

# 1 Corinthians 10

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon explores the lessons from Israel's experience to warn Christians about the dangers of false assurance and the importance of true unity in Christ.*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 10:1

**Topics:** "Unity in Christ", "Faith and Assurance"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on 1 Corinthians 10, emphasizing that while the Israelites experienced God's blessings, many were ultimately lost due to disobedience. He warns that outward participation in Christian practices does not guarantee salvation, as true faith must be accompanied by a life that pleases God. Darby illustrates the importance of maintaining assurance in one's faith and the dangers of complacency, drawing parallels between the early church and the Israelites in the wilderness. He highlights the significance of communion and the need for believers to identify with Christ rather than the world, urging a commitment to holiness and unity within the body of Christ.

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## Transcript

This chapter is a continuation of the same subject. All Israel were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." They were, as we may say, in the Christian profession, standing in this world. Paul is proving that a person might persist in the outward observance of Christianity, and yet be lost. But there may be such a thing as having the shield of faith down as a chastisement perhaps, but that would be the only case I can recognise of loss of assurance where it has been really known; that is, I mean where a man is given up to it, and to the fiery darts as a kind of chastisement.

I remember a person who was away from fellowship for fourteen years, and a high Calvinist spoke to him as a child of God, which became the means of bringing him in again. He had got puffed up, was a kind of prophet, Irvingite, and so on, and the devil had blown him over. Very solemn indeed! But I do not want a soul to lose his assurance; it may be the power for bringing him back. I do not say of a child that is naughty, he is not a child, neither do I wish him to think he is not. If you find a person in despair, you may feel it is the divine nature there. God reconciles absolutely His holiness and His faithfulness, and all else. We may be taking them apart, but He never does.

We have in this chapter certain truths typically presented - the keeping of Israel as a whole, or to the end, as well as the fall of these individuals. In Numbers 15 we have the security of God's purpose most beautifully set out. In Numbers 14 He says their carcasses shall fall in the wilderness. He pronounces judgment on the whole nation, save two persons. The entire people refuse to go up and take possession of the land, and the Lord says, "doubtless ye shall not come into the land," save Joshua and Caleb. Then in chapter 15, "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land," etc., and goes on with His own intentions just as quietly as if nothing of chapter 14 had happened.

247 "Baptised unto Moses," is what we call being associated with him in these ordinances. "Baptised with the baptism of John," was objectively the thing to which they were brought: so it was baptised "unto" instead of "into." The Greek preposition eis refers to the point you are going to, unless hindered. I might say I am going to Rome, but robbers might come in and stop me, but eis has that force. Pros is "towards" with the accusative; with the dative it is rather "there," but with the accusative it is distinctly objective. The sickness is not unto (pros) death, but for the glory of God, that is, it was with that object in view. In Ephesians 4 ministers were given with a view to (eis) the work of the ministry, eis the edifying of the body, and pros the perfecting of the saints. The prominent thought is the perfecting of the saints, the more immediate point is eis: the former was, that is, an eternal thing, but the work of the ministry was a present thing, and what they were at then; the perfecting is a definite result in view.

In the middle of this chapter we go from the outward thing to the inward. We have had not merely those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus, but those who were baptised to Moses, and did eat the same spiritual meat, and so on. These really partook of the privileges and yet were lost. You may have really Christ, and yet God be not well pleased with you. A person who is living after the flesh shall die. He therefore cannot have the real thing. This passage is not a warning against having a thing and in any way perishing, but against having the signs of the thing and then perishing. It is addressed to saints "with all those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus," however bad they might be at Corinth. It would be a very dangerous thing to say that people were outside warnings and dangers because they themselves are so bad.

We have here a kind of Sardis, and a terrible thing it is to have a name to live, and yet be responsible. "I gave her space to repent, and she repented not." The whole professing church will be cut off; they wax worse and worse, but still the responsibility is there, though they have left their first love. To the Thessalonians Paul had written, "Ye are not of the night that that day should overtake you as a thief." It will overtake the world so, and the Lord writes to Sardis, "lest I come as a thief," that is, treat you as the world. There will be a testing-time, and then some will be cut off. In the beginning of all, the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved; but when we come as far as Jude, we see apostasy coming in, evil men creeping in unawares. In verse 8 fornication refers to the particular danger they were in. All their relatives around them went on in that kind of thing, and they themselves were therefore in danger of slipping into it. Fornication was not a type. These were the things that happened then in Israel, not the figures of things for us, but the judgments that came from them are our warnings.

248 As to their idolatry, I doubt if a single sacrifice, unless an official one, was offered to God all through the wilderness. In Acts 7:42, Stephen says, "Have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them." The official ones probably were maintained, or might be; and at large what they did offer might be professedly to the Lord; for when they made the golden calf,

Aaron made proclamation, "To-morrow is a feast to Jehovah." God had ordered them to bring the blood of every beast they slew to the tabernacle. or rather the beast itself.

In verse 11 the "ends of the world" is the completion of the ages. To me the world now is not under any dispensation, but the whole course of God's dealings with it are over until He comes to judgment. Man was under responsibility from Adam to Christ, and then our Lord says, "Now is the judgment of this world." Historically I see this: up to the flood no dealings of God, but a testimony in Enoch. We see a man turned out of paradise, and presently God comes in by a solemn act, and puts that world all aside. Then after the flood we see various ways of God with the world. He begins by putting it under Noah. He gave promises to Abraham, then law raising the question of righteousness, which promise did not. Law was brought in to test flesh, and see whether righteousness could be got from man for God. Then God sent prophets until there was no remedy, and then He says there is one thing yet I may still do: I will send My Son; and when they saw the Son, they said, "This is the heir, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours," and then, so far as responsibility went, God was turned out of the world. Then comes the cross, and atonement for sin, and a foundation for a new state of things altogether, and that was the completion of the ages. God is not now dealing with man to try if he is lost or not, and so in John's Gospel man is gone from chapter 1. The first three Gospels present Christ to man, and then He is rejected; but in John 1, "He came to his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." There we find God's power coming into the world, and the Jews all done with: only some receive Him who have been born of God, and so John's Gospel is thoroughly what men call Calvinistic.

249 As to invitations, it is not incorrect to say to an unconverted man, "Come to Jesus." We may go "as though God did beseech you by us . . . be reconciled to God." God is obliged to have ambassadors for Christ now that Christ is gone. Beseeching is, so to speak, more than saying, Come. Christ says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," in the chapter where H. had already said, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented," Matt. 11. Thereon He begins to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, declaring woe unto them; and then comes, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." And then He says, "Come unto me," etc. He speaks of the judgment as already come upon them; then there is nothing for it, for no man knows the Son but the Father, neither knows any man the Father save the Son. He bows to His Father completely in rejection, and it is consequent upon that rejection, that, like Noah's dove, He finds there is no single place for Him to put His foot upon; and so now He says, If you want to get to heaven, come to Me outside the world. The gospel tests, and people will not receive the gospel any more than they could keep the law.

In 1 John 2:13 we read, "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning"; that is, they knew Christ had come into the world. They knew a great deal about Him, but no man can fathom the Son but the Father. "Son" is that being who was in the form of God, Christ, who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant" and so on; but if you ask how God can be a servant, you plunge into difficulty by getting into the reasonings of men.

250 Returning to our chapter, we have now identification with the table; the eaters are partakers of the altar. In eating of it, you identify yourself with the body of Christ, for "we are all partakers of that one bread." Someone once wrote to ask what was the proof that it was the body of Christ! And I found from

another that it was understood only to speak of the unity of those who were actually partaking. But what the apostle is saying is, If you go and eat of these idolatrous altars, you identify yourself with them. As Israel after the flesh, if they ate of the altar, they identified themselves with it; so if you partake of the table of the Lord, you have a common part with others with it. It is not itself identity with the body, but that which is the sign of it. You cannot partake of Christ and of demons at the same time; this is, "cannot" morally. The peace-offering gives the understanding of it: some was burnt on the altar, but of the flesh the priest ate the part offered to God, and they themselves, the offerers, ate the rest.

The principle was that the eaters were identified with the altar. If it were a thanksgiving, it must be eaten on the same day, but two days were allowed in the case of a vow, because there was a stronger energy in it, and none might be eaten on the third day at all. And so, if they were at table at a feast, he says, Eat what is set before you, unless it is given you as having been offered at an idol's temple, and then eat not. Of course you could do the act of eating of idols' sacrifices, but you cannot eat to God and to the demon together. Then comes the question, whether it is only those who are eating who are identified; and the local church is spoken of as the body of Christ, but I must take in all Christians when I go out into the mystic body. The communion (koinonia) is merely the external act of partaking, but if it is of Christ, it is the whole body. I cannot call an assembly the body of Christ, except so far as it may represent the whole body. At the altar there is identification, I am in communion with it; you do not get communion with the Lord's table, but taking a part in it; 1 Cor. 10:21.

251 There is a distinction: the Lord is the One who is over me. I do not think Christ is ever called the Lord of the assembly. He is the Lord of the individual, but not of the assembly. Head of the church implies union. Head of the body is not the same thought as the head of every man; that includes wicked men as well as good. The head of my body is head, and therein is union; but when I speak of head of every man, it is lordship over man. In Ephesians 5:29, "Even as the Lord, the church," should be "Christ the church."

"He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" is spoken of us, because He is a glorious person, and I by the Holy Ghost am one with Him who is such; but that is very different from the thought of Lord of the assembly as such. The thought destroyed the unity of the body, and this was the use that was made of it. He is Lord in the assembly. I suppose every Christian would own the title of authority in the Lord. Christ is generally the official name; it is not an absolute rule, but in most cases we have lost the the Christ in the English. There is a Greek rule, that if you have the article and the thing that governs the genitive, you have the article with the name, and there is a question then whether you say "the Christ," or "Christ." "The Christ" may contemplate the church too, as in "so also is the Christ." In "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ," he takes the lowest character first, and says, "He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," that is, he that has faith in His person.

The thought that was put out as a difficulty is, that the unity is merely the unity of those who are actually partaking. The bearing of it all is to make independent churches, whereas the apostle is here looking at them in connection with the fact of their partaking at the table; but he adds it is the communion of the body of Christ; and then we have the whole body, while those who may be present stand as such for the time.

In chapter 12 you have two statements. Verse 12, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ," literally the Christ. Then in verse 27, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular," takes in the whole thing, and the character that belongs to them. In our chapter we have two things; for if I speak of Christ's body, there is His literal body and His mystical body. His literal body is broken, and His mystical body is a united one.

252 The "one bread," in verse 17, represents Christ; it is the loaf on the table. We all partake of it, and are therefore one body; "for we are all partakers of that one bread." Before it is broken, in a certain sense, it represents the body of Christ before it was broken; but it does not form a sacrament in that state, because we have not the figure. It is true I eat Christ as the living bread that came down from heaven, but I go back to do that after I have eaten of Him as broken. I cannot think of the body of Christ without bringing in the mystic body, and verse 16 identifies me with the thought of the body it belongs to. The communion of the blood is always identification with the blood of Christ as shed for us. I do not know another word so good for it as that. Israel had their character from that with which they are connected; so with us, it is with Christ, with His body and His blood. It is not the spiritual feeding of my soul, but it is in the sense that my hand is partaker of the life of my body. "Joint participation" does not express it, because that is rather the act of partaking, or might only go so far. I may partake and not be in communion with; but it is in the latter way we are identified with Christ as His body.

"Demons" refers to idols' temples as such, because it was to demons they offered, and not to God. It is monstrous to apply it to any professing Christianity. In verse 20 we have distinctly what is the meaning of "the cup of demons." If any tried to eat of the Lord's table, and also of the table of demons, that would be saying, "I can eat with a demon, and I can eat with you." This would be provoking the Lord to jealousy, as in verse 22.

The difficulty we started with seems all cleared to my mind by chapter 12:27. The Corinthian church was not the body of Christ. It is a sheer attempt to make one meeting independent of another. That is not the apostle's mind through this chapter at all. But it is what was attempted by connecting the lordship of Christ with the assembly as such. Some said Christ was Lord, and they obeyed the Lord, and acted under obedience to the Lord in any one place, and nobody else had anything to say to them. At first I could not think what they were aiming at, insisting on His lordship in this way, though a man surely is not a Christian if he does not own the lordship of Christ. "Calling on the name of the Lord" is a sort of definition of a Christian. What we have been considering is ecclesiastically a less vigorous attempt at the same purpose. They asked what proof we had that the Lord's supper was an expression of the unity of the body. It was this that made the separation in - . Now what brought me out of the Establishment was the unity of the body: otherwise I could have gone into some independent church or set up one for myself, perhaps. I do not think many would deny that there is one body in words; but the practice denies it.

253 I could not go to any loose table as the Lord's. People do and call it the Lord's, of course; but I do not call it so or I should be there. Many go with a good conscience, I doubt not; but they do not meet on the principle of the unity of the body. If all the Christians in any place come together, they would not be a church and members; there are no members of a church. The idea and the term are unknown to Scripture altogether. Members of Christ's body, and therefore members one of another, is right, and that only. There is not the most distant approach to the common idea.

"All things are lawful" (v. 23) is connected with what is sold in the shambles. The apostle alludes to the custom of selling carcasses for food in the common way after the animal had been offered in an idol's temple. But suppose we were sitting at a table with a person just come out from idolatry, and he said, "That joint was offered to an idol." His conscience is not free, and for his sake I do not eat it. To me it is all common meat.

In Acts 15 the commands to abstain from blood, from things offered to idols, and from fornication, are obligatory on a Christian now. They are not from law, but from Noah. Not that I should think if I had eaten

blood, that I was defiled by it, for it is not the things that go in that defile. The above three things are special: one is life, and belongs to God; then idols are the giving up of the true God altogether; and fornication is giving up the purity of man. They are the three things which form the standard elements of what I have to say to God in. The two are plain enough: the third may be less clear. If a man came to me and said, 'That rabbit was caught in a trap,' I could say, 'Well, I will not eat it, simply for his sake.' To me these three principles are the expression of man as belonging to God, and not to his own lusts. As to blood, it is the life, and clearly belongs to God, but I leave every man's conscience to himself.

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