

“Lessons from the Past” 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Introduction

- During the third round of the 1987 Andy Williams Open, Craig Stadler’s ball landed beneath a pine tree on the 14th hole. He decided to play the shot from his knees. No one thought anything of it until the next day when PGA Tour officials were notified that Stadler had placed a towel under his knees to keep his pants from getting dirty. Since he signed his scorecard and didn’t penalize himself two strokes for illegally building a stance, a violation of Rule 13-3, he was disqualified.
- 1998. The NEC World Series of Golf. On the 17th hole of his first round Lee Janzen made a putt that hung on the lip of the hole. He waited...and waited for the ball to drop. He walked up to the hole, bent down, stared at his ball. His partner Vijay Singh also walked up to watch the ball. Twenty seconds later the ball fell in. Janzen, like most of us would have done, marked down birdie, three, on his scorecard. Later Tour officials saw the tape of the shot and disqualified him for signing his scorecard with the wrong score. He should have penalized himself for violating Rule 16-2, waiting too long for his putt to drop in the hole.
- 2003 British Open. Mark Roe finished his third round with a 67 and was one-over-par for the tournament and in contention for the claret jug. However, after finishing his round with his partner Jesper Parnevik, Roe learned that he and Pernevik never exchanged scorecards at the first tee. That whole third round they recorded each other’s scores on the wrong score cards. Since they failed to notice and signed those cards making them official they both were disqualified.
- Maybe the most heartbreaking disqualification of all. In the 1940 U.S. Open Porky Oliver shot a 71 in his final round to qualify for a playoff with Gene Sarazen. However, in the locker room, prior to the playoff, Oliver was told that he was disqualified along with four other golfers for starting his final round ahead of schedule. He broke into tears at the news.
- It pays to know the rules. I played golf in both high school and college. We used to have practices where all we did was review rules because in a competition, failure to comply with the rules of the game means disqualification. In the Christian life, it’s no different.

Transition

Last week we talked about running to win. Living the Christian life requires the same kind of self-discipline and training mentality as that of a world class athlete. The consequence of failing to live the Christian life this way is spelled out at the end of chapter 9. Disqualification. Let’s read 9:27 again. *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will no be disqualified for the prize.* This theme of disqualification continues in chapter 10. Chapter 10 is a history lesson that we are meant to learn from. Let me summarize chapter 10 for you.

Proposition

- **Those who’ve gone before us are given as examples to keep us from disqualifying ourselves from the Christian life**

- We are to run the Christian life as those intent on winning; as athletes in strict training, modeling self-discipline and self-control so that we aren't disqualified. Starting in chapter 10, Paul gives some examples from Israel's history of those who did not exercise self-control and failed to win the prize.¹ These stories are meant to be a negative illustration showing us what not to do. The reason Paul goes into this history for the Corinthian church and by proxy us, here, now, is to show us that the danger of disqualification is very real.²

Transition

This morning we're going to look at...

Organizational Sentence

- **Three ways in which we might disqualify ourselves from the Christian life if we're not careful**

Transition

Listen to [verses 1-5](#). *For 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. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. **If the Christian life is nothing more than external ritual then you're in danger of disqualification.***

Main Points

- First let me say that in order for us to catch what Paul is doing here it's important to note the continuity between our lives as Christians and the lives of those who have gone before us. We are part of the same story that began with the Israelites. And because we're part of the same story what held true for them holds true for us now. God is not a different God. He's the same God. He hasn't changed. He doesn't change. He still relates to people the same way. And what he expected of Israel he expects of us. Paul's point is that if they can be disqualified, it can happen to us.
- I've read and reread these verses over and over and over this week and I'm still trying to figure out how in the world Israel blew it. Think about it for a second. To see what they saw. To experience what they experienced. To see the waters part before their eyes. To walk the path with the sheer walls of water to the right and left. To see the cloud of God's presence lead by day. To drink your fill from a rock knowing that death by thirst was imminent. To hold the manna day after day after day and savor its sweetness as it dissolved in your mouth. All Israel experienced this. *Our forefathers were all under the cloud and 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.*
- How did Israel blow it? What can we learn from them so that we aren't disqualified? Here's what I think we can learn. **If the Christian life is nothing more than external ritual, ala Israel in the wilderness, we're in danger of disqualification.** Let me see if I can explain.

¹ Fee, p. 443.

² Morris, p. 138.

- Paul interprets Israel's experiences in the wilderness in a Christological manner. Having stepped back from the particulars of Israel's trek through the wilderness to look at all of God's saving history at once Paul says of Israel's experience of eating and drinking, they were in actuality experiencing God's future provision of Christ. Verse 4. *For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*
- Just as we have symbols now that speak of Christ's provision for us, baptism and the communion, Paul explains the Israelites had their own symbols. Just as the beginning of our spiritual life is symbolized by baptism so Israel's deliverance began with a kind of baptism, verse 2. And just as our life with Christ is symbolized by the bread and cup so Israel's deliverance was symbolized by the provision of spiritual food, the manna, and the spiritual drink, the water from the rock. They were experiencing Christ himself through those events.
- And Paul's point seems to be that the experience of those things alone was not enough to keep the Israelites from being disqualified. All of them experienced a kind of baptism and a kind of Lord's Supper, yet the vast majority of them experienced God's judgment and failed to take hold of the prize.³ Why? I think because they experienced the ritual of the manna and the water and yet in their hearts they rejected Christ—they turned to idols instead.
- The lesson for us is simple, provocative and powerful. Each week millions of Americans gather in church buildings to attend worship services with the label Christian on them, faithfully, dutifully participating in the external rituals of something just like the Israelites. They experience the ritual of the bread. The ritual of the cup. But history shows, ritual alone is not enough to save. It wasn't for the Israelites, it's not for us.
- Verse 5 is maybe the biggest understatement in the entire bible. *Nevertheless*, and you can add, in spite of what they experienced, *God was not pleased with most of them.* Major understatement. *God was not pleased with most?* Try all but two. Out of an entire generation that started the race only Caleb and Joshua ran it in such a way that they were able to enter the prize of the Promised Land. The rest were disqualified. Like runners dropping like flies, *their bodies were scattered over the desert.*
- Examine your hearts this morning, are you experiencing the ritual of Christianity or are you experiencing Christ? The difference between the two is the difference between *bodies being strewn in the desert* and entering the Promised Land.

Transition

I want to transition to verses 6-10 now because I want focus on the **second way** we may disqualify ourselves, if we're not careful. We talked about it last week. **Failing to exercise self-control.** Look at verse 6. *Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 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." 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel.*

- In these verses Paul lists four events from Israel's history to illustrate how their lack of self-control disqualified them from the prize. From **verse 7**, the idolatrous feast at the foot of Mt. Sinai coming from Exodus 32. From **verse 8** the sexual immorality and Baal worship from

³ Fee, p. 450.

Numbers 25. From [verse 9](#), testing God's generosity from Numbers 21. And from [verse 10](#), Korah's grumbling rebellion against Moses and Aaron from Numbers 16.⁴

- Each event, I believe, is deliberately singled out, chosen by Paul to illustrate Israel's lack of self-control and the ultimate reason for their disqualification. Moses comes down from the mountain. Aaron's got this gold calf and the people are in the middle of this idolatrous feast *indulging in pagan revelry* as it says in verse 7. No self-control. In Numbers 25 Israel passes through Moab. All those Moabite virgin prostitutes of Baal hanging around. No self-control. In Numbers 21 their uncontrolled appetites get the best of them. Psalm 78:18 which speaks of the Numbers 21 incident captures this idea of no self-restraint when it says *They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved*. And in Numbers 16 the Israelites grumble against Moses and Aaron. They can't control their tongues. No self-control. Without it you can't finish the race.
- Yesterday, [Pat Bertoletti](#), won first place in the World Grits Eating Championship at Louisiana Downs. The grits were presented in 2-pound trays, each about 8 inches by 6 inches and 1 ½ inches deep. This guy, I don't know how he did it; he ate 21 pounds of grits in 10 minutes.⁵
- I think this picture of a guy voraciously downing grits is the picture Paul wants to give us of Israel. No self-restraint. Whatever comes down the pike makes its way into the belly. The appetite rules. And Israel's failure is there as an example and warning to us. Verse 6. *Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.*
- Again, Paul's point is clear. The goal is running to win—not disqualification. What runner can live this way, with no self-control, no self-restraint and expect to finish the race? You can't. You won't. Exercise some self-restraint when it comes to your appetites. Don't give in to whatever your body wants. Our greatest appetite in life should be God otherwise we're idolaters just like Israel. Learn from Israel's mistakes. By God's grace their failures are for our example so that we might not follow in their footsteps.

Transition

Look at verses 11-3 and the [third way](#) in which we may disqualify ourselves if we're not careful. Listen. *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 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. **Those who repeatedly, consistently yield to temptation run the risk of disqualification.***

- Verses 11-13 are so practical aren't they? This warning passage, *if you think you're standing firm, be careful*, this warning passage ends with encouragement. What's the key to self-restraint, self-control? What's the key to not being disqualified? What's the key to running to win? Reliance upon a faithful God. Look at verse 13. *But when you are tempted*, verse 13. We are all tempted to sin. But temptation is not sin. Failing to stand up under the test,

⁴ Garland, p. 459.

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yielding to temptation. That's the sin. Repeated, consistent yielding to temptation, that's grounds for disqualification.

- We all know this truth but it's worth repeating. It's impossible to beat temptation on our own. In our own strength by our own will power temptation will beat us every time. But it doesn't have to be that way. And if we don't want to be disqualified it must not be that way. The key to defeating temptation is God who is faithful. There is a promise in this verse.
- How is God faithful during temptation? First Paul says that there will be a limit to the temperature of the temptation. *God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.* When the heat of temptation comes, the tempt, the test will never be so hot so as to melt us, burn us with sin. The problem is that most of us give in to the temptation at the slightest feeling of heat. We give up way too soon.
- But God is also faithful in that when we are tempted, it won't last forever. There will always be an end to the temptation. *But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.* The word translated *way out* in [verse 13](#) is the word used to describe "an army trapped in rugged country, which manages to escape from an impossible situation through a mountain pass."⁶ If you think about every temptation you've ever faced there's always been and always will be, if you look for it, a God-given way out of the temptation.
- It's one thing to face temptation when it comes our way. It's a whole other issue to put ourselves in harms way. [Martin Luther](#) once said, "Temptations, of course, cannot be avoided, but because we cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, there is no need that we should let them nest in our hair."⁷
- Some of you have become too cozy, too familiar with certain temptations that nail you every time. You've let them nest in your hair. These are the besetting sins, the sins that easily entangle us as Hebrews talks about.

Conclusion

- USGA Rules of Golf. If a competitor is disqualified from a primarily handicap competition for playing off a higher handicap than he was entitled to, he may still claim the gross prize. According to the USGA Rules of golf section 33-1/13, the answer is true.

⁶ Morris, p. 142.

⁷ Martin Luther, "Martin Luther--The Early Years," Christian History, no. 34.