

Series: 1 Corinthians
Gray Areas Pt 3
The Misuse of Christian Liberties
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 02.12-13.11

Let's thank them for leading us in worship this morning. Good to see everybody this morning. We've got a lot of work to do so let's go right at it; take our bibles – 1 Corinthians, chapter 10. If you don't have a bible then God have mercy on your sin, sick, shriveled-up soul. We've got one for you in the chair back. Follow along with us. We're in a series called Gray Areas. This is our third part. It's really a mini-series within a series. We're actually working through the book of 1 Corinthians from beginning to end. We're a little bit over halfway. We have about six chapters left but we're in a series on Christian liberties that actually started in chapter 8; moved through chapter 9 and is now in chapter 10 and we've been working through it with an understanding of it's principle and it's pattern in the last two chapters. Now we're going to move to the misuse of Christian liberty.

Now, I've been helping you understand week after week what we're talking about when we're talking about Christian liberties. I've given you a definition. A Christian liberty is any conduct or any action not specifically addressed in scripture. That's why we're calling it a gray area as opposed to a black and white area. For example, scripture can be very detailed in our conduct and our action; what is permitted and what is not. That's black and white. We don't have any questions about that. But also there's times when the scripture does not give us clear indication on our conduct and our actions. So those are gray areas. We're essentially asking the question well, how do we know when it comes to these Christian liberties, these gray areas what is right and what is wrong for us? Paul said everything is lawful but not everything is beneficial and so essentially that's what we're asking. What is beneficial for us?

As I mentioned, we started in chapter 8 and we started by learning the principle and surprisingly the principle really had nothing to do with us and our freedoms in our Christian liberties. Paul actually started by helping us understand that we need to be looking outward when we're thinking of our liberties and our freedoms. Now, we ought to be thinking about how they impact others and at times we need to limit our own freedoms, our own liberties so that we don't offend somebody else and that's the first principle of chapter 8.

And then as we move into chapter 9 what did we discover? We discovered really just one huge life illustration lived out before us in the Apostle Paul that he was willing to limit his own liberties for the sake of the Gospel. And we actually learn from watching his life two life patterns that he incorporated. He'd be the first to deny self and he would be the first to control self so that his personal liberties would not offend anyone. So what did we say? We said, listen, if we're willing to live a life of self-denial, if we're willing to live a life of self-control then that really opens the gate to really do whatever we want from that point forward especially in answering the question what is and what is not appropriate for us.

But now as we come to chapter 10 Paul moves into the misuse of our Christian liberties so let's go to the text. This morning what we're going to do is we're going to look at verse 1 all the way down to about verse 13 and I'm just going to stop periodically and dissect the meaning of the text for you. We're not going to get very far in verse 1. He says I want you to know. Stop right there. The word know is important. It sets our frame of thinking. This is the word *agnoēō* which means to understand or to recognize. It's opposed to *ginōskō*, the common word for know in the Greek bible. But what Paul is essentially saying here is that I don't want you to be misinformed. I don't want you to be ignorant. I want you to know. Alright, what do you want us to know Paul? I want you to know what happens if you misuse your Christian liberties. I want you to understand the impact that it will have on your spiritual life and for him to help us understand that he is going to use the nation of Israel. He's going to use the chosen people of God as an illustration. What we find in verses 1 all the way down to the end of verse 10 is really one, long running illustration; one story after another. Why? Because Paul is driving towards one point and one point only. As we move through the text it's going to look like there's just a plethora of points we have to kind of understand; a plethora of movements in the text. But actually he's just taking story after story after story and he's moving us, kind of like a funnel into one concept. The way this whole thing lays out is that there are four advantages that the people of God, the Jewish people of God had experienced. And then he parallels that with four failures. Let's start by looking at the four advantages that Israel had as the chosen nation. We're going to look at verses 1 through 4. Watch.

He says our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea. All were baptized into Moses and in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food; all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Now, what we are going to see here are four advantages that the people had. That they had the presence of God, the power of God, the protection of God and the provision of God. Do you have that? Let's look at the first one.

The presence of God. He says in verse 1, he says our fathers were all under the cloud. Now what does he mean by that saying – all under the cloud? This is actually a reference that you all are very familiar with. It goes back to the book of Exodus. What happened in the book of Exodus? Well, it's the story of the Jewish people leaving their captives, their captivity in Egypt. They had been in bondage for some four-hundred years. Remember the story. Moses goes to Pharaoh and he says let my people go and Pharaoh says no, I'm not going to do that and so what happens? God puts on them a series of plagues, ten plagues. And so finally, Pharaoh says alright, take the people. Take the people and go. And so a million plus people exit out of bondage, out of slavery, out of Egypt into the wilderness and what are they following? They're following, Exodus 13, 21 and 22 says a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. What that is a physical, visible representation of God for the people of God. They had the presence of God before them. Paul says this is an advantage that they had.

Now, parenthetically, if you think about it God has always been a God who has been with His people. Think of the pronouncement of the Christ child. He was Emmanuel. What does that mean? God with us. Right? Jesus said in the New Testament, it's one of the last things that He said, Matthew 28:20 – I am with you always to the end of the age. In Hebrews God says I'll never leave you nor forsake you. This is been the activity of God before his people from the beginning of the Old Testament to and through the end of New Testament. We have God who is saying I am with you but do you see what Paul is saying that the advantage that people of God had at this particular time was a physical, visible representation of God. They had the presence of God with them.

The second advantage was that they saw was the power of God. Now look at the middle of verse 1. He says and they all passed through the sea. What is that? Well, you know the story. That's the reference of as they moved out of captivity, as they moved into the wilderness that Pharaoh relented. He changed his mind and he said no, we're not going to let these people go. We're going to go after them and so he sends the Egyptian army after pursuing the people of God and they're pushing them towards the Red Sea. What happens when the people get to the Red Sea? God miraculously parts the sea, correct? The people see this huge display of the power of God and they move through this parted sea on dry land but as soon as the Egyptian people try to do that they're stopped literally dead in their tracks. Right? God brings the waters back together. Paul is saying this is the second advantage. Not only did they have the presence of God but they had the power of God with them.

Third advantage is the protection of God with them. Third advantage is the protection of God. This is verse 2. And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Now, I need to help you understand this. This is not a reference to water baptism like we see in the New Testament. This is not an ordinance of the church rather; baptism here has more to do with identification. You see the people here were identified with who? Moses. Who was Moses? Moses was God's chosen leader and so Moses was God's instrument of divine protection. Basically what Paul is saying is that these people were identified with God's chosen man so they were the witnesses of the protection of God coming through the leadership of Moses. So that's the third advantage.

The fourth advantage is found in verse 3 and this is the provision of God. They all ate the same spiritual food, all drank the same spiritual drink. If you remember right as they were traveling through the wilderness how did God provide for them on a daily basis? He gave them physical food – manna. And they received physical water from the rock. Interestingly, Paul goes on to say that they same from the spiritual Rock that followed them and the Rock was Christ. According to Paul who was the source of water for them? Christ. Interesting metaphor, isn't it? That's a metaphor that moves from the Old Testament into the New Testament. Now, on a physical sense water is very important to those who live in the Middle East. It's very important to those people in biblical time

because water is what would sustain them. They would build their cities; they would build their villages around wells. Water was incredibly important. Jesus picks up the importance of water and uses it as a personal metaphor but it didn't start in the New Testament. It actually starts in the Old Testament. Do you remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well? He said you're coming here for physical water but what I'm going to offer you; I'm going to offer you what? Living water. He was the living water. He is the living water of life. But the people of God, Paul said saw that through the provision of God.

This is all the privileges that they've had. These are the privileges. You say, where is Paul going? What is the point that he's trying to make? Well, the point is that all of these privileges, all of these advantages didn't produce automatic success in their life. Look at verse 5. Nevertheless. That's a key transitional word. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now, one of the things I love about the scriptures is many times it's so understated. Most of them God was not pleased. Are you kidding me? Do you know the story? I mean, that first generation that left the exodus traveled around the wilderness for forty years. Most of them did not get into the Promised Land. How about almost all of them minus 2, Joshua and Caleb were the only ones that got to cross over into the Promised Land. It was the second generation that was raised up in the wilderness that bore the fruit of the Promised Land. In fact, the scripture said that God was not only displeased with them but they were overthrown in the wilderness. This is the Greek word *katastrónnumi* which literally means that their bodies were strewn over the wilderness as they died.

Even though they had these great advantages what happened that they ended up in disobedience. What is Paul doing? Let me just remind you – what is Paul doing? Paul is using a series of illustrations and stories to drive one point towards us. We are halfway there. He says this is what the nation of Israel had. Four advantages. Now he's going to parallel that and he's going to give us four failures. We're going to see that in verses 7 through 10 but before we get there look at verse 6. He reminds us what we're doing in the text.

He says, now these things. What are these things? These advantages took place as an example for us that we might not desire evil as they did. You drop down in verse 11 he says something very similar about the failures that we're about to learn.

Alright – four failures. They devoted themselves to idolatry, desired pleasure, distrusted God and disobeyed God. Let's look at this in the text starting in verse 7. He says do not be idolaters as some of them were. By the way, that phrase – some of them, you're going to see in verse 7, in verse 8, verse 9 and verse 10. That's a catch phrase for the Apostle Paul to say this is an illustration. Alright now look. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, the people sad down to eat and drink and rose up to play. What is he

talking about? What is he referring to? What story is he conjuring up here? Well if you follow this phrase you see the quote marks that “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.”? That actually literally comes out of Exodus 32:6 and it’s a reference to a very specific period of time in the nation of Israel. Do you remember the story that Moses is walking on Mt. Sinai and he discovers a bush that is burning? But the bush isn’t just on flame arbitrarily. It’s a bush that also has a voice. It’s the voice of God. This is a representation of God and the voice says Moses take off your sandals where you stand. You are on holy ground. What happens next is that God begins to reveal His plan for the people. He gives Moses the law and the Ten Commandments. Now he goes down. He tells the people this is what I’ve experienced. I’m going back up on the mountain. I’m going to meet with God. I’m going to bring down to you His divine law; His plan for us and that’s what he does. He goes up and he meets; he’s up there for a long period of time and the people become impatient. Do you remember? They become so impatient that they turn to Aaron and they say Aaron, what happened to Moses? And then they say something devastating. They say make us a god that we can follow. Moses is gone. They turn to idolatry.

Do you remember what Aaron, who by the way is the high priest. Do you remember what he says? He doesn’t correct them. He says alright. Give me your gold, rings and your earrings and whatever gold you have. He melts them down and what does he create? He creates a golden calf. He creates an idol. These people are now devoting themselves to idolatry and that phrase that they were eating and drinking was actually a phrase that pointed back to how the Egyptian culture would practice idolatry. That there would be great festivals and feasts before the worship of idols. Essentially they were emulating the Egyptian culture they had just left. And that phrase, they stood up to play. That was a euphemism for sexual activities in the practice of idol worship.

Now, stop right here. Remember the context. Remember, Paul is writing to the Corinthians. He’s using this as examples. Do you think this might have struck a cord with the Corinthians at this point because what do we know about their entire society? We’ve learned that their entire society was built around the worship of idols. The temple of Aphrodite was in the center of Corinth. Some of the Christians were dangerously close to slipping back into idolatry. Paul is sending out a warning to them.

Now, you might look and this and say I’m not. I don’t have that problem. It’s the 21st Century. We don’t worship little idols. That’s not our problem. Do you see what Paul is saying? Paul’s using this as an example. He’s saying anything that takes the place of God in your life becomes an idol. Now, connect what we’re learning. He’s saying essentially that our freedoms, even our Christian liberties if we’re not careful can become idols in our lives.

Alright. With that set in mind let’s go to the second failure and that is they desired pleasures above God. Verse 8. He says we must not indulge in sexual immorality as some

of them did. There's that phrase again. And twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. What's he referencing this time? Well, this is referencing an event that happened in Numbers 25 where the people of God began to inter-marry with the Moabites. You hear a lot – Jebusites, Moabites, mosquito bites. You have all these people in scripture. Who are the Moabites? Well, the Moabites were people that worshipped idols. And God specifically said do not marry them. It's like sexual immorality because you are not only inter-mingling and marrying with idol worshipping but they are going to draw your hearts away from me. And what's the first thing that the people of Israel do when they have the opportunity? They inter-marry. So what does God do? God places a judgment of death on many of them. Second failure.

Third failure – they distrusted God. So, they devoted themselves to idols, they desired pleasure. Number three – they distrusted God. You see that in verse 9. He says we must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents. This was a reference to an event that happened in Numbers, chapter 21 where the people basically just stopped in the desert. They'd been wandering around in the desert and they just stopped and they started complaining. They said this is ridiculous. We had a much better life as slaves in Egypt. Can't you just send us back to Egypt? God says don't you trust me? Don't you trust the divine hand on your life?

Now, let's not be too hard on the Israelites at this point because don't we often do that? Something happens in our life. It doesn't make sense. We're tired of dealing with it? What's the first thing we do? We say, God, what's it matter? This isn't how life is supposed to work. This isn't the plan. And we start distrusting God. You see, this was a major failure for the nation of Israel. They had all of these advantages. They had the presence of God, the power of God, the protection of God, the provision of God. At this point now they had the plan of God because they had the scriptures and they're still falling into distrust and God judges them for it.

The fourth and final failure they move from distrust to disobedience. Verse 10 just simply says, they were grumbling, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. That is also a reference that we can read about in the book of numbers where ultimately the people stopped in the desert and started a protest. They said we're not going any further. We're done following you. They weren't protesting against a government. They were protesting against God and they said we're done. And what did God do? Look at the text. It says he sent the capital D, the Destroyer. What's this? You know what God did? He sent an angel to discipline them and this angel we see throughout scripture as the Destroyer. For example, he was the angel that slayed the Egyptian first born in Exodus 12. This was the same angel that killed seventy thousand Israelites who worshipped incorrectly in 2 Samuel 24. Same angel that destroyed an entire Syrian army in 2 Chronicles 23. God uses a divine discipline on the people of God. Failure.

Now remember that Paul is setting all of this up to drive us to consider one thing. Look at the application. Verse 11. He says now these things happened to them as an, what? What's the word? An example. We already knew that. We saw it in verse 6. But, watch this, they were written down for our instruction.

This word instruction, *nouthesia* is more than just to teach you something. This was to warn you about something. Do you hear what Paul is saying? All of this I'm giving you, all of these illustrations, all of these stories is a warning for us. Look at the text. Now we're moving forward to that one point. He says, these were warnings on whom the end of the age has come, verse 12, therefore. There. That's the central clue that all from verse 1 to the end of verse 11 Paul has been driving to. He's about ready to tell you. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stand take heed lest he falls.

You say what does this have to do with Christian liberties? Do you see what's going on in the text? What had happened to the Israelites? What had happened with all of their advantages that turned into all these failures? Why did they fail? I'll tell you why. If you want to bring it down to a nutshell. Because they were over confident. They become over confident – took God for granted and they began to fall. Do you see what Paul is saying? He must have been thinking of Proverbs 16:18 at this time. Remember what Proverbs 16:18 says? Pride goes before destruction; a haughty spirit before fall. We can see pride and a haughty spirit all throughout the nation of Israel. What happened? They fell. They fell to sin.

What's Paul's point? Listen. The point is clear. When you become over-confident in your Christian liberties, when you become over-confident in the use of your freedom you are in danger of falling into sin. That's the whole point of the passage. What's the message of the text? The misuse of your liberties will lead to sin. Take heed. That's the whole point of the text. Paul's giving a warning. Be careful with how you use your liberty. Don't be so over-confident in these gray areas because as soon as you do it's that gray area that becomes sin for you.

You say, how do I know what is right and what is wrong? How do I know what to choose in these liberties? Very simple. Do you want to know? If a Christian liberty causes you to sin it is no longer a liberty. You got that? If a gray area, Christian liberty leads you to sin it is no longer a liberty. Your liberty went from a gray area in your life to a black and white area in your life. This is what Paul is telling us. This is what Paul is saying – listen, let anyone who thinks that he can stand, stand strong in use of their Christian liberties, if he gets too over-confident: warning, take heed. You're about ready to fall.

Now, let's get real practical here. Reality is some of us have pushed our Christian liberties so far. We've pushed and pushed. We've come right up to the edge and now that very liberty that we once enjoyed as a freedom, that the scriptures don't give a permission

Series: 1 Corinthians
Gray Areas Pt 3
The Misuse of Christian Liberties
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 02.12-13.11

or a denial, it's a gray area in our life, that very liberty has become a point of sin and if it is a point of sin then guess what it has turned into? Your greatest temptation.

Look at verse 13. What does Paul say? Paul turns and he starts talking about how to overcome temptation, doesn't he? So many times I see people extract this verse right out of context, just rip it out. But the context is set within in this discussion of Christian liberty so if you're here today and your thinking you know what? I think I've turned my liberty into a sin I think that's become a point of temptation. What do I do now? And Paul's about ready to tell you in verse 13. And that's exactly where we're going to start next week when you come back. We're going to learn how to take that temptation and we're going to learn how to defeat it by the Word of God.

What did we learn today? What is the point – that if you misuse your liberties then watch for it. That very liberty will be the very thing that will lead you to unrighteousness and just like the people of God, the chosen people of God that very liberty will draw you away from God. Take heed. Let's pray together.