

Why Die in the Wilderness

by Ian G. North

The sermon explores the reasons why Christians die in the wilderness, and how they can avoid this fate by being careful not to fall into temptation and idolatry, and by seeking to please God.

Duration: 1:02:25

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:12-14, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 10:18-19, 1 Corinthians 10:31

Topics: "Wilderness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of learning from the examples and warnings found in the Old Testament. He highlights the need for Christians to be cautious and not fall into temptation, as God is faithful and provides a way out. The preacher also addresses the issue of idolatry, warning against becoming idolaters like the people in Exodus 32. He concludes by urging Christians to seek true contentment in godliness and to learn from the mistakes of their ancestors.

Transcript

1 Corinthians chapter 10. The subject of this evening's message is, why do Christians die in the wilderness? Now, if you look at this particular passage, you'll find that chapter 10 follows a passage where Paul in chapter 9 has been expressing a kind of fear that he has. Well, now you might say, do you mean that there's a place for fear in the Christian life? Well, there is a holy kind of fear that I think, a healthy kind of fear that Christians should have.

After all, fear is one of the emotions that God has placed within our constitution and properly used, it is healthy. And here, Paul expresses that fear in the last verse of chapter 9, where he says, I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away. A cast away, that is set aside or disqualified from usefulness in God's work.

And that's a holy fear for any person, and it's very real. And it happens so much, a Sunday school teacher who goes on faithfully preparing the lesson and teaching the class, and yet there never seems to be any real spiritual impact. And none of the Sunday school class members are converted.

There's a lack of something there. A preacher, perhaps, who faithfully preaches Sunday after Sunday, but nothing happens and nobody is converted. In that church, something missing.

A mother who knows of her obligation to teach her children to pray with them, and does so, and reads the Bible with them, and yet never sees any spiritual response in the children's life. What's wrong? Something missing? What has happened? And I think that those of us who know the blessing of God and what it is to be used in some measure by God, should take to heart the message tonight. The text, if you like, is found in chapter 10 and verse 12.

Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. Now, I'm going to read this chapter 10, which is the basis of the message tonight, from the New International Version. There are some difficult passages and phrases in this chapter in the King James translation, which I think are helped in our understanding by a modern, accurate translation.

First Corinthians, chapter 10. 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. They were all baptized into Moses, in the cloud and in the sea.

They all ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them.

That's an understatement, if ever there was. I think about two or three million of them came out of Egypt, and only two of them got into the promised land. God was not pleased with most of them, so their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now, these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things, as they did. 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.

We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day 23,000 of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did, and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them as examples, and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. 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.

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I say.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving, for which we give thanks, a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break, a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. Consider the people of Israel. Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God.

And I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too. You cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Now, eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, this has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience's sake, the other man's conscience I mean, not yours, for why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced? Because of something I thank God for.

So, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God, even as I try to please everybody in every way, for I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Why do most Christians spend their whole life in a condition of spiritual unproductivity? I think that's a fair estimate.

Most Christians spend their lives stagnating in mediocrity, and they literally die in the wilderness. They die in the wilderness. They never have entered into God's Canaan, God's land of promise.

Why does it happen? Why do most Christians die in the wilderness? I wonder if I am speaking to somebody who has been a Christian perhaps for many years, and at some time in the past, the promise of God burned clear and bright. You entertained hopes of growing up into the fullness of Christ, and being used by God, but so much time has passed in the wilderness that the early hopes and promises have grown dim, and it looks almost now as though things are irreversible, and you're going to die in this wilderness. Why is it that so many do face that kind of experience? Is this going to be your experience? You've been in the wilderness so long, sadly contented with a show of things.

Are you going to go on in that condition? Are you going to die in that? Why does it happen? I would say it need not happen, and I believe we shall see from this chapter that it need not happen, and if there's somebody here tonight in a spiritual wilderness going round and round in circles, not getting anywhere, producing no fruit for God in your life or in others, I trust that tonight God will show you the way out, because God has never tested anybody above what that person is able, but God with that test will also make a way of escape, and there's a way of escape for you tonight, out of the wilderness into Canaan, into the promised land, and it can be yours. But I think first of all it would be helpful to answer the question, why do Christians die in the wilderness? Turn with me then to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Paul is very anxious to drive this lesson home to the hearts of the readers, and he does so by drawing upon an Old Testament illustration.

Now you see it says here, and evidently Paul wants us to understand this very clearly in verse 6, that these things are our example, and then you get it again in verse 11. All these things happened for examples, and are written down for our admonition. All of these things in the Old Testament, Paul's not talking about the New Testament, it was not written then, parts of it were written, it was not collated as an entire Bible, he was referring to the Old Testament, which many Christians ignore and neglect to their great poverty.

He's referring to the Old Testament, and he says it was all written down for our instruction, we who live at the culmination of the ages, and it's for us to learn from these experiences. He draws the application and makes it even more personal to the Christians in the first few verses. Notice he says, all our fathers were

under the cloud, verse 1, all passed through the sea, all were baptized unto Moses, or into Moses, in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat or food, did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

Very interesting use of words here by the Apostle Paul, the word baptized, for example, obviously those people who read that word would immediately relate what he said to their own experience, because they too had been baptized. And what he is saying is that these Hebrew people who were delivered from slavery, when they passed through the Red Sea, it was typical of the baptism that we experience in Christ. Paul speaks of it in Romans chapter 6, where he says, know ye not that as many of you as were baptized into Christ, baptized into Christ, were baptized into his death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

So baptism represents the Red Sea, or the other way, and is therefore the great divide between the old and the new, between slavery and freedom, between spiritual bondage and death, and spiritual liberty and life. And so they were baptized unto Moses. They were separated from Pharaoh, their old taskmasters, and they now came under a new leadership, unto Moses.

And they went into the wilderness on their way through. It was never intended that the wilderness should be their permanent habitat, and it is never intended that a Christian should live indefinitely in a wilderness experience, dear friends. You will have a wilderness.

They had to go through it. There was no other way. They had to go through it, and you will have to go through wilderness experiences.

Many of the greatest saints of the church have gone through what they call the dark night of the soul, and there is a sense very often of being utterly bereft and deserted by God. Sometimes there is that sense of complete inner barrenness, where you wonder, is there a God at all? And there's a wilderness, but God never intends that his children should stay in the wilderness. It has a lesson for us, but it is not our permanent residence.

They had to go through it, but the tragedy was that they lived there, they wandered there 40 years, and they died there, and their bodies were strewn on the desert. They died in the wilderness. Why did it happen? Verse 5 says, with many of them God was not well pleased.

Why? What happened? Verse 6, these things were written for our example. Now it comes, and I see here at least four things that kept these people in the wilderness. Why do Christians die in the wilderness? Paul would answer, many Christians die in the wilderness for the very same reason that the Hebrew people died in the wilderness.

And he says, these are the reasons why they died in the wilderness. And then he gives us the examples. First of all, it says in verse 6, they lusted after evil things.

The first thing that keeps many Christians in the wilderness is a desiring after evil things. The word is desire. It's exactly the same word that you get in Romans chapter 7, where Paul is speaking of his own discovery of sin in his heart, when he read that 10th commandment from Exodus chapter 20, and he says in Romans 7 verse 7, what shall we say? Is the law sin? God forbid, I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust.

I had not known what lust is. I would not have recognized this in my own life unless the law had said, thou shalt not covet. The word covet is the same word as the word lust.

Lust is a strong word to us in modern English. In fact, the Greek word is a word that is used sometimes in a good context, probably taking the New Testament as a whole. The word is used as much in a good sense as it is in a bad sense.

And in fact, the apostle Paul says the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. You would not use the word lust in reference to the Holy Spirit, and so the word desire comes in there, and it would perhaps be better translated, the flesh has desires which are contrary to the desires of the spirit. And now it says that these people desired after evil things.

What was it that they desired after? Turning back to the book of Numbers, we have the historical account to which this is a reference. Numbers chapter 11, verse 4, and the mixed multitude that was among them fell to 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 garlic, but now our soul is dried away, there's nothing at all beside this manna before our eyes.

Ah, they desired, it says they desired evil things. Did you know that fish could keep you out of the promised land? Evil things, fish, flesh, garlic, evil things. Oh, of course, somebody says, well, what's wrong with those things? How can you speak of these things as being evil? Flesh, we all eat, we enjoyed beef for dinner perhaps today, fish.

And yet here it is spoken of as evil things. They lusted after evil things. Now the Bible says that nothing is evil in itself.

And in fact to the pure, the Bible says, all things are pure. And here Paul himself says in the latter part of first Corinthians chapter 10, that all things are permissible. Now if fish and cucumbers and garlic were intrinsically evil, then it would be very clearly stated in the Bible that Christians should not eat cucumbers.

But it's not there. You see, the evil lay not in the intrinsic quality of the thing itself, the evil lay in the context within which it was desired. And that's the whole point.

What were these people doing? They were desiring something that God had not willed for them at that point on their journey. They willed and they desired beyond the provision of God for them at that point of time. They desired.

I would not have known the power of desire unless the commandment said, you shall not desire. As one writer has said, commenting on Romans chapter 7, that particular verse, he said, the human heart is a nest of desires. Where does frustration come from? Frustration comes from our inability for one reason or another to satisfy personal desires.

You never find Jesus frustrated. Never. Because his desires were utterly and totally in union with, motivated by, inspired by his father's desires.

And how wonderful to desire only what God desires. Delight thyself in the Lord and he shall give thee what? The desires of thine heart. But that's a safe statement because it is qualified by the person delighting himself in the Lord.

So his desires are God's desires. God's desiring through me. But that's not the case here.

They desired evil things. Now a thing may be good in its proper context, but my friend, if it is not God's will for you at that point in time and in that context, that thing becomes evil. And it becomes a cause of sin.

They desired evil things. How long it takes us to learn the lesson of contentment and surrender. In first Timothy chapter six, verse six.

First Timothy six, verse six. Godliness with contentment is great gain. They were anything but contented, you see.

And dear friends, we live in an age where we're grasping for things all the time, you know. And we're comparing our thing with our neighbor's thing, whatever it may be. Or look at this new thing that I've bought.

These are the qualities. I got it on sale and it's a thing. But the Bible says, love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

The truth is that things have wrapped their tentacles around us. And we have come to desire things more than God. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

And then he goes on to say, for we brought nothing into this world, it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be there with content, but they that will be rich. Now many people want to be rich.

That's the simple meaning of this phrase. It says, those who want to be rich. Do you want to be rich? I wonder how many of you want to be rich? Well, people of course want to be rich.

We want to be able to buy whatever we lay our eyes on. We want to be rich. But listen, there is great danger in wanting to be rich.

You don't want to be rich, my friend, unless you're prepared to walk a very perilous path. Oh, do you mean it's not God's will for us to enjoy the good things of life? Of course, it's God's will for us to be blessed. And the promise of Philippians 4:19 is that my God shall supply all you want according to his riches in glory.

Oh, is that what it says? No, my God shall supply all you need according to his riches in glory. And he's the only one who really knows what I need after all. And he'll supply that.

The blessing of God maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow therewith. But the word rich may apply to spiritual riches and material riches also. Now, those who want to be rich, watch out.

What does the scripture say? Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, a trap, and into many foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition, for the love of money is the root of all evil. There are very few people that God can trust to remain spiritual and rich. So, before you say, I want to be rich, think twice.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. Having food and clothing, be content. I have learned, said Paul in Philippians 4:10, I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Oh, the blessedness of true contentment of heart. They lusted after evil things. No wonder many Christians live and die in a spiritual wilderness.

Secondly, in 1st Corinthians chapter 10 verse 7, 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. Many Christians die in the wilderness because they have become idolaters.

This is a reference to the incident in Exodus chapter 32. Exodus chapter 32 is the historical incident to which the Apostle Paul is referring. Moses is up in the mountain meeting with God, and because he delayed to come down, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, up, make us gods.

Let's get on our way. As for this Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what's become of him. We don't know what's happened to the man who brought us out of Egypt.

He's only a man. We don't know what's happened. He's gone.

We need gods to lead us. Make gods. Verse 2, and Aaron said to them, break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives and your sons, your daughters, bring them to me.

And all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received them at their hand, fashioned it with a graving tool after he'd made it a molten calf. And they said, these be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

Now that's what the world is saying to you today. If you want to get out of Egypt, if you want to get out of the boredom and the drudgery and the slavery of life, what you need are a few gods. And those gods will bring you up out of that boredom and slavery.

And what are the gods of our modern society? I'm sure very quickly you could give me some answers to that. The gods of our modern society. Some person says, what I need is a little more social status.

If I could climb the ladder a little more so that I can look down on a few more people. And social status becomes a god. They make that their aim.

That's their goal, to get ahead and marry their children into a family a little higher up the ladder and give us a little more social prestige. Social status becomes a god in the lives of many Christians. They look down on people who do not have their economic level or their social level.

Social status. I think of the god of sport. I love sport and we should be healthy in our body.

And the Bible says that bodily exercise profits. The apostle Paul said that. I'm sure he was a man of exercise.

He walked halfway across Europe and he probably ran a lot too. And he swam occasionally because he said he was shipwrecked several times. He enjoyed physical exercise and he said bodily exercise profits.

But then he said, for a little. But godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is and of that which is to come. There should be a balance here.

But the trouble is that for many people, sport has become a total preoccupation. And sport has become a god to such an extent that if it's a conflict between a spiritual meeting and watching a championship ball game, the decision is already made in favor of the ball game. When that happens, sport has become a god.

It has dislodged and displaced the priority need of my life, which is spiritual. It's become a god. Sex is another god of our society.

You can't sell a spanner without it being advertised against the background of a pretty girl. I don't know what a pretty girl has to do with a spanner, but that's it. Almost anything you want to sell is related in some way to the sex symbol of our age.

Sex plays a tremendous part in the thinking of our society. C.S. Lewis humorously draws up how ridiculous our preoccupation with sex is. C.S. Lewis, of course, has now gone on his way, but a wonderful writer and the professor of English literature at Oxford University.

I hope if you can read any of his books, buy them up. Sell whatever you have to buy any books by C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis said, what would you think of a man who, walking down the main street, looks through the window of a butcher shop and sees there a beautiful piece of steak? And there he stands in the window, watching it with eyes wide open, and then before long saliva starts running down his chin.

And he's so glued at the window, preoccupied totally with the thought of this beautiful piece of steak and what it can mean to satisfy the hunger and the appetite and the taste and the palate. Why you'd say that man's demented, he's off-center, he's eccentric, he's out of balance, he's not right. He's giving an undue emphasis to one of the appetites of the body, to one aspect of our physical life.

And yet we do this in the area of another appetite of the body, also given to us by God. We have distorted and extended it and perverted it to such an extent that people drool over it, instead of keeping it in its proper perspective. As a civilization, we are losing our creative energy.

Because of our preoccupation with sex, that has become a god. And a young man and a young woman who do not win the battle of sex, will not win the battle of life. They've lost it.

And spiritually they will be doomed to a wilderness experience, unless they win the battle in that area. Sex, social status, sport, shows, TV shows. May God search our hearts, dear friends.

All these things have their proper place. But when I put something in the place of God, it becomes a God. And listen, I can tell you how you have become an idolater.

Watch it. If God puts his finger on something and you regard that as an unwanted intrusion, that thing has become a God in your life. And you are an idolater.

Could I say that again? If God puts his finger on something in your life that he wants to remove or correct, and you regard his touch at that point as an unwanted intrusion, that thing has become a God in your life. And you've become an idolater. Now there are many Christians who are temporizing, compromising at this very point.

They want to drift into the kingdom of God. You can't drift. We drift out of the kingdom.

How shall we escape if we neglect? So great salvation, the word neglect, actually is drift from. You drift from salvation, you don't drift into it. And if you are a drifter spiritually, you will never reproduce spiritually, you will never grow spiritually.

You're an idolater. These are your gods which bring you up out of the land. Live this way, the world says.

Go to this show. Become preoccupied with this sport. You're not with it if you're not there.

You know the pressures that are on you all the time. This will deliver you from a life of boredom and grayness and dullness. Live it up, man.

These are the gods that'll bring you up out of the land of Egypt. But it's all a lie. It's all a deception.

And then thirdly, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 8, neither let us commit fornication or sexual immorality as some of them committed and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. This is a reference to the incident recorded in Numbers chapter 25. Numbers chapter 25, verse 1. And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit wardom with the daughters of Moab.

And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods. And the people did eat and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself to Baal Peor.

And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And then, of course, followed God's judgment on that. Sexual immorality.

And Paul says God was not pleased with it. What's wrong? These Corinthians knew very well. They had had a visual demonstration of this right there in their own church.

Right in the church. In 1 Corinthians chapter 5. 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 1. It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you. Paul had heard this report from the Corinthian church.

It is reported that among you there is sexual immorality. And such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles. He describes it, but then he goes on to say in verse 4. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Now, what does this mean? It means this. That one of the most destructive things that can enter into human life is sexual deviation. Sexual immorality of one kind or another.

And it destroys. The word of God says in Proverbs 6, 52. Whoever commits adultery lacks understanding.

That's a nice way of putting it. And it's true. Whoever commits adultery lacks understanding.

He doesn't understand what he isn't doing to his own personality. To the personality of the other party. And also to the personality of any children that may be involved.

Whoever commits that sin lacks understanding. And then it says, he that does it destroys his own soul. I believe that when a person opens his life to this kind of thing, he's opening his life to terrible demonic powers that he cannot foresee or control.

I remember in North India, meeting a man who had become literally possessed of an evil spirit. And when it was traced right back to its origin, we discovered that this evil spirit entered into that man and took possession of his personality when he became involved in immorality in the big city of Ludhiana in the Punjab in Northwest India. And that has happened many times.

He destroys his own soul. May God keep you for himself. 1 Corinthians chapter 6. Verse 13.

Meats for the belly and the belly for meats. Verse 13 of 1 Corinthians 6. But God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord.

And the Lord is for the body. Verse 15. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid.

Flee fornication. I wonder if this sin is somewhere in the background in somebody's life here tonight. And you've never resolved it.

You've never settled it. It is slowly sapping away your energy mentally, spiritually. It will destroy your soul.

As long as you compromise with that sin and refuse to settle it and cleanse it, you will live in and die in a wilderness. And then fourth. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

Verse 9. Paul says neither let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted and were destroyed of serpents. They tempted Christ. Now what does this mean? They tempted or they tested the Lord.

The word test. They tested the Lord. Of course the Bible says God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man.

God does not tempt anybody to commit sin and nor can God be tempted to commit sin. But you can test God. In fact God says in some places, in a certain context, prove me now if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing.

But in this particular case, what does it mean they tested God? They put him to the test. In Numbers chapter 14. There is an incident which illustrates what it means to test God.

Numbers chapter 14. They were under the leadership of Moses. But they had a difficult time.

They complained, they rebelled. And notice what they said. In the last part of Numbers chapter 14.

Verse 2. They said to Moses and Aaron. Would God we had died in the land of Egypt. Or would God we had died in this wilderness.

And why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword that our wives and children should be a prey. Were it not better for us to return to Egypt. What are they saying? They're saying anything would be better than this.

Even death. Would God we had died here in this wilderness. Anything would be better than this.

And notice what they say in verse 4. Then they said to one another. Let us make a captain. Let us return into Egypt.

And then Moses and Aaron fell in on their faces before the assembly of the congregation and the children of Israel. They didn't say anything. All they did was to fall down there on their faces before the people.

Moses and Aaron. The people were saying. We will have our own man.

We will carve out our own destiny. Our own life. We are going where we want to.

And we're going back to Egypt. And Moses and Aaron are down on their faces. It was Joshua and Caleb who saved the day.

But here it is. These people were putting God to the test. Now what does it mean? I think you can use the illustration of parents guiding and bringing up their children.

Don't children often put their parents to the test? Children have their disciplines. Thank you. An experienced father.

And we set our limits for the children. And the children come and they push that little fence to see if it'll give. See if it's weak.

And sometimes children rebel. They rebel against the authority of the father. And you know children do this.

It's very typical of children to test the limits of the authority placed around them. To test the limits that have been put around them. They test.

And they're all the time pushing and testing. And this is where discipline comes in on the part of a parent dealing with a child. Now the Bible says no chastening, no punishment for the present seems to be joyous but grievous.

Nevertheless afterward it brings forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby. And when God disciplines us it's for our good. But if we go on bucking that the time will come where having tested God like that, having rebelled against God's authority continuously, God indignantly replies.

And God's indignation burns over against that point. He cannot tolerate total continuous rebellion. He cannot.

A human being, a parent, a father or mother, of course we need to listen to our children. Perhaps we are wrong. We are not perfect.

We have something to learn. Maybe they are right. Perhaps we should let them go there or do this.

And we need to take them into consideration. But not so with God. It is absolutely intolerable and illogical that any creature should challenge God's authority, God's sovereignty.

No wonder many Christians remain in the wilderness testing God. And then lastly in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 they died in the wilderness because of, here it is in the King James translation, murmuring or grumbling. Another translation has it.

They grumbled. They murmured, murmur, murmur. Continually grumbling.

I like those onomatopoeic words that sound just like their meaning. And these people would grumble, grumble, grumble, underground all the time of course murmuring. And every now and then it would come out into the open.

A lot of the time they followed Moses and maybe it appeared that all was well. But back there in the ranks somebody was grumbling, murmuring, complaining, a spirit of complaint. Murmuring, murmuring.

Christians who murmur. Christians who are negative all the time. Critical in their attitudes towards other people.

Judges of others. Critical, murmuring, particularly against leadership. Grumbling.

You find this in Numbers chapter 21. How they murmured. How they grumbled.

Numbers 21 verse 4 we read, 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. They were discouraged.

The people were discouraged. It was a hard way. Dear friend don't think that when you come to Jesus Christ it's all joy and peace.

The joy and peace is of such a quality that God gives it. It's not as the world gives. It's not what the world interprets as peace and joy.

But Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And the Bible says, As is the master so shall the servant be. But here we find them discouraged.

And the result, verse 5, The people spoke against God and against Moses. Wherefore have you brought us up out of the wilderness? And so on. Our soul loatheth this light bread.

Then came the snakes. And the result in verse 7, The people came to Moses and said, We have sinned for we've spoken against the Lord. Now the point is this, they didn't say we have sinned because we were discouraged.

Very often discouragement comes from one source or another suddenly upon us. Discouragement may not be a sin but watch, discouragement can give rise to complaining. And that's what they had to confess.

And if there's somebody here with a critical, complaining, murmuring spirit, you need to confess it as sin for what it really is. You see, when you give way to complaining and grumbling, one of two things is true. Either you are where God wants you to be and you're not satisfied with the way God is treating you.

Or you are not where God wants you to be. In the first instance, it is unbelief. You're not trusting God to care for the details of your immediate situation.

You're not really committed to God. You're not trusting God to take care of the details. And you're guilty of unbelief or you are guilty of disobedience.

You're out of his will altogether. It's one or the other. And if tonight you have a grumbling, complaining spirit, why is God dealing with me like this? Why are these people acting like this to me? Why don't I have these friends? Why is this happening? Why is that happening? Why are they acting against me in this

way? And you're critical and condemning and judgmental.

It's because, dear friend, there is sin that needs to be confessed to God and brought out before God. Why do many Christians die in the wilderness? There it is. Is there a way out? My time has gone, but I must take a few minutes.

How disastrous it would be to leave them in the wilderness. There is a way out. Oh, friend, listen, if God has spoken to you tonight, lay hold of this tonight and come out of your wilderness right now.

First Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13, follows upon this tragic incident. And here we read, but God is faithful. Ah, what's the way out? The faithfulness of God.

That's the answer every time. Get the eyes off the evil things that you desire beyond what God has provided. Get your eyes off the idols in your life.

Get your eyes off the appetites of the body that have carried you away. Get your eyes off your bewildering, discouraging circumstances and get your eyes on to the faithfulness of God. But God is faithful who will not let you be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape.

A way to escape. Can we get out of this wilderness? Can we get into the promised land? Oh, is there someone you've almost forgotten what the promised land is? After 40 years in the wilderness, no wonder all those early spies brought back the wonderful report. Huge grapes, milk flowing, honey dripping, a land rich and fertile.

Oh, but that was 20, 30, 40 years ago and you've almost forgotten about that land of riches and fullness in Christ. Is there a way out? What is the way of escape? A way of escape. Yes.

And it's given to us in these remaining few verses. And I'll sum them up very quickly. First of all, separation.

Verses 14 to 21. Second, edification. Verses 23 to 30.

Third, glorification. Verse 31. The way out? Separation.

That is, identification with Christ. The way out? Edification. That is, identification with my neighbor.

The way out? Glorification. That is, identification with God. Identification with Christ.

Separation. That's what Paul's talking about in those verses 14 through 21. He says, if you take the cup of Jesus Christ, the cup of thanksgiving, the communion cup, and you drink that cup, you're partaking of the blood of Jesus Christ.

If you take the bread, you're eating the body of Christ. You cannot be a partaker of the altar of demons and the world and the altar of Christ. It's one or the other.

Jesus said you cannot serve two masters. There's a war going on in your life. There's a battle, a tension, a struggle.

The things I want to do, I cannot do. The evil that I hate, that I do. And it'll go on and you'll be saying, oh wretched man that I am.

Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Until you come to the point of saying, I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ. Once it was sin that dwelt in me, but now it is Christ that dwells in me.

I live for him, unto him, through him. He is my life. Identification with Christ.

Separation. Come ye apart. Come ye apart and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.

And I will receive you and will be a father unto you and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. And then edification, verses 23 to 30. That is identification with my neighbor.

What's he talking about? If your neighbor, who is a pagan person worshipping an idol, invites you to go and have a meal with him, go and enjoy the meal. Don't take a holier-than-thou attitude. Don't say, oh but I'm a Christian, I can't identify with a worldly person.

Go and eat it and enjoy it. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And don't bring up anything pertaining to conscience.

Just enjoy it. But if your neighbor, when you come, says, oh this food has been offered to my God, then don't eat it. Don't eat it.

See. For conscience sake, for his conscience, there's a point where you must take your stand in love, because the new law that governs us is, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There are many questions of conscience.

What we should eat and what we should drink. And as a Christian, I'm free. All things are permissible, Paul says.

But not all things are constructive. Not all things edify. And think about that in relation to what you do, what you eat, what you drink, where you go, the friends you have, the society that you frequent and enjoy.

Think about that. It's all permissible to me. The question is this.

Not is it permissible, is it edifying? Does it build you up? Does it strengthen you spiritually? Does it draw you nearer to Jesus Christ? Edification and glorification. As Paul says there in verse 31, whether therefore you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. That's a good test.

Have you ever thought of applying that test to everything you do? Even down to the details of eating and drinking? Do all to the glory of God. I have a dear friend, he's a German. He came to Australia as a displaced person after the second world war.

And he was a hard-drinking man and also a heavy, very heavy smoker. And he used to go to a formal church every Sunday but then he'd have his wild parties during the week. And somehow one Sunday he wandered into a little Baptist mission church.

I think there were a few ladies there and that was all. And he took, pardon me, I don't mean to say that was all in that way. He took his seat right at the back and he was uncomfortable there.

The preacher was a hot gospeler and he preached salvation that night. And at the end of his message he said, is anybody here in need of prayer? My friend quickly put his hand up and pulled it down. He thought

there's no harm in that.

And when it was over he hurried to the door but the preacher beat him to the door. Took him by the hand, welcomed him and then said this, tell me, if you dropped dead right now, would you go to heaven? What an unusual question. He'd never been faced with that kind of question.

And he stumbled and stuttered and said, oh I hope so. To which the preacher replied, what? Go to heaven without a savior? And he quickly pulled his hand out and went away. But he had heard that that same preacher was to give his own testimony in a youth meeting a few days later.

And he had heard that that preacher was the owner of a nightclub in London called the Nightclub, the Down Under Club for Australian and New Zealand tourists visiting London. That he too had been a hard-drinking, hard-living man and he said, I'll go and hear what he has to say. And he went and heard the preacher give the testimony titled, From Playboy to Preacher.

And in the course of his testimony the preacher happened to mention that he had been a very heavy smoker, 60 cigarettes a day, that he was a slave to smoking. And my German friend, also a heavy smoker, spoke up and said, what's wrong with smoking? To which the preacher replied, young man, can you smoke to the glory of God? Very unusual question. He'd never thought of applying that test to smoking or anything else in his life.

And he had no answer. But that night he went home deeply disquieted in his heart, deeply convicted of his uncleanness and his need of a new life. And he pulled his little VW over to the side of the road in the darkness there alone, put his window down and said, oh God, I've already spoiled this day.

But I ask you now to give me a new life from tomorrow morning. And he took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket as a symbol of this new change that was to come. And he threw them out through the window.

Bring forth therefore fruits demonstrating repentance. And that was the fruit he brought forth that night and threw it out. Rotten fruit that it was and it went.

And God brought into that man's life a Canaan of blessing. He has since gone to Nepal as a fearless witness of Jesus Christ in that Himalayan kingdom. He has witnessed to Christ in Germany.

He has been faithful to God because he applied this test. Is it for the glory of God? Dear friend, take that step tonight from now on. My life is going to be identified with Christ.

It's going to be lived with a view to edifying my neighbor. And it is going to be for the glory of God.

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