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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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## **The Dangers of Spiritual Privilege**

### **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

#### I. The Warning: Israel's History of Privilege and Sin

##### A. The Context:

##### 1. The Corinthian Church: Richly Blessed, Deeply Dysfunctional

- a. The Corinthian church had been lavishly blessed with the greatest spiritual teachers the world had ever seen...the Apostle Paul; also Apollos... even the Apostle Peter
- b. All of them were teaching the doctrines of the greatest teacher in history—the Lord Jesus Christ
- c. They were blessed with every spiritual gift; there was a super-abundance of gifts, and many had attained a very high level of doctrinal knowledge
- d. BUT they were also dysfunctional... divided into factions; some of them indulging in sexual immorality, even with temple prostitutes, and worst of all... VERY PROUD of themselves

Paul knew that this gifted, talented, sinning church was actually in GREAT DANGER, and he wanted to warn them lovingly about their danger, and the need for constant spiritual vigilance

##### 2. Paul's Most Recent Assertion: His Own Fear and Vigilance

- a. Paul had been lavishly blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ
- b. Three times he saw the resurrected Lord with his own eyes...
- c. He had been spared death on the Damascus Road, had been supernaturally healed from blindness, and had been given an

astounding ministry... to be THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

- d. He learned the gospel directly from God, not from any man
- e. He was caught up to heaven and heard inexpressible things
- f. He was raised from being stoned, perhaps even to death, and miraculously healed
- g. He heard doctrine directly from the Lord and wrote down thirteen epistles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... he WROTE THE BOOK OF ROMANS!!
- h. He had been empowered by the Spirit to do great signs and wonders... miracles of healing, including raising the dead
- i. He had preached boldly in city after city and had led countless people to Christ
- j. In every city he went to, he planted a church
- k. He was a leader of leaders... training and discipling the next generation of church leadership
- l. He was dearly beloved by the churches everywhere
- m. BUT he lived in fear... a healthy fear of his own sin nature

***1 Corinthians 9:27 I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.***

Paul was afraid that his own BODY... his FLESH... his SIN NATURE would drag him off the path of holiness and result in his being disqualified from the prize of a faithful servant of Christ

He knew his own weakness, and how horrible it would be – how devastating to the churches – if he fell into sin and was evicted from the ministry, after he had preached the gospel in so many places

So he “beat his body and made it his slave”

This is a fear I have as well... all preachers of the Word of God should have this level of healthy fear

Richard Baxter, *Reformed Pastor*:

**Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others... Will you preach Christ's laws, and wilfully break them? ... If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? if they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men, with them, and put them into such frights without a cause**

"Take heed to yourselves" is the same warning given to ALL CHRISTIANS...

#### B. The Great Danger: Privileges Can Lead to Complacency, Pride... and Sin

1. God gives to sinners lavish blessings of his grace
2. We sinners deserve to be condemned eternally in hell for our sins; instead, God has covered our sins by the blood of Christ; furthermore, he is amazingly patient with us and continues to forgive our sins whenever we confess them to God
3. We sinners deserve to be excluded from the presence of God forever; instead, God has reconciled us to himself and adopted us into his family
4. We sinners deserve to waste our lives in frivolous pursuits that will be swept away like dust; instead, God has richly blessed us with spiritual gifts and with a lifetime of good works to do every single day
5. BEYOND ALL THIS... God has lavished so many other blessings on us in our American context... incredible spiritual resources—seminaries teaching true doctrine, authors writing excellent books, Christian media making sermons and podcasts available, and MATERIAL BLESSINGS—ample food, clothing, shelter, myriad luxuries and pleasures and common grace blessings—beautiful scenery, stable government, good economy, peace... the blessings go on and on

6. AND in OUR CHURCH, FBC Durham, we have been so blessed with spiritually gifted men and women who surround us and use their gifts to bless us both spiritually and materially; we have excellent role models to follow, a beautiful building, a strategic location, a heritage of biblical fruitfulness and faithfulness
7. The danger is clear: these blessings can make us COMPLACENT and LAZY and BOLD IN SIN, presuming on God's patience and grace

***Luke 12:48 From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.***

8. Satan can use our blessings to lull us into carnal ease and arrogant overconfidence, and we can relax our spiritual vigilance and start playing with sins and worldliness and little by little become corrupt
9. By this devastating process, godlier and more gifted men than I have been disqualified from the ministry; by this devastating process, bigger, more fruitful, more strategic churches than ours have quickly become corrupt and their lampstands have been removed

C. Key Command: Verse 12

***1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.***

This scripture is a clear WARNING to spiritually blessed people, to Christians everywhere, to live in a HEALTHY FEAR of sin; to respond to the danger with the same kind of vigorous holiness that Paul pursued in his own race... **I BEAT MY BODY AND MAKE IT MY SLAVE LEST I BE DISQUALIFIED**

D. Israel's History of Privilege and Sin

1. To intensify the point and broaden it, Paul reaches for the devastating example of Israel's history; the Corinthians were Gentiles, so maybe they were not as familiar with Israel's sad history as they should have been

2. Paul lists out Israel lavish spiritual blessings... their SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES, using Christian imagery and language to do it

*1 Corinthians 10:1-4 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*

- a. “Our forefathers” = the Jewish ancestors; but also they are the Corinthians’ spiritual ancestors as well, for all Christians are spiritually sons and daughters of Abraham... we can all learn lessons from Israel’s history
- b. “all” = Paul strongly emphasizes this word... he says “all”
  - i) “**all** under the cloud”
  - ii) “**all** passed through the sea”
  - iii) “**all** baptized into Moses in the cloud and sea”
  - iv) “**all** ate the same spiritual food”
  - v) “**all** drank the same spiritual drink”
  - vi) In others words, there was no special class that received the blessings, but ALL of them did
- c. “under the cloud” = the pillar of cloud that led Israel from place to place
- d. “passed through the sea” = the Red Sea, which God miraculously opened up for them to rescue them from Pharaoh’s mighty army, the most powerful on earth at the time
- e. “baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea” = immersed into Moses’ leadership, immersed into Moses’ laws, immersed into the common experience of supernatural deliverance from slavery in Egypt

- f. “ate the same spiritual food” = the manna, the “bread from heaven” that God provided for them every day, meeting their needs miraculously every single day
  - g. “drank the same spiritual drink” = the water from the rock, that God miraculously opened for them in the desert
3. Paul Christianizes these experiences, using Christian language, saying that these things symbolized the salvation Jesus Christ would work for us in the New Covenant:

***1 Corinthians 10:4 for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.***

- a. The Jews partook in Christ at that time... Christ was the Angel of the Lord who led Israel by the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire; Christ was truly the one delivering them, not Moses; Christ is the accompanying rock—meaning he NEVER CHANGES

***Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***

- b. Christ was ALIVE back then, pre-incarnate... saving his people from slavery in Egypt... he WAS the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire!!
- c. Their experiences were types, shadows, living prophecies of the salvation Christ would work for us in the New Covenant
- d. So, the Jewish nation that were brought out of slavery in Egypt experienced amazing things—they saw the Ten Plagues, including the plague on the firstborn and the Passover; they saw the awesome Red Sea miracle; they saw God descend in fire from heaven onto Mount Sinai, and they heard his actual voice speaking the Ten Commandments

E. NEVERTHELESS!!! {What a terrifying word!!!}

***1 Corinthians 10:5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.***

- 1. God killed them all... all except Joshua and Caleb... that whole generation of Jews ended up being scattered throughout the desert over the forty years

2. They did not die all at once, but God killed them all off little by little, when they refused to trust him and cross the Jordan River
3. God BLESSED THEM but WAS NOT PLEASED WITH THEM
4. TERRIFYING!!!

F. Israel's History of Sin Presented as a Direct Warning to All of Us

***1 Corinthians 10:6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.***

***1 Corinthians 10:11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.***

1. Look what Paul said about them:
  - a. First, they SET THEIR HEARTS ON EVIL THINGS (vs. 6)
    - i) All sin begins with LUST... evil desire that leads us astray

***James 1:14-15 each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.***

- ii) Our hearts are “prone to wander”, and the same lusts pull on our hearts as theirs
  - iii) These Jews lusted after sexual immorality and food and the pleasures of this world
  - iv) STOP: ask yourself, how is MY HEART lusting? What evil desires are pulling on MY HEART? What worldly pleasures are enticing to ME?
- b. Second, they indulged in idolatry and sexual immorality

***1 Corinthians 10:7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry."***

- i) Idolatry is not just bowing down to a Golden Calf, as the Jews did... it is living for any created thing over God

- ii) At that time, when Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, engraved in stone, the people had made a golden calf and were feasting and getting drunk and getting up from the feast to have an ORGY... they “got up to PLAY” (Ex. 32:6)... the word was also used for Isaac engaging in marital intimacy with his wife, Rebekah... but the Jews were running wild sexually

***1 Corinthians 10:8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did-- and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.***

- iii) These same desires plague us as well... they are a deadly danger NOW as they were THEN
- iv) God is NO LESS HOLY now than he was then; he slaughtered 23,000 people in one day... the WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH

c. Thirdly, the people TESTED the Lord

***1 Corinthians 10:9 We should not test the Lord, as some of them did-- and were killed by snakes.***

- i) This means to TEST GOD’S PATIENCE... to become arrogant and push hard against God’s laws and challenge his authority and presume upon his grace
- ii) God sent poisonous snakes to slaughter those who tested him, and they tested him again and again
- iii) Some of you may well be doing this now, testing God’s patience... violating your consciences with various sin patterns, you are presuming on God’s grace and patience, testing him... not realizing that God is allowing you time to REPENT!

d. Fourthly, the people GRUMBLED against the Lord, complaining about his provision for them

- i) God supernaturally fed them with manna every day, but they grew weary of the manna and grumbled and complained against God



- ii) God responded by sending the killing angel, the same one who had slaughtered the firstborn of Egypt
- iii) This GRUMBLING and COMPLAINING against the Lord's provision is the root issue... a roaming discontentment with what God has provided—a lust after the good things of the world that the pagans get to enjoy

#### G. Summary:

1. Paul cites this terrible history to prove that spiritual privileges are NO PROTECTION from the holiness of God if his privileged people indulge in this same pattern of sin

***1 Corinthians 10:6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.***

***1 Corinthians 10:11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.***

## II. Our Greater Privileges and Greater Danger

### A. “On Whom the Fulfillment of the Ages Has Come”

1. Paul is referring to the FULFILLMENT that God worked in Christ and in the blessings of the New Covenant
2. Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses and the Prophets by living a holy life and dying an atoning death on the cross
3. In every way, the New Covenant is SUPERIOR to the Old Covenant
  - a. That is the whole message of the Book of Hebrews
  - b. Christ is a SUPERIOR MEDIATOR...
  - c. Bringing a SUPERIOR COVENANT, the New Covenant,
  - d. And this superior covenant must result in a SUPERIOR LIFE... a life of faith and holiness in the pattern of Christ

### B. Because Our Privileges Are Greater, So Also is Our Responsibility

***Luke 12:48 From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.***

1. God expects us to live at a HIGHER LEVEL than the Jews of the Old Covenant
2. We have the example of Jesus Christ, the only perfect man that ever lived
3. We have the actual accomplished work of Jesus Christ, the blood of the Son of God atoning for our sins
4. We have the resurrection of Christ as a sure proof of our new life of holiness and our future life in the New Heaven and New Earth
5. And we have the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower us to live a holy life
6. God expects, DEMANDS a higher pattern of life than what Paul says the Jews did

C. Therefore, our DANGER is greater

1. God will not overlook our spiritual arrogance and willful wandering into sin
2. That's Paul's whole point here... the Jews are a WARNING FOR US to not indulge in sexual immorality and worldly lusts—
3. God is as perfectly HOLY now as he was then; and their bodies were scattered over the desert

D. You May Ask: “These temptations of the flesh are SO POWERFUL! So alluring!! How can I possibly stand firm and not yield?”

E. Answer: Take Responsibility in the Power of the Holy Spirit, relying on God's promises

III. Our Responsibility: Constant Vigilance

***1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!***

A. “If you think you are standing firm...”

1. This speaks to spiritual arrogance... over-confidence... complacency
2. You may think, “I am a Christian! All my sins are forgiven! I am guaranteed to go to heaven! There is no condemnation for me, since I am in Christ Jesus! SO... I am free from all danger, nothing need worry me again!
3. That is the wrong way to look at it! Paul was obviously extremely concerned about his body leading him astray into sin
  - a. He feared temptation... he was constantly vigilant over the motions and directions and habits of his body and its desires
4. So also this statement, “If anyone thinks he is standing...” refers to any area of sin at all in which you feel very confident that you could never fall
  - a. You may have a past habit of drunkenness or internet pornography or illicit sexual activity in your younger days
  - b. But it has been a long time since you fell in those areas... this text says **BE CONSTANTLY VIGILANT!**

Illus. The Roman army in enemy territory, after a days’ march would make a fortified camp that always followed an established pattern; they would choose high ground surrounded by clear space with good sight lines; they would make a square camp, then dig a three foot trench around the camp; they would use the dirt to build a rampart and then erect a stout log fence or barricade at the top of the rampart; then they would pitch their tents within the fortress and post sentries every 10 meters or so with a clear schedule of relieving them through the watches of the night. The officers would meet with the commander at sundown and write down the night’s password on wooden tablets, then pass the tablets on to their centurions, and then on to the sentries. All of the tablets were then returned up the chain of command so that none of them could go missing. Then

and only then could the Roman army safely bed down for the night.

In 73 BC, during the slave revolt led by a gladiator named Spartacus, the Roman commander Gaius Claudius Glaber failed to follow these patterns to protect his army; he greatly underestimated the slaves and did not dig the moat or build the stockade or post sentries. Spartacus led a night raid and slaughtered the soldiers in their beds

There is an old saying: "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom."

Paul would say "If you think you are standing firm, TAKE HEED LEST YOU FALL!"

Jesus commanded us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One."

Paul also said, "When I am weak, then I am strong." I think that means, "When I know I cannot win unless Christ helps me, that's when I am actually the strongest." He would probably agree that the opposite is true as well: "When I am strong, then I am weak!"

***John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***

## B. How to Be Vigilant?

1. Do not expect a single day off!

John Owen, *Mortification of Sin*:

"You must mortify! You must make it your daily work. You must be constantly at it while you live. Cease not a day from this work! **Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you!** When sin leaves us alone, we may leave sin alone!"

2. Pray specifically about your day, what you will face
  - a. Anticipate the temptations Satan might bring your way

- b. Prepare for battle... memorize scripture that will help you
- 3. PUT ON YOUR SPIRITUAL ARMOR (Ephesians 6)
- 4. Learn from your own sins...
  - a. Study how Satan deceived you
  - b. Limit the damage... watch out specifically for habitual sin
  - c. Study your own weaknesses
  - d. Ask for help from spiritual mentors and accountability partners
- 5. Grow in a sense of total, moment by moment dependence on Jesus Christ... seek to ABIDE IN HIM
- 6. Make Christlikeness the goal... total conformity to Christ

#### IV. God's Promise: Filtering Temptations, Providing Escape

***1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.***

A. More Next Week

B. Just Now, briefly...

- 1. God commands us to put sin to death! No excuses!
- 2. Nothing you are experiencing is unique...
- 3. God is faithful to you... he will not give you over to your lusts and sin patterns
- 4. God Limits Your Temptations... Satan is on a leash!
- 5. You are NOT a Slave to Sin... By the power of the Holy Spirit, you can defeat any temptation that comes your way
- 6. STAND UP by ESCAPING!