



Catalog No. 794

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

16th Message

Gary Vanderet

September 23, 1990

# DEALING WITH OUR DISCONTENT

*SERIES: EXAMINING LIFE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH*

We are in the midst of discussing a complex problem which existed among believers in the first century, the problem of food offered to idols. The Corinthians were demanding their right to attend the cultic meals at the temple, and to eat whatever food they wanted whenever they wanted. They were very knowledgeable about their freedom in Christ, and they demanded their rights. Paul has already told them, in chapter 8, that though he agreed with their theology, all their knowledge had done was to make them arrogant and selfish. As we have already seen, the evidence of maturity is not knowledge, but love. Knowledge is a means to an end—the building up of others. In chapter 9 Paul illustrated that truth through his own experience. Though he was an apostle, and had rights of authority and power, he had yielded those rights so as to be a help to others.

Today in chapter 10 we come to a warning. Paul deals with the root cause of why we cling to our rights, why we are unable to say no to things we ought to refuse. The passage we will look at, verses 1-13, divides into two parts. First, Paul illustrates from the example of Israel (verses 1-11); and second, he gives an exhortation to help us apply the lesson (verses 12-13).

## I. A lesson to learn: The example of Israel (10:1-11)

### A. Their unique privileges (10:1-5)

**For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. (1 Cor 10:1-5 NASB)**

The Corinthians thought they were a privileged people and that those privileges allowed them to do whatever they wanted. Here, Paul takes them back to a really privileged people, the nation of Israel, and demonstrates what their privileges did for them. Notice the repetition of the word all throughout the account. When they came out of Egypt, all the Israelites enjoyed tremendous blessings from God. They all had certain advantages, from the youngest to the oldest among them. Paul lists four privileges they enjoyed:

#### 1. They enjoyed the presence of God

“...all passed under the cloud,” says Paul. The cloud was the pillar of smoke that represented the presence of God in their midst, something that was unique to the nation of Israel. The Jews later referred to this as the *Shekeenah*. We have anglicized that word, calling it the *Shekinah*. This is not a biblical term, but it is a word the Jews used that was based on the Hebrew word *shakan*, which means “to dwell.” The cloud covered them during the day and was a source of direction for them, and at night it became a pillar of fire, providing warmth

and light. It was a constant reminder that the Lord was always present in the midst of his people.

#### 2. They enjoyed the power of God

“...all passed through the sea,” says the apostle. This is a reference to the passing through the Red Sea. Remember when the Israelites left Egypt, the Pharaoh changed his mind about their freedom and pursued them. They found themselves caught between the Egyptian Army at their back and the Red Sea in front. It was in this impossible situation that God demonstrated his power. He divided the sea, and they walked through on dry ground; they were saved. The writers of the OT always look back to that event as an example of the power of God, his ability to provide for us in impossible situations. When you find yourself stripped of all resources and it looks like your life is ending, that is when God works in supernatural ways.

#### 3. They enjoyed being the people of God

Paul tells us in v. 2: “and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” Baptism means “to immerse.” It carries the idea of identifying with someone else. The cloud, and the parting of the sea in a unique way united the Israelites to Moses and to his leadership. In fact, we read in Exod 14:31: “And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.” No longer were they a crowd; they had become a community of people who believed God.

In the cloud and the sea therefore we have a picture of the presence and the power of God, and a group of people who shared that presence and power.

#### 4. They enjoyed the provision of God

Paul tells that they “all ate the same spiritual food.” He is referring to the manna which the Israelites ate. When he calls it “spiritual” food he is not contrasting it to physical. It certainly was real food, but it was supernaturally given; that is the point. Perhaps as many as a million people came out of Egypt, and God fed them supernaturally. They came out of their tents in the morning to discover a white substance spread all over the ground. They said, “*Mana’h*” (in Hebrew, “What is it?”), and that became its name. Manna is what they ate throughout their wilderness experience. From the time they left Egypt to the time they entered Canaan, God miraculously provided for them. They never went hungry.

Paul goes on: “and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.” This is a reference to the rock which Moses struck and water gushed forth. Paul says the rock followed them, which probably implies that God did this a number of times. He supernaturally provided for them. It was a wonderful reminder of how God can provide from the most unlikely source, even in a dry and thirsty wilderness. Paul says that this rock symbolizes Christ; he is the rock from which we drink.

The point of all this is that Israel had tremendous privileges. They enjoyed the presence and the power of God. They enjoyed in a unique way being the people of God; they enjoyed the provision of God. They had everything they needed.

However, Paul tells us in v. 5: “Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.” This last phrase is a graphic picture. It really should be translated “scattered.” The picture is one of corpses strewn all over the desert. It is a picture of judgment. Exodus and Numbers overwhelm us with the number of people who perished in the wilderness. According to Numbers there were 600,000 men alone, not counting women and children. I am sure the number was well over a million; it was probably closer to two million people. How many of those entered the land? Only two men, Caleb and Joshua. All the rest died in the wilderness. It is a picture of judgment.

Why wasn't God pleased? They had everything they needed, yet somehow they failed. In spite of their tremendous privileges, similar to the privileges the Corinthians enjoyed, they failed to obtain the prize. They were disqualified. They didn't run to win.

I am sure this truth would have hit home for the Corinthian believers who were confident of their own spirituality and maturity. Remember they didn't have much time for Paul as an apostle or teacher. Their attitude was another evidence of their presumptuous arrogance. These verses are a helpful reminder to us that along with our freedom come some inherent dangers. The privileges we enjoy as God's people do not make us immune from God's discipline.

I know of believers who, when they contemplate an action that is clearly out of bounds for Christians, justify that action in their mind with the thought that it doesn't matter; God will forgive them because they are Christians. That is the subtle lie that leads us into activities that displease our God and we find ourselves disqualified.

What was wrong with the actions of the Corinthians?

## B. Their basic problem (10:6-11)

**Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (10:6-11)**

From the books of Exodus and Numbers Paul describes five well known incidents in Israel's history. I believe they are all driving home one single message. There are common elements in each of the examples: all of them involve eating or drinking. In each case the Jews wanted food and drink, and in each case they wanted more than God had provided. Though they had tremendous privileges—they had God's presence and his provision—it wasn't enough. They were not content with what he gave. Because of that each case involves judgment.

Paul begins with a summary statement in v. 6: “Now these things happened as examples for us.” These things actually happened; they aren't myths. But their significance goes beyond their mere occurrence in history; they are examples for us, “that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.” This is the point Paul is making.

He is referring to an experience recorded in Numbers 11, when the Israelites had just left Mt. Sinai. It had taken them about a year to get from Egypt down to Mt. Sinai. They had received the law, built the tabernacle and got ready for the journey. Just a few days out of Sinai they began to complain. “We are sick of this manna,” they said. “We have baked it, we have fried it, we have boiled it. We are tired of it.” They demanded meat from Moses. Moses went before the Lord and said, “I can't handle them anymore Lord. What am I going to do?” The Lord told Moses that if it was meat they wanted, then it was meat they would get. God brought a flight of quail near the camp and when the Jews awoke, the ground was filled with quail. The people gathered hundreds of bushels of them. Then a plague struck the camp and thousands of them died.

The psalmist says that the Lord granted their request but sent leanness to their souls. The problem wasn't simply their desire for meat. I imagine that anyone who had eaten manna for a year would love to have a little meat. The problem lay in how they handled that desire. They allowed it to control them and they began to crave meat. Whenever we feel we must have what God has not provided, our desire becomes evil. Whenever we want more than God provides it is evil. We are always *tempted* to want more, but to give in to that temptation, to allow it to become a craving, is evil. The Israelites began to take their needs into their own hands because they would not trust God to provide for them. That kind of craving will always result in a disqualification, to use Paul's terminology in chapter 9. We won't lose our salvation, but we will forfeit the power of God in our life and ministry.

The second instance is given in v. 7: “And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.’”

The scene here is at the foot of Mt Sinai, while the law was being given to Moses. He was gone for forty days and forty nights, and after awhile the people became restless and perhaps a bit frightened. Their discontent drove them to doubt God's provision for their care. They demanded from Aaron another god who would take care of them. They had a feast, they became drunk, there was an orgy, and it eventually led to idolatry. It was because they refused to trust in God's provision.

Verse 8: “Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.”

This is recorded in Numbers 25. This was the second generation. They had travelled from Kadesh-barneah, and were on the way into the land to conquer it. Then they ran into some Moabite women. Some of the Israelites objected to God's restraints, and couldn't resist the women's invitation to a feast. They joined them and fell into immorality. A terrible judgment came upon the camp. Again, it was because they wanted to eat and drink something God hadn't provided for them. They wanted something more.

Paul gives another example in v. 9: “Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.”

This refers to the story in Numbers 21 of how Israel complained to God and charged him with unfaithfulness. They said, “You brought us out here to die in the wilderness. There isn't enough food and drink, and we hate the food you have provided. It's all your fault that we are in such a mess.” Again, terrible judgment fell upon the people. Poisonous serpents came out and bit them and many died.

Finally, Paul writes in v. 10: “Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”

This refers to Numbers 16, where Korah, Dathan and Abiram began to grumble and criticize Moses’ authority. They said, “We are just as good as you, Moses. Who are you to tell us what to do!” They began to create unrest in the camp, and the ground opened up and swallowed the three men alive.

We can see the parallel that Paul is making to the Corinthians. They wanted to eat and drink what they wanted when they wanted, and they began to grumble and criticize the authority of Paul. But Paul says that their basic problem was they were not content with what God had given. What makes us unwilling to give up our rights is the attitude that we will never be satisfied until we get what we think we need. So we begin to fantasize and focus on those things we think we must have, and after awhile that fantasy turns into a craving. We feel we must have, for example, a new home, a better job, a happier marriage, a better body (all of which can be good desires), etc.

Paul tells us in v. 11 that these OT accounts are written for us. They are types, or pictures. I don’t know about you, but I can put myself right in those Israelites’ place. I am just like them. Much of my life has been characterized by wanting something more. God has been opening my eyes and helping me understand why I think I need to change my circumstances to be happy. This passage warns us to be careful. Discontent is a dangerous thing. It leads to idolatry, immorality, and a presumptuous spirit. Your fantasies just might get fulfilled and in reality become nightmares.

Now we need to underscore that there is nothing necessarily wrong with having desires for better things. And there is nothing wrong with praying for those things. Our heavenly Father longs to hear our requests and to give us what we need. But be careful to not allow that normal desire to become an evil craving, to think you must have what God has not provided. At that point you are tempted to take your needs into your own hands. You begin to question God’s care for you, and you are robbed of the contentment God wants you to have.

Paul concludes with an exhortation, in verses 12-13, to help us learn from this example.

## II. A warning to heed: An exhortation to the Church (10:12-13)

**Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (10:12-13)**

Paul wants us to realize that we are not living in a beautiful world designed merely for our enjoyment. We are in a battle, and we are under attack. The sooner we realize that the better. We are running a race that must be won. We are fighting a battle with a ruthless enemy. His devices are clever, his strategies are subtle, and we can be easily deceived.

The Israelites had all the privileges one could ever expect, yet their privileged status did not protect them from the judgment they experienced. So the Corinthians, who thought they were above danger when it came to enjoying their freedom in Christ, especially in attending the cultic temple meals, ought to take heed. Maybe that is where you are this morning. Your discontent with certain things in your life has been simmering for a long time, and now it is boiling

over. You feel you have to have certain things in order to be fulfilled.

There are three wonderful truths set out in verse 13 to help us handle our own discontent:

### A. The pressures we experience are common

The word Paul uses for “test” in v. 13 is used in the New Testament to refer to the solicitation to do evil (hence the translation, “temptation”), or it can refer to a difficult circumstance which helps us grow (often translated often by the word “trial” or “test”). That is the difference between a test and a temptation. A *trial* is an experience which *God* brings into our life in order to *help us grow*. A *temptation* is a process which *Satan* brings into our life in order to *cause us to sin*. But the amazing thing is that any circumstance can either be a trial or a temptation, depending upon our response to it.

I appreciate the word my friend Dave Roper used to describe what Paul is saying. The word “pressure,” he says, better encompasses both of these ideas. All of us have difficult circumstances which cause us pressure. These pressures, says Paul, are common. And in this context, it is pressure to think that we need something more, pressure to fantasize about better circumstances, pressure to be discontent with our present situation. This is a common phenomenon. If we asked how many of us were experiencing that pressure at this very moment, most of us would raise our hands. One of the enemy’s strongest arguments when he is enticing us to evil is to get us to think that our situation is unique, thus God’s word doesn’t apply to us. We are tempted to say, “You don’t understand my situation. You don’t live with my mate. You haven’t met my boss.” Those pressures are commonplace. No one is exempt from them. You will never arrive at a spiritual plateau where you no longer are tempted by these pressures.

Whether you are a student, a doctor, a salesman, an engineer, a homemaker, or even a pastor, these pressures are all around us. There is no place you can go where they are not present.

There is a second truth revealed.

### B. The pressures we experience are controlled

Paul says, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.” That is often hard to believe when we are in the midst of the pressure. I am sure some of you right now would respond, “Well, I am already beyond what I am able.” Notice that Paul doesn’t say God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we think we are able. God often takes us beyond that point. In fact, he must if growth is to be accomplished. But the truth is that he knows us much better than we know ourselves. He knows what we can handle. Paul has just exhorted the Corinthians regarding the discipline of an athlete. If you have been involved in athletics, you know that one of the marks of a good coach is to get an athlete to do things he previously thought were beyond him. God must push us beyond what we think we can withstand by confronting us with more pressure than we think we can handle. But it is a controlled pressure, it will not be more than we can handle.

And lastly,

### C. The provision that is available is constant

“...but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.” When the pressure is active in the Christian’s life, there is a counteractive power available from God.

It is interesting that the word for “escape” is almost exactly the same word as “exodus,” a way out of the wilderness. When we are in the midst of the wilderness and we think we cannot take any more of the pressure, then we must remember that God is right there with us. He wants to turn our wilderness into a green pasture, to feed us with supernatural food. David wasn't resting in a green pasture when he wrote Psalm 23. He was in a wilderness—a desert—and was being pursued by Saul. But there David found God's life and fed upon it. That is our exhortation this morning—the presence, the provision and the power of God are available to us. I pray we will find it sufficient to meet all of our needs.

© 1990 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino