

An Admonition from the Example of the Old Testament Church

Including Covenant Theology and Water Baptism

1 Corinthians 10:1-11

Transcript of sermon preached by **Pastor David Silversides** on **Sunday, October 15, 1995**
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We turn in the word of God to 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, and these first 11 verses of the chapter.

In verse 11 we read, "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."

And so our theme this morning is "An Admonition from the example of the Old Testament Church." An admonition or warning to the Church of God in these days.

We must remember that the last word of chapter 9 is the word "castaway" (or "disqualified"). And we know that the true believer is safe. The true believer is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The true believer is safe because God keeps His people. And the way that God keeps His people is by keeping them persevering in the faith and in the pursuit of holiness and godliness. He does not preserve them in spite of what they do; He preserves them by causing them to persevere in the faith.

But the Church on earth is to be exhorted to perseverance, for two very good reasons:

(1) First, exhortation to perseverance is one of God's means whereby His true people are enabled to persevere.

(2) Second, the Church on earth is mixed. The church in its outward form on earth is subject to mixture. That is true even where the strictest discipline is applied. The parables teach us as much. The parable of the ten virgins. All ten of them were supposed to be waiting for the coming of the Lord. That's why they were out with their lamps and so on. But only five of them were actually prepared.

The parable of the wedding feast and the man without the wedding garment. He remained present at the wedding feast until the king came.

In the parable of the sower, the stony ground hearers, who have no real depth, look pretty convincing at first, above ground as it were, to the eyes of man. But their interest is temporary.

So the Scriptures teach that the Church on earth is mixed.

Sometimes those who are supposed to be Christians but are not, it becomes evident in this world. Others, not until another world. But the Church on earth is mixed.

So we have the examples of Judas [Iscaiot], of Ananias and Sapphira, of Simon the magician in Acts 8, who at least for a time looked like the genuine article but were not.

The apostle John in 1 John says “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19).

So only in time did their true condition become apparent. As they turned away to false doctrine, it became apparent only then what was true all along, that their hearts had never received the love of the truth.

One thing that church members are inclined to lean upon are their outward privileges in the church of God. And that is what the apostle is addressing here. That there was no room for complacency merely because these Corinthians were part of the outward form of the Church of God on earth.

You see, the apostle Paul is about to warn against idolatry. He has already shown that eating the food on sale in the marketplace that had previously been dedicated to idols before it got there is not sinful. Provided that it can be done without harming other weaker believers, it is not sinful to eat. He’s going to show that to actually participate in idolatrous feasts in the idols’ temple is wrong, it is sinful, it is dangerous, it is something to be alarmed about, to be shunned, to be turned from. And that shunning of idolatry, of real idolatry, is part of that perseverance in the faith, in holiness, which the true believer must practice. And which the true believer will practice. And which many in Israel of old did not practice.

And so he looks back to Israel’s history. To Israel’s history given in the Scripture for the benefit of the church of God in the ends of the world. In verse 11, he says “it was written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Or, “the ends of the ages.” That phrase is similar to “the last days” or the “last times.” The apostle is saying that the New Testament church is in the last times, the ends of the ages. This simply confirms what we have seen many times before: that in the Scriptural terminology, the phrase the “last days,” “the last time,” “the end of the age,” applies to the whole period between the first and the second coming of Christ. So that when Christ came in the flesh, died, and rose again, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, the last days had begun.

So the Corinthian church in the first century was living in the ends of the age, and so are we. Because since that coming of Christ, there is no event of comparable significance until Christ returns in glory.

And so he is saying that this Old Testament history is there in the Scriptures for our learning. We are to be warned. We are to learn. And we are fools if we do not.

Now concerning these Israelites, let us notice three things. We look at these in turn:

- (1) What they had.
- (2) What happened to them.
- (3) Why it happened.

So, first of all, what the Israelites had. And for this we look at the first 4 verses.

We could say that they had a place in the church of God on earth. Verse 1: “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.”

Our fathers. He is writing to the Corinthian church. Most of them were Gentiles. Most of them had been pagans and idolaters. But he refers to the Israelites of old as “our fathers.” Because the apostle saw the church in the New Testament, whether at Corinth or Philippi or Ephesus or wherever, he saw the church of Christ in the New Testament as the continuation of the Church of God in the Old Testament, that is, Israel. So Israel was the Church of God in the Old Testament. And the Church of Christ, wherever it is found, is the continuation of that in the New Testament. And as with Israel of old, so with the Church now, not everyone within it is the genuine article. Not everyone within the Church is a genuine born-again believer, trusting in the Redeemer.

But in terms of the outward form of the Church, Israel was the Church, and the Christian Church in the New Testament is the continuation of that. That’s why in Romans, chapter 11, Israel and the New Testament church are described as one olive tree, beginning in the Old Testament and continuing on into the New. And the Bible teaches us that Israel was the Church of God. The Bible calls Israel the Church of God. Numbers 31:16, for example, refers to the Israel as the “congregation” or “church” of the Lord. In Acts 7:38, Stephen refers to Israel in the wilderness as the “church” in the wilderness. Hebrews 2:12, quoting Psalm 22, says “in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” David, in the midst of Israel, the congregation of the Lord, was the Lord’s anointed in the midst of the church of his day, pointing forward to Christ, who is in the midst of the Church in all ages.

So these Israelites were within the Church of God on earth.

We may also say that these Israelites had a remarkable baptism.

Verses 1-2: “how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”

These Israelites are said to have been under the cloud. Not underneath it, but under its guidance. That is the sense of the phrase. So in Exodus 13:21: “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.” So they were all under the direction of cloud.

They all “passed through the sea,” we are told in verse 1. At the exodus, when they were brought out of Egypt, and when Moses held out his rod and the sea was driven apart and the people passed over as on dry land.

And then we are told that “they were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” Well, what does this mean? . . . This baptism was not an immersion. We’ve seen elsewhere that the word *baptize* does not mean “to dip” or “to immerse.” The baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts, chapter 2, consisted of the Spirit being “poured out” on the disciples. And later on that same baptism of the Spirit is described as the Spirit “falling upon” or “coming upon” the people of God. The baptism of fire in Acts 2... we read of the tongues of fire “sitting upon” the disciples. In

Hebrews 9:10, where it speaks of diverse washings or “baptisms” as the word is [in the original Greek], the context indicates that these “baptisms” were those sprinklings of blood upon the book and upon the altar [and upon all the people] and so on in the Old Testament ceremony. So that a baptism can be a pouring upon, a falling upon, a coming upon, or a sprinkling upon.

Now at the Red Sea, the only people who were immersed were the Egyptians. And so it has been correctly said that the Egyptians were immersed, but not baptized. Whereas the Israelites were baptized but not immersed. They went through on dry land.

The main idea of baptism, or the term baptism, is “to be wrought [acted] upon with lasting effect.” And to be baptized into someone is “to be wrought [acted] upon resulting in a lasting union, to be acted upon with the effect of a lasting union.

And so water baptism, while it does not save, it doesn’t regenerate, it doesn’t unite to Christ, water baptism pictures and symbolizes the work of the sovereign Spirit of God working in and bringing a sinner into lasting union with Jesus Christ.

Some have the sign but not the reality; others have the reality but perhaps not the sign. But the sign is a picture of that reality of the Spirit of God working in a sinner, bringing him into lasting, irreversible union with Jesus Christ.

And the cloud and the water in the exodus had the effect of binding the Israelites to Moses.

Now then, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the covenant of God with sinners (the covenant of grace). That is always the case. No one was ever saved from their sins other than by Jesus Christ, the Mediator. But in the picture of the Old Testament ceremonial, a picture involving priesthood and sacrifices, all that administration appointed by God which pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ who was going to come and to teach the people then about the coming Redeemer. All in that overall administration and picture Moses was the typical mediator. Moses, along with Aaron and his sons, the priests established as the priesthood of God through Moses. But first of all Moses himself would be typical mediator of that ceremonial administration. All those ceremonies pointed to Christ. And Moses was the mediator within that administration. And he, and Aaron and his sons, all pointed to the real, the true Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the effect of the cloud and the water was to separate Israel off and to close them up to Moses as their prophet, their leader, and their teacher whom they were to follow, even as he followed the LORD. And so the pillar of fire or the pillar of cloud and the way that it led them constantly made known to the people that Moses was the man of God to whom they should take heed. And when they passed through the water of the Red Sea, it was through Moses’ instrumentality that the water was opened, and it was through Moses’ instrumentality that the water was closed. And Israel was distinguished from the Egyptians and separated to the leadership of Moses as the prophet of God. So in that sense, the people through the cloud and the water (the Sea), the people were closed up to Moses as the prophet of the LORD.

We may also say that the Israelites had spiritual meat and drink.

Verses 3-4: “And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”

They had spiritual meat and drink and a spiritual Rock. Now then, it was sense was this meat, this manna in the wilderness “spiritual”? What does it mean? It was physical food for their stomachs? So why is it called “spiritual”? Some see the answer as that it had a deeper meaning that it was for the good of their souls. Well, that may be so and is so, but that is not why it is called spiritual. The word *spiritual* in the Scriptures usually means “of the Holy Spirit.” And what the Holy Spirit gives in a supernatural way is called “spiritual.”

So in Corinth there were supernatural gifts. And they are called “spiritual gifts.” So when Isaac was born, miraculously, then he is said to have been born “after [according to] the Spirit” (Galatians 4:29). “Spiritual songs” are songs given by the Holy Spirit. And so this bread is the bread that God by the Spirit miraculously gave to His people. And the same is true of the drink. That the water that they were given at the streams of Meribah, given miraculously, was given by the Spirit of God. And the spiritual Rock is Christ.

Now there was a Jewish tradition, to which Paul is obviously referring, that the rock from which the water came when Moses struck it with his staff, with his rod, at Horeb, that that rock literally followed the Israelites through the wilderness. So what Paul is saying here is that it was not that rock; the Rock that followed them was Christ. I don’t think that he is saying the tradition is true. I think he is saying that the real Rock which followed them was the Lord Jesus Christ. And that He is the source of all the blessings of the Spirit. Even those blessings of the Spirit that relate to their physical needs. It was Christ, the angel of the covenant, the messenger of Jehovah, present in the pillar of cloud and fire, who provided by the Spirit even the bread and the water that they needed, as well as those blessings which came upon the souls of some of them.

And so even their physical provisions were bestowed by Christ through the Spirit. Yes, even these physical provisions had a deeper meaning: they pointed to Christ, the bread of the life and the One who could give the living water. That Christ was with Israel. Christ was at work among Israel. Christ was providing by the Spirit for Israel. And to some of them, these Israelites had a place in the Church of God on earth. They had this magnificent baptism by cloud and water. They saw the doings of the law. They had Christ among them, providing for them food and drink as they needed it. They had all of that. And we must surely say then, it must be well for them. If these Israelites had all these things, all these privileges, all these displays of the divine presence and power, surely then the end result must be good.

And that brings us to our second thing: What happened to the Israelites?

Verse 5: “But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” They were overthrown. The word means they were scattered or overthrown in the wilderness. Despite all of these things, they perished in the wilderness. Their bodies were strewn in the wilderness.

Notice the use of the word “all.” It appears 5 times in the first 4 verses.

“**all** our fathers were under the cloud, and **all** passed through the sea. And were **all** baptized unto Moses... And did **all** eat the same spiritual meat; And did **all** drink the same spiritual drink.”

They all had these things. They all had a place in the outward Church of God. They all were directed or led by the pillar of cloud. They all passed through the water on dry land. They all had this miraculous food provided and miraculous drink. And they all had Christ working among them in the wilderness. But they did not all end up alright.

That is the point of this passage. The apostle is saying that despite the fact that they all had these things, they did not all enter into the rest of God. With many of them, God was not well pleased, and their carcasses were strewn in the wilderness under the wrath of God.

And this is telling these Corinthians, and it is telling us, that church membership and even miraculous provision and ordinances from Christ and gifts of the Spirit, which the Corinthians had in abundance—none of these things were a guarantee that they would be saved from the wrath of God.

And that brings us thirdly to what they had done. In verses 6-10, what they had done.

They had lusted after evil things. Verse 6: “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” The reference is to Numbers, chapter 11. And you will see that the apostle [Paul] refers to various points in Israel’s history when they showed their enmity to the LORD. Numbers 11:4-6: “And the mixt multitude that *was* among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul *is* dried away: *there is* nothing at all, beside this manna, *before* our eyes.” And then we read in verses 33-34 that God having given them quails to eat, “And while the flesh *was* yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted.”

They were dissatisfied with the LORD and with His provision. They said, “Oh, that we were back in Egypt. Oh, that we could get back to the melons, and the garlic, and the onions, and so on, in Egypt.” And in that desire, even though the things they were talking about were not sinful, but in that desire they showed their sinful discontent with the LORD.

And if the church members in Corinth said in their hearts, “Oh, that we could go back. Back to the good old days, when there weren’t these problems, and we could socialize in the idols’ temples and eat with our friends without difficulty there.” They were saying that they were not content with Christ.

And then the apostle in verse 7 gives an example of idolatry: “Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.”

He is referring back to Exodus 32, the golden calf, when the people went back to idolatry. They turned aside to idolatry. Oh, yes, they called the golden calf *Jehovah* in order to put a good face

on it. Just as people who worship idols today, they call them Christ, and they put a good face on it. And so they called this golden calf Jehovah, but it was idolatry still.

And “they rose up to play.” The word means “to dance.” They danced; they danced an idolatrous dance around the golden calf, after the manner of the heathen (pagans). And God judged them.

And the apostle Paul is saying to these Corinthians, “You might be a church member, but if you turn back to idols, you will be judged.”

He mentions fornication in verse 8: “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.”

The reference here is to Number 25, verses 1-3. Idolatry and fornication were often linked in Old Testament history, and they were linked in Corinth as well, in the practice of the pagans at Corinth.

Numbers 25:1-3: “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.”

In verse 9, he goes one stage further. He says, “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.”

They tempted Christ. Christ was Jehovah among them. And they tempted or tested His faithfulness to His promises by calling that faithfulness into question.

So Numbers 21:4-6: “And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.”

And what the apostle is saying is this: If the Corinthians continued after the idols of their former life, if they showed discontent with Christ, just as the Israelites longed to get back to Egypt and were discontented in the wilderness, then they could expect the same result.

He then speaks of murmuring in verse 10: “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.”

The reference is to Number 16:49, where the people having complained, we read: “Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah.”

They complained against the LORD. They complained against the Christ who was among them. They complained against His provision. They complained that He was not enough for them, and God judged.

The root cause of all of this is given in Hebrews 4:2: "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*."

So they could not enter in because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:19). The reason they were discontented, the reason they complained, the reason they wanted to go back to Egypt, the reasons they wanted to engage in the golden calf business, the reason they wanted to join with Moab in the worship of Baal of Peor: their hearts were not right. The gospel made known in the Church of old was not mixed in their hearts with faith.

What do these examples teach us?

It is quite straightforward. No amount of outward privileges can save us. No amount of outward ordinances can save us. We can have the Word of God read and preached. We can have the ordinances of Christ administered. We can have baptism and the Lord's Supper and all of these things that the Lord has appointed and still be lost!

Look at what these people had. They had a place in the church of God. They had the name of Israel. They had a miraculous, marvelous baptism. They saw the doings of the LORD. They had Christ among them, providing and making known His truth. And yet they were lost.

And what is true with them, if that is what happened with them, it will happen with us. This means it doesn't matter what outward privileges or even what heritage we have. You can be a born and bred Covenanter. You may be able to trace your ancestry back for generations among the Covenanters, and yet you could still be lost.

These were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. With all their outward ordinances appointed by God, with all the displays of His power, and yet they perished.

It has to be feared that there are many born and bred Covenanters who still end up in hell despite all their privileges.

No amount of outward privilege will make up for unbelief. If you are saying in your heart, I don't need this salvation, this conversion to Christ, this faith in Christ. I don't need to hear all this about being a sinner in need of salvation, of deserving to go to hell but needing Christ in order to go to heaven. If you are saying in your heart that you don't need all of this, then all your outward church connection and privileges will not avail. You will be lost forever. And that's why you must seek. You must seek. You must seek no matter what else you have or think you have. You must come to God through Jesus Christ as someone who knows that they are a sinner, knows that they deserve His judgment, and you must seek mercy and forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, bearing the guilt of sin in the place of His people.

And the Scripture says, "They shall find me when they shall seek for Me and search with all their hearts." Seek, seek, and you will find. And those who are in Christ, those who are in Christ, they go on in Christ. They persevere in Christ. They pursue godliness, and they go on doing it. And they overcome through faith in the Lamb. Let us then examine ourselves. Are we in Christ, or do we have only the outward things. If that is the case, then seek.

And if we are in Christ, let us learn that it is our responsibility to watch our hearts. Not just from outward idolatry. But to watch our hearts against excessive devotion even to apparently harmless things. Let us keep our hearts set upon the Lord.

The apostle Paul in Philippians 3:10-14 says, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Amen.