

April 11th, 2021

The Dreadful End of Temporary Believers

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Subjective vs. objective idolatry

The Apostle Paul is in the middle of an argument which began in chapter eight. The issue was idolatry, specifically food offered to idols. But the issue is rather complex. In chapter eight there was *subjective idolatry* happening. The stronger brothers in Corinth knew that meat sacrificed to idols was a matter of indifference¹ for an idol was nothing, therefore they ate it. But the weaker brothers didn't have this knowledge, and thus they were being encouraged to violate their conscience and sin by eating the meat. This is *subjective idolatry*. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (**Romans 14:23**). Here in chapter ten Paul is addressing *objective idolatry*. Some of the Corinthians took their Christian liberty so far that they believed not only could they eat the meat, but they could do so in pagan temples during *distinctively* pagan celebrations. But idolatry under the guise of liberty is still idolatry. They became puffed up, and convinced themselves they were free to do the *same things* the world did.²

What is a temporary believer?

So how does Paul respond? He introduces the doctrine of temporary believers and displays the dreadful end that all such souls come to. What is a temporary believer? A *temporary* believer is a person who mentally assents to the Christian faith. They possess some affections towards the Bible and Jesus, and

¹ 1 Corinthians 8:8

² "It is not enough to make a thing right, that we think it so to be so. Things do not change their nature according to our thoughts about them. Murder is murder, though man in his self-conceit and pride may call it justifiable homicide." Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 177

confess these truths with the Church. Some of their external behavior is consistent with the saints. But they are not truly united to Christ by a living, vital, saving faith that justifies them and sanctifies them. Jesus taught on the doctrine of temporary believers regularly. Consider the parable of the sower in **Matthew 13:20-21**. “As for [the seed] sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and *immediately receives it with joy*, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” Consider the parable of the ten virgins—all of them seemed to be waiting for the Bridegroom Jesus, and yet five of them were foolish, devoid of the oil of the Holy Spirit. When they said “Lord, Lord, open [the door] to us.’ Jesus answered “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” (**Matthew 25:11-13**). Or consider how Peter spoke of temporary believers in **2 Peter 2:20-21** “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.” We could multiply the number of places this doctrine is taught.³

The vital difference

That’s why Paul is pointing to Israel of old. In essence, ‘look how many of them didn’t persevere to the end and were destroyed.’ God punishes idolaters. Belonging to a Church, doesn’t make you safe. Getting baptized, eating the Lord’s Supper, gathering with the saints, knowing some doctrine, exercising some Christian virtues doesn’t mean you are safe.⁴ Temporary believers can do all those things, and yet come to a dreadful end. The **vital difference** between a temporary believer and a true believer is that a true believer holds steadfastly to

³ cf. Judas and Demas

⁴ “False security of salvation commonly rests on the ground of our belonging to a privileged body (the church), or to a privileged class (the elect). Both are equally fallacious.” *Ibid*, pg. 181

the Lord, fearing the Lord, trusting the Lord, relying on the Lord, afraid to do those things which displease the Lord; *but* a temporary believer is *ultimately* unconcerned with the Lord. He fastened himself to the Lord *because* it was convenient to him, or because it was according to the custom of his family, or because it brought him some private pleasure or advantage or blessing. His concern is not with the Lord but with himself and his own gain. That's why Jesus can say of temporary believers that when the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the Word—they will prove unfruitful (**Matthew 13:22**). They are the ones that turn to idolatry—to serving themselves in this crooked generation—just like Israel of old. That's what Paul is warning us against this morning.

The Big Idea...

Temporary believers come to a dreadful end because they don't believe the Lord is faithful and therefore give themselves over to the things of this world

☆ A Type

☆ A Warning

☆ A Promise

I. A Type

What is typology?

What is the relationship between Israel of old and the Church today? Well Israel is *the type* of the Church. Paul is engaging in *typology* in these verses. He uses the word type twice in the Greek. v.6 “Now these things took place as *examples* for us...” As τύπος (too'-pos) for us. Where we get the word type. He

repeats this idea in v.11 “Now these things happened to them as an *example*” —as a type. So what is a type? A type is a person or thing that foreshadows another person or thing.⁵ So for instance the book of Hebrews tells us that the ceremonial law and all its sacrifices were *types* pointing forward to Christ who is the final and ultimate sacrifice. (**Hebrews 10:1-10**). Therefore the passover lamb was the *type*, and Jesus being the Lamb of God is the *antitype*. The type is thing that foreshadows, and the *antitype*⁶ is the fulfillment. The type is the shadow, the antitype is the substance.

Israel *the type* : the Church *the antitype*

Paul’s point in these verses is that Israel is the *type* and the Church is the *antitype*. There is an essential continuity between Israel as the people of God *and* the Church as the people of God.⁷ In v.1 he tells all Gentile believers that the Jews of the OT are “our fathers.” He wants us to see Israel’s history is the blueprint for our Christian experience. The things that happened to them *parallel* the things that happen in our day. Their deliverance from Egypt is a *type* or shadow of our deliverance from sin. Notice how expands on this idea. Halfway through v.1 “...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 drank from the *spiritual* Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

Israel had baptism, the Lord’s Supper & Christ

Notice the three *types* he mentions. **First**, Israel’s passing through the Red Sea was a *type* which corresponds with our baptism. In other words, in leaving Egypt in their passage through the sea, they became followers or disciples of Moses their prophet. Likewise in our leaving the world through conversion and baptism we become disciples of Jesus Christ who the True and Better prophet

⁵ Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/typology-Biblical.html> Accessed April 10, 2021

⁶ cf. 1 Peter 3:21 for the Scripture’s use of ἀντίτυπος antitypos

⁷ Israel was called a holy nation (Exodus 19:16) just as the Church is (1 Peter 2:9).

that Moses pointed to (**Deuteronomy 18:15**).⁸ **Secondly**, Israel’s eating of the manna from Heaven (spiritual food) and drinking from the rock (spiritual drink) was a *type* which corresponds to our Lord’s supper which is our spiritual food and drink. Just as God nourished their physical bodies in the wilderness on their way to promised land, *so* God nourishes our spiritual bodies in this world on our way to Heaven. **Thirdly**, the Rock that followed Israel *or accompanied them* (as the Greek indicates⁹) is the same Rock—the Lord Jesus Christ—that accompanies us today. He is the Rock upon which the whole Church—both OT and NT—is built (**Matthew 16:18**). In other words, Jesus was their Savior as well. He pre-existed His virgin birth. He was the Jehovah whom Israel clung to. He was the One who Abraham put His faith in (**John 8:56**). He was the One who Isaiah saw sitting on the throne in all His glory (**John 12:41**). In other words, the Great “...Deliverer of the Israelites was none other than our crucified and risen Savior.”¹⁰ Amazing. Paul is connecting the whole Bible together for us through this typological interpretation.

The objection of Allegoricalism

But we have to address two important objections. **First**, someone might say, this sounds how some of the early Church fathers allegorized everything in Scripture, always looking for a deeper more spiritual meaning than the plain meaning of the text. For instance, Catholicism through the allegorical method teaches that Mary co-reigns as Queen of Heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ.¹¹ This teaching is based on an allegorizing of **1 Kings 2:19** “...Bathsheba went to

⁸ “There is no allusion to the mode of baptism...The point of similarity is to be found, not in anything external, but in the effect produced. The display of God’s power in the cloud and in the sea, brought the people into the relation of disciples to Moses. It inaugurated the congregation, and, as it were, baptized to him, bound them to serve and follow him.” Hodge, pg. 172

⁹ Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G190&t=NASB95> Accessed April 10, 2021

¹⁰ *The Reformation Study Bible*, Ed. R.C. Sproul, (Orlando, FL.,: Reformation Trust, 2015), pg. 2029

¹¹ Source: <https://www.scionofzion.com/allegory.htm> Accessed April 10, 2021

King Solomon to speak to him...and the king rose to meet her and bowed down to her. Then he sat on his throne and had a seat brought for the king's mother, and she sat on his right.” Here Solomon represents Christ and Bathsheba represents his mother Mary. Therefore Mary is reigning in heaven with Christ.¹² How do we answer? Well Scripture doesn't tell us to interpret *everything* allegorically or typologically, but where it does we have to obey Scripture. The rule of interpretation is the Scripture interprets Scripture. When the Scripture gives us history or poetry or prophecy, we must interpret according to the rules of history, poetry or prophecy. And when it gives us typology, we have to interpret it typologically.

The objection of Dispensationalism

But secondly, someone might say, ‘...this typological interpretation means that Israel and the Church are one body. But Israel is Israel, the Church is the Church—these are two different peoples—the Church is not the true Israel.’¹³ How do we answer? That is the assumption of 150 years of Dispensationalism, *not* Scripture. **Ephesians 2:14-16** says that “[Christ] made us both [Jew *and* Gentile] one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility... that he might create in himself *one new man in place of the two*...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.” Don't you see? Jews and Gentiles are one person, with *one Savior*. This doesn't diminish Israel, nor does it unduly exalt the Church. How can it? Scripture says we are one body. Israel *is* the Church in the wilderness (**Acts 7:38**) and the Church *is* Israel of God

¹² See <https://www.catholicshare.com/here-are-bible-verses-that-support-every-catholic-teaching-about-the-virgin-mary/> Accessed April 10, 2021

¹³ This was C.I. Scofield's objection certainly, who was one of the forerunners of Dispensationalism: “...in approaching the study of the Gospels the mind should be freed, so far as possible, from mere theological concepts and presuppositions. Especially is it necessary to exclude the notion—a legacy in Protestant thought from post-apostolic and Roman Catholic theology—that the Church is the true Israel, and that the Old Testament forview of the kingdom is fulfilled in the Church...Do not assume that “the throne of David” (Luke 1:32) is synonymous with “My Father's throne” (Rev. 3:21), or that “the house of Jacob” (Luke 1:33) is the Church composed both of Jew and Gentile.” *Scofield Bible*, (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1909), pg. 989

(Galatians 6:16). They are *our fathers* (v.1) making us their sons and daughters.¹⁴

This is our history—these are our warnings

Now *why* is all this vital to see? Because the OT concerns us more that we have perhaps imagined. We can not dismiss it because this is Jewish history. Unfortunately there are voices today that are telling us that we need unhitch the OT from the NT, because the OT doesn't concern us, it's irrelevant, it's antiquated, it's not winsome. Beloved, Paul is teaching us here that the OT is *our* history. It greatly concerns us. He tells us in v.6, that Israel is an example for us "...that we might not desire evil as they did." But *how* can we avoid the evil things they desired if we ignore the OT? He tells us in v.11 that these things are "...written down for our *instruction*." The Greek is νουθεσία *nouthesia*. Contextually it would be better interpreted admonishment, or warning.¹⁵ That's how the NIV translates this verse, "...these...were written down as *warnings* for us." Ought we to ignore warnings? What happens when you ignore the warning light on your car dash? Your car breaks down. Children what would happen if you ignore the poison warning on your mom's cleaning bottles and you decided to drink it like kool-aid? Don't you see, the Lord has given us both precious promises and woeful warnings in the Scripture. That's our **first point**. Israel is a type of the Church. We must look to her and avoid those things that brought her destruction.

¹⁴ The Church is simply the last chapter in God's unfolding Covenant of Grace. We are those "...on whom the end of the ages has come." "The ends of the world may be said to come on us because we live under the last dispensation of the Covenant of Grace" [Jonathan Edwards in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:11 found at edwards.yale.edu] — "One series of ages terminated with the coming of Christ; another, which is the last, is now passing." Hodge, pg. 181

¹⁵ Although I certainly agree that the OT is for our instruction generally speaking, here contextually Paul is using negative examples to warn us in v.7-10, and ends with an ethical conclusion in v.12 "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Therefore I think the word "warning" fits better here than a generic "instruction."

II.A Warning

Most of them were disqualified

There is an important connection between ch. 9 and ch.10. Paul ended chapter 9 with an athletic illustration. The Christian life is a race, therefore run in such a way so you can win the prize. How do you win? By denying yourself. Paul says in v.27 “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be *disqualified*.” And then ch.10 begins “For I want you to know...” and then he goes on to explain how so many of the Israelites were *disqualified*. Meaning, they were not saved.¹⁶ The emphasis in v. 1-4 is on the word “all.”

Our fathers were *all* under the cloud

All passed through the sea

All were baptized

All ate the same spiritual food

All drank the same spiritual drink

In other words, *all* of them tasted the blessings of being God’s visible covenant people. Because Christ was with them (v.4), they enjoyed redemption, direction, protection, and provision. But the majority of them perished. Paul says in v.5 “Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were *overthrown* in the wilderness.” Overthrown in the Greek is where we get the word *catastrophe*. It means a reversal of what is expected, an overturning, a sudden end. To give a picture: the path to the Promised Land was one extended graveyard filled with the hundreds of thousands of Jews who didn’t make it *because* they were only *temporary believers* disqualified from eternal life.

¹⁶ That’s how Paul uses the word in 2 Timothy 3:8 “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and *disqualified regarding the faith*.”

‘I’m safe no matter what?’

The fearful thing Paul is teaching us, is that there are many in the visible Church who are just like them. In fact, he lived in such a way *so that* he wouldn’t be disqualified. That was his point in **9:27**.¹⁷ Furthermore notice all the plural pronouns in **v.6-11**.

(v.6) *We* must not desire evil like them

(v.8) *We* must not practice sexual immorality like them

(v.9) *We* must not put Christ to the test like them

Paul includes himself in those pronouns, showing us what manner of punishment we ought to expect if we live wicked lives like them. And if you say, ‘But I’m in the Church, I confess Christ, I’ve been baptized, I partake in the Lord’s Supper—this doesn’t apply to me. I cannot be lost.’ Don’t you see that is *exactly* what some of these Corinthians were saying. ‘I can participate in pagan practices—I can do whatever the world does—*because* I belong to the people of God. I’ve said the sinner’s prayer. I’ve confessed Christ as my Savior.’ All Mormons can say those things. Every president for the last 50 years has said those things that even the wicked ones who advocated for the murder of babies. The theology that says: “I’m a Christian, therefore I am safe no matter what I do”—is *not* Biblical.

Can I lose my salvation?

So we need to address this first. Both these two statements are 100% at the same time: **1)** The elect cannot lose their salvation *but* will persevere in faith till the end. **2)** The Lord uses *means* to guarantee that His elect will persevere to the end.¹⁸ God uses means to accomplish His ends. Take for instance the case of the

¹⁷ “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

¹⁸ WCF 17.1 “They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, *can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace*, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”

Apostle Paul in **Acts 23:11** — God absolutely promised Paul that he would testify of the gospel in Rome. *Yet* in the following verse a plot was uncovered that some Jews were lying in wait to kill him. What did Paul do? He sent word to the captain telling of him of their wicked plan lest he be murdered on the way. Paul got to Rome *as God promised*, through *the means* of this murderous plot being foiled. Likewise the warnings in Scripture “...are the God-appointed *means* by which true believers persevere to the end.”¹⁹ The warnings in Scripture are like guardrails on a winding mountain road. Imagine you are driving in the dead of winter late at night and you hit a patch of ice, what do you want on that curve ahead? A guardrail that will keep you from falling off the cliff. God uses the warnings in Scripture to keep His people clinging to Him by faith. Jonathan Edwards puts it like this:

“God has connected damnation with living in allowed sin, and being overcome by sins, and brought under it’s power. And therefore, although it be impossible, that men, after they are once truly converted, should ever perish, yet they are warned against falling away and yielding to the power of sin, lest they should perish:”²⁰

1. The golden calf incident

Now Paul is showing us in Israel’s history that those who lived in wickedness and were destroyed by the Lord. He gives four examples.²¹ The **first example** is in **v.7**. “Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’” This took place in **Exodus 32** when Moses delayed to come down from the mountain and the people grew impatient and began to question what god would lead them

¹⁹ “Those of faith who heed these warnings, as the Spirit works through them to make them will and work ‘for his good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:12-13).” The Reformation Study Bible, pg. 2029

²⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 602

²¹ Actually probably five since the end of v.6 “...that we might not desire evil as they did” seems to reference the incident in Numbers 11:4ff.

now.²² So Aaron made them a golden calf and they celebrated it.²³ Now they were secure or so they thought. When Moses came down from the mountain, he asked them in v.26 “Who is on the LORD’s side?” And the Levites rose up as per Moses command and executed 3,000 people with the sword—all those who chased after the golden calf.

2. The whoring with the Moabites

The **second** example is in v.8. “We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.” This took place in **Numbers 25:1** when Israel “...began to whore with the daughters of Moab.” Being God’s covenant people didn’t stop them from engaging in sexual immorality like their surrounding culture. What a frightening parallel today. How many of those who say the Lord is their God have adopted the world’s view of sexuality? Yet God sent a plague in the camp and 23,000 people perished (**Numbers 25:9**).

3. The poisonous snakes

The **third** example is in v.9. “We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents.” This took place in **Numbers 21:4-9**. They were sick and tired of living in the wilderness. Comfort was their idol here. They said “...we loath this worthless food” (**Numbers 21:5**) speaking of the Heavenly manna God graciously provided for them. So God sent poisonous snakes into the camp, biting the people, so that many of them died.

4. The spies and their bad report

The **fourth** example is in v.10. “[We must not] grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.” This took place in **Numbers 14:2**

²² Exodus 32:1 “When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, *make us gods who shall go before us.*”

²³ Exodus 32:6 “...was a description of the Israelites in their raucous worship of the calf idol.”
The Reformation Study Bible, pg. 2029

when the people grumbled against Moses after they heard the report the spies brought back from Canaan that there were giants in the land. They feared man more than God, and they rebelled against Him. They wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb who told them "...the LORD is with us; do not fear them" (**Numbers 14:9**). This was *the sin* that God judged with 40 years of wandering in the wilderness until that whole generation of people died for their not trusting the Lord. Hundreds of thousands were destroyed in the wilderness, they never saw the promised land.

Temporal judgment *the type* : eternal judgment *the antitype*²⁴

Now all of these terrible judgments are types or shadows that point to something far, far worse. All these punishments are shadows of the final and eternal judgment in hell. That's Paul's *ultimate* warning here. It doesn't matter what benefits you think you have belonging to the visible Church. Israel had all the benefits. They saw the miracles. Yet **Jude 1:5** says "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, *afterward destroyed those who did not believe.*" There are those in visible Church in every age who live wicked lives, and if that is you, Paul is saying that you are heading for eternal fire and judgment.

Oh how much more terrible is hell than *merely* dying. Physical death is a type—a mere shadow—of eternal death. In physical death your body is put into the prison of the grave. This is shadow of the prison of hell where the body is confined forever and ever, never to be released. **Revelation 14:11** says "...the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night." In physical death your body is placed in the darkness of the grave. This is a shadow of the miserable darkness of hell, where no light of day is ever seen again. **Jude 1:13** calls it the gloom of utter darkness or the blackest darkness. In physical death your body purifies and rots and is consumed by worms. This is a shadow of the infinitely more awful rotting of the soul, where the soul is

²⁴ So much help here by Jonathan Edward's sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:8-11 found at edwards.yale.edu

inwardly tormented of a guilty and accusing conscience like the gnawing of a worm that never dies. **Isaiah 66:24** says “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

‘Take heed, lest you fall’

That’s why Paul gives *the most* vital imperative in **v.12** “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands *take heed* lest he fall.” Take heed, meaning turn your thoughts, direct your mind, beware, consider these very things. What things? Well let’s consider what these so-called temporary believers had in common. This was something that Christian and Hopeful talked about on their way to the Celestial City in Pilgrim’s Progress. They came across so many travelers who also said they were going to the Celestial City but never made it. Take heed to these three attributes that temporary believers have in common.

1. Though temporary believers are awakened, their minds are not changed

Hopeful told Christian “...though the consciences of such men are awakened [to spiritual things], yet their minds are not changed; therefore when the power of guilt [or fear] weareth away, that which provoked them to be religious ceaseth.”²⁵ The Israelites of old were awakened to the misery of Egypt and to the fear of Pharaoh. They cried out to the Lord to save them. Then God saved them. But when all was well then their worship ceased. The book of Numbers is essentially one long account of the Israelites grumbling against the Lord instead of worshipping Him. This is a picture of temporary believers. They are hot for heaven when they are awakened to their own sin and the threat of hell, but once those fear cool down, then their desire for salvation and heaven also cool.²⁶

²⁵ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. 3*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 160

²⁶ *Ibid*

2. Temporary believers have a slavish fear of man (of what they can see)

Hopeful next tells Christian "...they have slavish fears that do overmaster them; I speak now of the fears they have of men, for 'The fear of man lays a snare' (**Proverbs 29:25**). The Israelites were more afraid of the giants in Canaan than the God who split the Red Sea and sent the ten plagues on Egypt. They feared man more than God, they feared what they could see with their eyes, more than the Invisible God. Once temporary believers see the cost of following Jesus and how men will ridicule them and how they might lose their honor or their reputation or their comfort, they turn back and fall in with the world again.

3. Temporary believers don't truly care about God's honor

Christian tells Hopeful that true Christian has "...great reverence of God, His Word, and ways...afraid to try from them, to the right hand or to the left, to anything that may dishonor God."²⁷ Not so with temporary believers. God asked Moses "How long will this people despise me?" (**Numbers 14:11**). The beating heart of a true Christian is that he wants to see God delighted in and treasured in the world. "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!" (**Psalms 67:3**). But temporary believers have no care about the honor of God, they are only religious as long as it is convenient to them. They follow the Lord because it brings benefit to them. They are not God-centered. They are self-centered.

Experimental theology

So let's test ourselves. Take heed of yourself. What are you part of the visible people of God? Why do you follow the Lord? Or are you living a life of wickedness? It's not enough to be awakened to the things of God. Israel was awakened to all the things we've said today, but most of them perished. Have you been truly converted? Who do you fear most? Jesus said "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can

²⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 159

destroy both soul and body in hell” (**Matthew 10:28**). Whose honor do you seek above all? Is God’s honor your chief concern? That’s our **second point**. Israel serves as a warning. All who live wicked lives, regardless of one’s status in the visible people of God are in danger of the judgment to come.²⁸

III.A Promise

The temptation of idolatry is common to all

Does Paul leave us with any good news? Is there any hope? The best news, the greatest hope. Look with me at v.13 “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.” The temptations that seized Israel were not extraordinary or unusual, they are the same that every average person faces in this life. Every believer and unbeliever, every ancient and modern person are faced with one common temptation: idolatry. Israel was tempted to worship the idols of security, sex, and comfort. That’s what the Corinthians were tempted with. That’s what we are tempted with everyday. What will I live for today? Who will be my king? What must I have in order to be happy? The story of the Bible is essentially entitled: “Whom Will You Worship?”²⁹ It is not a question of *whether* but *which*. It’s not a question of *whether* you will worship a god, but *which* God you will worship. So *how* do we avoid giving ourselves to idolatry?

The Faithful One

Paul tells us in v.13 “God is faithful.” Isn’t that interesting? Why doesn't Paul say: God is loving or God is wise? Why faithful? In order to be called, there must be some prior promise, some prior obligation or covenant made. If I fail to show mercy to a stranger in need, I can't be accused of not being faithful. I could be called not merciful, but not unfaithful. However if I fail to fulfill my

²⁸ Christian also gives the nine steps of Apostasy which are very insightful. *Ibid*, pg. 161

²⁹ Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2001), pg. 127

vows to my wife, I would be called not faithful, *precisely* because I promised her something, I covenanted with her. God is faithful to His people precisely because He has obligated Himself by promise to us. He is faithful. He is trustworthy. He is not a man, that He could ever lie. He is reliable. What He has spoken, He will certainly make good on. God is dependable. He is with us all the way to the end. **Isaiah 46:4** "...even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."

Why we turn to idolatry

Don't you see? this is what all these temporary believers were doubting. That's *why* they turned to idolatry. They didn't *believe* God was faithful to defend them, to provide for them, to satisfy them like He said He would. This is what grieves God the most. He told Moses "...how long with they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" (**Numbers 14:11**). Beloved don't you see, we have so many more signs that God has given us? Chiefly we have the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.³⁰ "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"³¹ The Lord Jesus Christ is the chief evidence of God's enduring and everlasting faithfulness. God has done precisely what He has said He would do. What have you needed that God has not provided for in Him? Do you need a defense on the day of judgment? God has given you Jesus Christ the Righteous who is the propitiation for our sins.³² Do you need comfort? God has given you all things for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him—that is Christ.³³ Do you need to be satisfaction? Nothing is more satisfying than the Son of God, He told Abraham "I am thy

³⁰ Galatians 2:20

³¹ Romans 8:32

³² 1 John 2:1-2

³³ 2 Peter 1:3

shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”³⁴ Is that the God you worship? Is that the God you trust and hope in and live for? The God you must have more of?

The negative promise

Let’s look at the end of our verse. “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” There is a negative and positive promise. **First** the negative: He will not allow us to be tempted past what we can bear. But this seems to contradict what Paul says in **2 Corinthians 1:8**. He says: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened *beyond our strength* that we despaired of life itself.” Paul says he is beyond his strength, past it, utterly burdened. But in our passage, God says we will not be tempted beyond our ability. How do we reconcile this? Well in **2 Corinthians 1:8**, Paul is talking about his natural strength, his own strength apart from any help from God.³⁵ Our own strength will always fail us.³⁶ But in **1 Corinthians 10:13** he’s talking about the strength we have when God helps us—whenever God helps us we will never be tempted beyond past what we can bear.

The positive promise

That brings us to **positive** promise He will provide with the temptation the way of escape so we can bear it. This doesn’t necessarily mean that He will

³⁴ Genesis 15:1

³⁵ One author helpfully notes: “The *ability* in the former of these passages, and the *strength* in the latter, are far from being the same. The one is expressive of that divine support which the Lord has promised to give to his servants under all their trials: the other, of the power which we possess naturally as creatures. We may be tried beyond this, as all the martyrs have been, and yet not beyond the other. The outward man may perish, while the inward man is renewed day by day.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 332, fn 1

³⁶ Look at **v.9** here, it proves the point. “But *that* (meaning our being burdened beyond our strength) was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.”

remove the temptation, but rather He will provide the necessary supply. How? When we trust that He is faithful. **v.13** is meant to provoke in us faith in the Faithful One. I think we fail to see the grace that is unleashed in our souls when we trust God at His Word. God supplies to us the Spirit when we believe Him (**Galatians 3:5**). You ask: but what if my faith is weak? Of course it is. But it's the object of your faith that matters. **2 Timothy 2:13** "if we are faithless [even when we feel like our faith has failed] he remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself." Beloved that is how we fight against temptation to idolatry. By trusting that the Faithful God is all we need.

Great is thy faithfulness
 Morning by morning new mercies I see
 All I have needed thy hand hath provided
 Great is thy faithfulness
 Lord unto me

You need not be a temporary believer that comes to a dreadful end. Put *all* your hope in the Faithful God. He is the God who sent His Son in the world to live, to die, and to be raised from the dead for sinners like you. Cling to Him alone, and you will find a Faithful God who will not let the gates of hell prevail against you.