of giving a black eye. The unjust judge is saying, "This woman bothers me so much, it is as if she is bruising me." The actual translation is "hitting me under the eyes."

Paul is saying here that we have to be willing to give ourselves a black eye, or we have to beat ourselves black and blue to discipline ourselves.

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And it gets worse! The next thing he says is to bring it into subjection. That is another word picture, which means "reduced to slavery." We have to make our body [human nature] come to the point to where it is going to follow every order we give it.

We have to beat ourselves black and blue. In addition, we have to reduce ourselves to slavery. Do you see how he is exaggerating so much to give us the idea of just how tough we need to be on ourselves?

And we all fail. However, this gives us a goal and something to reach for. Paul's instruction, then, is that like an athlete, a Christian must deny himself anything that will break his training. This means we have to deny our carnal flesh, and our carnal mind. It is hard to do—very hard to do.

Okay, now that Paul has been thinking about running, boxing, self-discipline, and how hard we have to be on our selves, he says in verse 27, he did not want to become disqualified. That sparked a thought in Paul. This is the first thing he writes after he says he did not want to become disqualified.

I Corinthians 10:1-6, 11 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Paul thought of self-discipline, and Paul thought of becoming disqualified. Then immediately he thought of the Israelites in the wilderness. It was the first thing he thought of. He thinks of them on their wilderness trek. He specifically thinks of them as being on the shores of the Red Sea, and having gone through the Red Sea, and then being given food and drink in the wilderness.

The timeframe is just right. He was thinking about these things because the Days of Unleavened Bread were coming up. He had to give these people a message, and it fits so well. The wilderness trek of the Israelites is, as all say, a type of the Christian church in its walk toward the Kingdom of God. What Paul gives us here is a negative example. These people did not make it. They failed so miserably that their bodies, condemned to

death through sin, lay strewn in heaps all across the wilderness.

That is the idea in verse 5, where their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. It is like a Basil Wolverton illustration from *The Bible Story*. They used to scare people because they were so gruesome. But, they were very realistic of the agonies that some of these people faced, and the death that they faced because of their unfaithfulness to God. It is really a ghastly and sobering witness that Paul draws from the Old Testament.

I want you to notice that he called the Israelites, "Our fathers." But, whom was he writing to? Mainly a Gentile (Corinthian) church. Yet, he said that these were our spiritual, Christian forbearers. I think the thought made him think that he had better prove this. He gives them five basic similarities of the Israelites to the Christians. He gives those five things, which are: (1) they were under the cloud, (2) they passed through the sea, (3) they were "baptized," (4) they ate the same spiritual food, (5) they drank the same spiritual drink.

He goes on to say that they drank of that Rock, which was Christ [Deuteronomy 32:4]. What Paul is saying is that they, in type, did all the same things we do as Christians. They were in God's presence and protected by the cloud. They experience a kind of baptism by going through the sea. God Himself supplied them with food and drink. They worshiped the same Rock, Jesus Christ. The Israelites did not know at the time that it was Christ, but it was Christ—the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ.

The correlation is precise. Therefore, they are not only fitting examples to learn from, but also God deliberately made them to be so, as our example. That is why I went to verses 6 and 11. This happened to them as examples. They were written. God made sure it was put in a book for us to learn from.

We have this one on one correlation with the walk of the Israelites through the wilderness with the Christian walk.

Notice where Paul goes from here. He provides five specific sins we have to reject to avoid the Israelites fate.

I Corinthians 10:6-10 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed

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by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

There are five specific sins here, which we need to avoid so that we will finish the race, and be able to receive the crown of victory. We have to avoid these five specific sins so that we avoid failing the race and dying spiritually before attaining the goal.

The five sins are these, (1) lust or covetousness, (2) idolatry with its attendant sins, (3) sexual immorality, (4) tempting or testing Christ, (5) murmuring or complaining.

I think Paul's reasons for giving these specific five sins are that he thought these five to be the pitfalls of church members in his day—the five points that most troubled the church. Maybe most troubled the church was in Corinth. I believe that from his experiences, he was drawing a wider net—that these were facing the whole church.

I also think these are the big five that we need to guard ourselves against.

Lust—the Israelites lusted after meat. That is the one in Numbers 11. The general idea of lust is not thinking of lusting after meat, specifically for us, although it did come into play. There were people buying meat from various temples and shambles, which had been offered before idols. I do not think that this is specifically what he was talking about. He is talking about any kind of lust or covetousness after something they thought God was denying them.

"God, you brought us out into this wilderness, and you gave us this manna. We have not had any flesh between our teeth for months or years. We need something to eat. We need variety from this, this manna, or what ever you call it."

They thought God was denying them the good things in life. "Oh, remember the onions, and leeks back in Egypt! Were they not good? I can just taste them now!" God let them have their desire. And did He! They gorged on it, and they died.

The lesson for us is to be content with what God supplies. What God denies us, we either cannot handle, yet; or it is just plain not good for us. If we can handle it, He will give it. However, there are things that we lust after that we are not ready to handle.

Now, of course, we could be greedy for money. We could lust after a position. We could lust after a person. We could lust after a better job. We could lust after food. We could lust after clothing. We could lust after drink. We could lust after a nice car. You name it. I

know of people who lust after a nice lawn tractor!

It is going to be different for each person. And, God denies us those things, purposefully, because we either cannot handle it yet, or it is just plain not good for us.

We need to understand and remember that God is faithful. He gives us what we need for His focus is on the Kingdom of God, not on whether we have what we want, not whether we get the toys that we might desire to play with.

So, he says to be careful about lust, because that can take you off and get your mind focused on something that is not good.

The second thing is idolatry. The idolatry in Paul's mind is the incident of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). Moses went up on the Mount, said he would be back. He did not come back right away, so they roped in Aaron, and he made them an idol—a golden calf fashioned after the gods of Egypt.

Now, Paul's warning, I believe, is against trying to worship the True God in the same way the world worships its gods. Remember, in this incident it was said that they, "made a Feast unto the Lord." And so, what they did was take this image, worshipped it, saying that they were worshipping God through it.

What they did was to completely change God's nature. This was something totally against what He had commanded them.

Now for us, we have come out of the world, not just out of one society—Egypt. We do come out of particular societies, and each society we come out of has its own ways of worshipping, whether it is of the true god (they think), or whether of some idol. The Corinthians were no different. They had come out of a society whose worship practices were very different from what God commands. And, human beings have a tendency to want to put together things from outside of God's way, and blend them with God's revealed way—it is called syncretism. They wanted to combine things that they were familiar with, with the way that God's way is. We have to admit, most folks are not familiar with God's way either—in fact, they think it is kind of weird. I mean, "you do not eat bread for seven days? You are weird. Why would you do that? You do not eat lobster? Is not that God's gift to restaurants or something?"

No we do not, because God says, "Do not do that." [Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14]

However, people like to mix things together. And so, the Corinthians, I am sure, had this

tendency to want to bring some of their former practices which they had enjoyed so much into the true church, and worship God through them.

And Paul says, "No, no, no! You do exactly as God says," because if you go back to Exodus 32, what you find is that they mixed the practices of Egypt with what God had commanded them through Moses. They ended up eating, drinking, and rising up to play. That is why I said it is idolatry with its attendant sins. These things just do not stop with bowing down in front of some golden image. There were other things being added to it. They had a feast. They ate and they drank in fellowship with this particular idol, or god, as well as each other. Then, they got stark naked and rose up to play—immediately! Right away, they started combining through this syncretism sex with the worship of God.

There is nothing like that whatsoever in God's commands! As soon as they stooped to idolatry, they began bringing in other practices. They changed the religion of God, and the nature of God Himself, the goal, and everything else.

We have this same tendency today. We have come out of a society that worships God in a particular way. Moreover, the warning that Paul gives is, "do not try to mix what God says about worshipping Him with the worship methods of this world because it is not going to stop there. It is going to end up bringing in something else also—more sin. And it will change the perception of God in the worshippers." Therefore, you must be careful about this. You cannot syncretize God's way with the world's way.

The next thing he thinks of is, "do not commit sexual immorality." His thoughts go to the time when Balaam decided that the best way to get at Israel, rather than confronting them, or cursing them, was to bring in Midianite women to undermine them. This worked beautifully for Balaam and Balak. Using sex felled the Israelites better than armies.

Now, the Corinthian church, in chapter 5, had been rocked by problems with sex. Obviously, their whole society was very sensual, and they had to fend off the temptations of it constantly. And Satan uses the same old trick still. Men are especially prone to being totally knocked off their track with a pretty smile, flip of the skirt, or whatever. Men just seem to have a one-track mind, and are easily distracted. You men understand best of all.

Now, I want you to notice the death toll. Paul quotes Moses specifically. He could have said, "Nor let us commit sexual immorality as some of them did." But, he did not stop there. He went on, "They committed sexual immorality," Do you know what the result was? Twenty-three thousand people died in one day. How is that for bringing forth fruit? He wanted to impress upon them just how dangerous illicit sex is.

Now God caused most of those 23,000 deaths through a plague. And He also sent various ones through the camp, and they killed another 1,000. So, 24,000 people died in this one incident, because God was not pleased whatsoever. They were just about to come into the land! Oh well.

The next thing mentioned, verse 9, is testing or tempting God. Now, Israel did this frequently. What this means, if you do not understand, is that they tried to force God to act in their behalf, or demanded that He perform at their whim. It was often linked up with their murmuring. "Why have you not done this for us?" Or, "Look. We are out here, and we need you to do this for us, God." God does not like to be abused or manipulated.

He does not need to prove Himself to us. Look at all He did for the Israelites in Egypt in bringing them out. But, at every turn they are saying, "God, are you still there? Why have you not done this for us? We need this. Can you not bring water out of a rock?"

And they did this, and that, and the other thing. They kept tempting Him to come down and beat them to smithereens. They made Him angry. They kept tempting Him; testing His good nature.

Do we do this? How often do we make demands of God, that we have no right to even ask? We expect Him to do something for us, and then we get angry, or miffed, or whatever, when He does not perform what we expect Him to. He does not owe us anything!

The covenant we signed gives us over completely—lock, stock, and barrel—to Him. If it were not for His good nature, He would not even have to supply us with food and drink. He would not even have to supply us with air to breathe. We are His. And we should be happy with what we have been given, and not keep demanding that He act for us when He has other ideas, when He has other plans. And we are trying to tell Him what to do?

That is just not the way that it works. When there is a Superior, and a subordinate, it is the Superior letting His will be known to the subordinate, and the subordinate says, "Yes, Lord." We can even concur to this attitude from the standpoint of thinking that God is not being fair. God is being fair. You could have no better Master.

And so, any idea that He is treating us wrongly, or unkindly, or unfaithfully, is simply foolishness. He has us right where He wants us.

The next one is murmuring. Israel complained from one end of the wilderness to the

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other. It is there, plain for us to see. Do we moan and gripe about the way that life has turned out for us? Do we say, maybe to ourselves if not out loud, "God, I would have been better off if you had not led me to this sorry state!"

This comes out mostly through things like grumbling, faultfinding, and criticizing by saying something like, "I can do this better. God has not supplied the leadership," and other such things.

In the fifteen years of the Church of the Great God, we have heard it all. And, it is par for the course. It is something we need to work on. And, it can get people's minds and focus skewed off into some trivial nothingness, and lead them right out of the church.

Now, I did want you to notice that each of Paul's examples ended in things like destruction and death. He did that purposefully. He wanted to show that these sins were not inconsequential.

Though, it is not said in verse 6, "But when they lusted after the meat, many of them died," with the meat still between their teeth.

In verse 7, and the Golden Calf, how many of them died when God sent the Levites among the people, and said, "Kill your brother, every one who did this."

Twenty-three thousand died when they committed sexual immorality with the Midianite women.

When they tempted Christ, many were destroyed by serpents. And it says that when they murmured, "The were destroyed by the Destroyer."

All of them ended in destruction and death. Sin caused hundreds of thousands of Israelite deaths in the wilderness.

However, for us as Christians, it is far worse, because that death will not be just some physical death, but it can be the second, final death. We have been called and have tasted God's grace of the good things to come, and we can fall away and die spiritually.

That is why Paul is so urgent with them to get their lives turned around, and practice some self discipline, because, these are not small things.

I Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages

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have come.

He is saying that time is running out.

I Corinthians 10:12-15, 21-22 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say...You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

Paul wrote these examples for our admonition. That word combines instruction with warning. He is giving them a very stern warning, because the stakes for us are far higher and more critical than these Israelites in the wilderness.

One of the things Paul did not mention as he was going through the similarities was the fact that the Israelites did not have God's Holy Spirit. But we do! That is what sets us apart. That means this is our day of salvation. It was not their day of salvation. This is ours. This is for all the marbles.

So, we have to be very serious about it. We should never think like in verse 12 that you are too secure, or too strong to be felled by any of these temptations. We are all always going to be facing temptations. As we get stronger, the temptations become harder to resist. But never beyond what we can handle, he is quick to say.

God is faithful, Paul said. This is one of the main themes of I Corinthians. God is faithful. He is true to His Word. He will be there to supply help in the time of need. We can overcome these hard temptations. Or, he will make a way of escape, so we can come at it from a different angle and try again later.

God is not unjust. God is not going to throw something really hard at us the first day out of the gate. It might seem hard, because we are new, but He has it gauged to our abilities. And He does that throughout our entire race to the Kingdom of God.

So, Paul says right in the middle of this section, "Flee from Idolatry." Now, he had

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mentioned idolatry as one of these big five. It was the second in the list, but here he singles it out as the primary sin.

Idolatry is either worshipping someone or something other than the True God; or trying to worship the True God in a wrong way. Both of them are considered idolatry. Both forms will harm and destroy a person's relationship with God because they warp his perception of God's true nature, and they put him in rebellion against Him.

Now Satan is eager for us to commit idolatry because this sin is a double whammy. It causes two major problems. It simultaneously gets us in trouble with God, while messing with our idea with what God is like. It pushes us away from God, so Paul says (verse 21), "You cannot mix God's way with any other way. It just does not work."

But, notice the verb that Paul uses—Flee! Have you ever known anyone to flee danger slowly? What do they do? They do it quickly. Does a person flee danger by lingering? Or does he skedaddle? Does he sit there with his hand on his chin pondering the situation? Or does he run for the hills? Usually, a person reacts, instead of a considered response.

The race we run is either a sprint or marathon. But in either case, it is running. Fleeing is running. And in the presence of sin, especially idolatry, our first reaction should be to run for cover, to get out, to divorce ourselves as quickly as possible from it—fleeing! Do not stick around long enough to get involved, because it will reach out and grab you if you are anywhere close.

Do we really want to tempt God, as Paul ends this section, by making Him jealous? He loves us. And any kind of love can turn into a bit of jealousy if the other person is showing affection for anybody else. God has feelings for us. We do not want Him to react with any kind of jealousy, because His jealousy burns hot. Paul says in the book of Hebrews that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. That is quite a warning.

Then Paul says (back to I Corinthians), "Do we think we could withstand His wrath? Are we stronger than He? Could we stand up to God?" I do not think so.

You are caught between the Holiness of God on the one hand, and the defiling nature of sin. What is the best thing to do? Run to God. Flee the idolatry. Run to Him.

Some of Paul's final words to Timothy are in this particular epistle. He had just finished talking about various sins that were prevalent wherever Timothy was at the time. Things

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like pride and envy, strife and arguing, lust and greed. Then he says,

I Timothy 6:11-14 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith [boxing again!], lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing...

So Paul admonishes Timothy and us to flee all of these things—to run, to get away from them, to put them in our dust. We should have nothing to do with them.

However, the Christian life is not just fleeing. That would be very warped if all we did was flee from sin. He gives us a positive activity to do while we are fleeing. That is to pursue righteousness, or as it says, "follow after righteousness and Godliness," and all those other virtues of God that he mentions there.

He tells them to seize the crown of victory. You still have to fight, yes. We still have to run, yes. The goal is there, and we have to go out there and seize it by winning the race, or by outlasting the enemy. We have to run from sin, but we need to run toward righteousness. And of course, we must endure to the end.

God is faithful, and He will, as it said here, give us entrance into the Kingdom of God.