



Negative Examples

No. 23
Series: 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

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Text

10 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil 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 rose up to play.”

⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. 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.

Introduction

I performed the wedding for members of our church who were both Moody Bible Institute students. It was a ceremony soaked in Scripture and Christian symbolism. A couple years later the husband abandoned his wife and kid and the Christian faith.

There was a worship leader at this church who is now a witch and she reads tarot cards for people.

I’ve had an intern here at the church who isn’t part of a church anymore and is a life coach writing about self-love spirituality.

There was another intern who left here and went to a solid seminary, got an MDiv, but now is a state legislator advocating for grossly immoral positions.

I’ve baptized people who gave tear-filled testimonies and then turned away and we had to remove them from membership.

I can give a lot more examples like these. It grieves me. It makes me sad. But it doesn’t make me doubt the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is brutally honest that this kind of stuff happens. It preps us for it. We shouldn’t be embarrassed to tell these stories, because taking notice of people making shipwreck of their faith is an important tool that God uses to keep others in the faith. It’s kind of like how in Driver’s Ed we had to watch movies of horrible accidents. It was a means of making us more careful drivers.

In today’s passage from 1 Corinthians Paul gives several examples from the OT of people not finishing the race, like he talked about in last week’s text. Negative

examples are powerful teaching tools. My prayer is that the Spirit would use today's study of this text to help those of you who profess faith to persevere in faith to the end, despite all the temptations you'll face along the way. In short, what 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 teaches us is just this: **not everyone who does Christian things turns out to actually be a Christian.**

If you're here today doing this Christian thing, I hope that's not you. I hope that you learn from these negative examples and take them to heart and show that your faith is genuine by standing firm.

Let's pray...

We can break this section down further into three sub-sections – (1) What Christians do, (2) What Christians shouldn't do, and (3) What God does.

What Christians Do (vv. 1-5)

First, what do Christians do? There are a lot of ways we could answer that, but here Paul highlights the two *basic* Christian practices – Christians get baptized and Christians eat and drink at the Lord's Table. These are two fundamental Christian things to do.

But Paul comes at these two Christian conventions in an unconventional way. In the flow of 1 Corinthians, "[Paul] leaves his own example and turns to the history of the people of God recorded in the Scriptures to show that," in the words of Leon Morris, "the enjoyment of high privileges does not guarantee entry into final blessing."¹

Paul begins by saying, "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers." Focus on that last word: "brothers." So he's assuming that his readers – the members of the church in Corinth – are his spiritual siblings, his brothers and sisters in Christ. We should assume that those who are fellow members of the church with us are true Christians, until they prove otherwise as determined by church discipline, which we looked at in ch. 5.

But there are many brothers and sisters who are unaware of many things. Paul's about to cite several stories from the OT. Do you know what he's talking about? Are you familiar with these references? I do not want you to be unaware, ignorant of spiritual lessons found in the Bible. One great guardrail against a faith that turns out to be superficial is having a thoroughgoing acquaintance with Scripture. Are you familiar with the Bible?

The New Year is coming up pretty soon. It's a great time to get a Bible Reading Plan and have a system for working your way through the Bible consistently and repeatedly. Don't wait until the end of December. Start thinking now about what your plan will be for 2026. Having a regular time in the Word every day and reading through the Bible every year is a really helpful practice that indicates genuine faith, not just nominalism. It's not a guarantee (I know a lot of people who know the Bible well, but walk away from it), but it's a good thing.

What Paul says next here is important to note – "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers..." He speaks of the OT Israelites as the Corinthians' fathers. Many of the Corinthians were Gentiles, Greeks, non-Jews. How could Paul refer to the Israelites as their ancestors? Because when you become a Christian, the OT is your history now.

Abraham Lincoln began *The Gettysburg Address* this way – “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” In the 87 years between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, many immigrants came into America and were naturalized. So how could Lincoln say “our fathers?” How could Paul say “our fathers?” Because to be a Christian is to be part of this one people of God with a long history that goes back into the OT. There is significant continuity between the OT and the NT.

Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to learn from their history. He says that the Israelites “were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.” Do you know what OT story this is referring to? The Exodus narrative. You can read about it in the 2nd book of the Bible. Basically, Israel was in bondage in Egypt. God came and dramatically delivered them and set them on a course for the Promised Land. This was a real, historical event that actually happened. And yet Paul teaches us to also read it symbolically as a picture of the Christian life from conversion to heaven. Just like the Israelites were redeemed through the blood of the Passover lamb, so a Christian is saved by putting his or her trust in Christ, our Passover Lamb (cf. 5:7). And just as the Israelites were then set on a journey to the Promised Land with many twists and turns, so a Christian is set on a trajectory to heaven, with a lot of stops along the way.

Paul reminds us that after leaving Egypt, “the LORD went before [the Israelites] by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way” (Ex. 13:21). And this cloud led them to and through the Red Sea. Again, this really happened – a miraculous parting of the waters for the Israelites to go through on dry ground, but the pursuing Egyptians were deluged and judged. But this passing through water unharmed also has symbolic meaning. It pictured the reality of Israel’s redemption and began their journey in a similar way that baptism for a believer today pictures a believer’s salvation and the beginning of the Christian life. Just like Israel came through the waters of judgment safely to the other side, so in our baptism we go down into the waters and come back up, a picture of the new life we have in Christ, spared of God’s judgment.

Do you see how Paul makes that connection in v. 2? “[A]nd all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The Red Sea crossing was like the Israelites’ baptism. Today a Christian is marked off by baptism upon their deliverance from the realm of Satan and bondage to sin. It’s the initiatory rite of the Christian life. Just like the Israelites were baptized into Moses as their leader through the wilderness, so Christians are baptized into Christ (cf. Rom. 6:3). He is their leader through life. Every Christian should be baptized at the beginning of his or her Christian life to identify as part of God’s people, the church. Paul acknowledged this baptism back at in ch. 1.

So what do Christians do? They get baptized, just like OT Israel was, so to speak, at the Red Sea with the cloud and all that.

Next, what do Christians do after they get baptized? They eat and drink regularly at the Lord’s Table. Don’t get the order mixed up. Baptism is the one-time initiatory rite that signifies the beginning of the race, the gun shot, if you will. The Lord’s Table is the repeated rite that we do along the race course, the station with energy food and drinks along the way, if you will. Paul finds an analogy for this in the food and drink that the Israelites partook of in the wilderness after passing through the Red Sea, before entering the Promised Land.

“They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” v. 2. And “all ate the same spiritual food,” v. 3. And “all drank the same spiritual drink,” v. 4. Baptism, followed by eating and drinking. What did they eat? The manna, the bread-like substance that God gave them 6 days a week. He also provided quail at times. Through this food, God sustained his people on their journey. It was more than just physical provision. It was a symbol of God’s spiritual sustenance.

That’s what they ate. What did they drink? Water from a rock – “For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them.” There are two occurrences, in Exodus 17 and then in Numbers 20, where Moses strikes a rock with the same staff that brought the plagues on Egypt and parted the Red Sea over the Egyptians, and suddenly water sprang out of the rock for the Israelites to drink. It was a picture then of God bearing the judgment on behalf of his people and thereby providing them with physical water, with spiritual meaning.

Paul says, “the Rock was Christ.” There’s a lot there – typology, the pre-existence of Christ, the divinity of Christ... but I don’t want to get too side-tracked from the main point Paul is making here (you can find our sermon on Exodus 17 online and read it; it’s one of my favorite ones). Paul is saying that Israel went through water at the beginning of their sojourn and then were sustained by eating and drinking along the way. Similarly, for those who claim to experience redemption through Christ today they are baptized with water to mark the official start of the Christian life, and then they go on by eating and drinking the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Table with his church. The Lord’s Table is a spiritual meal where Christ nourishes his people. Baptism and the Lord’s Table – it’s what Christians do.

But, it’s not what actually makes you a Christian. Have you ever seen *The Godfather*, the classic mobster movie? At the end of the first movie there’s this scene where a baptism is happening, while he’s had a hit put on all his enemies. Right? There are a lot of people who have been baptized and take communion, who have no clue what they’re doing. And Paul says it was the same thing in the OT. Look at v. 5. They were all ‘baptized’ and all ate and drank at the Lord’s table, in a sense. “Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” In fact, only two people actually survived to see life in the Promised Land. So huge numbers of people who went through those experiences didn’t make it to the end.

It’s an illustration for us. **Not everyone who does Christian things turns out to actually be a Christian.** You can be immersed as a professing believer in a Southern Baptist Church and not be saved. Baptism itself is not salvific. It doesn’t regenerate you. The elements of the Lord’s Supper are not magic. They do not work *ex opera operato*, in and of themselves to confer grace. They are important. They can be immensely useful. But they aren’t guarantees of genuine faith. You can be a baptized, communicant member of a church and turn out to be unregenerate. It’s not just about going through motions, checking boxes. God is not pleased with mere external religion. How is God pleased? “Without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6). A true faith that looks to Christ as your sacrifice to appease God’s wrath and your only righteousness to meet God’s requirements. Only those who genuinely have that faith are pleasing in God’s sight. It’s more than going through the motions.

Some people who go merely through the motions keep that up all their lives and their insincerity is found out at the last day when Jesus says to them, “I never knew you,;

depart from me” (Mt. 7:23). But many others start off looking like a Christian, they profess faith, get baptized, join a church and eat at the Lord’s Table... for a while, but they show that they didn’t really believe before the final day by falling away. Do you want that to be you? Then keep listening.

What Christians Shouldn’t Do (vv. 6-11)

We’ve seen what Christians do – 2 things: they get baptized and eat at the Lord’s Table as signs that they are part of God’s people, feasting by faith on Christ. But **not everyone who does Christian things turns out to actually be a Christian**. So if you want to be sure that’s not you, let’s look now at what not to do.

The next section goes from v. 6 through v. 11. Verses 6 and 11 provide bookends to this section. They say that “these things took place as examples for us,” and that “these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction.” The story of the Israelites who left Egypt but didn’t make it to the Promised Land was put in the Bible for us to read and heed. Examples to learn from.

The word ‘example’ is the word ‘type’ from which we get ‘typology’, if you’re familiar with that term. It just means that God is sovereignly orchestrating events in such a way that they foreshadow and find their fuller meaning in the NT. So the passing through the Red Sea was a ‘type’ of Christian baptism. The rock that was struck was a ‘type’ of Christ’s death. And the water they drank was a ‘type’ of the wine we drink. Typology is similarity with escalation. The story of Israel’s failures in the wilderness are meant to teach us “on whom the end of the ages has come” not to miss out on the ultimate reality of heaven.

So here are 5 lessons to learn, negative examples to avoid, if you don’t want to be someone who does some Christian things but turns out not actually to be a Christian. Ready?

#1 – Inordinate Desire (v. 6b)

The main issue in all of this is DESIRE, the desires of the heart. You can’t be a Christian just by doing certain external practices like baptism and communion. And you can’t just avoid certain external behaviors that are sinful. It’s way deeper than that. It’s about the internal matters of the soul. Verse 6 says, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not *desire* evil as they did.” Before any of the deeds that the Israelites did that disqualified them, there were desires. Here’s a doctrine to look up – concupiscence. It means that it’s not just acting on inclinations that is wrong, but we are culpable for the inclinations to do wrong themselves.

This means that we must pay attention to our desires and work on them with all the arsenal of God’s Word. We must repent not just of our actions, but of our twisted desires and bring even our covetousness under the blood of Christ. We must fight desire with desire. If you have never read *Desiring God* by John Piper, do so over Thanksgiving break; it will be better for your soul than binge watching Hallmark movies. If you think you can live the Christian life by rules and regulations, you are gravely mistaken. If your basic desires remain fleshly, your Christian veneer will be peeled off. You have to fight fire with fire. There has to be in you a Spirit-wrought desire for God that drives you to fight against all unruly desires that war within you. Is your Christian

life being played out on this level, a heart level, as a matter of getting your desires in order?

In Numbers 11 the Israelites' issue was described as having a "strong craving" (cf. Ps. 106:14). Are you alert to your cravings? Your lusts? I've seen a lot of people who formerly identified as Christian who no longer do so because their Christianity never dealt with the heart and eventually their strong cravings couldn't be contained and they felt like they just had to express them. It was just too hard to keep them bottled up. Are you using strategies aimed at only at behavior or getting down to the core of motivations? Are you just eating and drinking the bread and wine or do you have spiritual taste buds for Christ? Learn from the story of Israel in the wilderness and pay utmost attention to inordinate desires.

#2 – Idolatry (v. 7)

The second thing Paul points out *not* to do is to play around with idolatry. We're going to talk about this more next week. We must flee idolatry. Idolatry is a big topic. It takes many forms. It starts in the heart – idols of the heart, and manifests in physical forms.

Here in v. 7 Paul says, "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.'" It's a quote from Exodus 32. It's the scene where Moses is up on Mt. Sinai and the Israelites are down in the camp and they decide to make a golden calf like what they had seen in Egypt and worship the world's way – self-directed and flippant. They convinced themselves that they were worshipping the LORD, but the LORD was not pleased and 3,000 were struck down.

The world has its gods, be they totem poles or amulets or money or youth or entertainment. There are a lot of baptized Christians who are just living for the world's goals – fun, adventure, social acceptance – and smuggling that into their Christianity. You see it obviously in health and wealth versions of Christianity that purport to worship God, but really are worshiping money and comfort. You can see it in churches that are consumeristic concerts, catering to felt needs. That kind of Christianity likely won't last for people. It's shallow. It's worldly. Why not just join the world outright?

How might we at IBC be idolatrous? Let the example of Israel with the Golden Calf make you inspect your heart and life for idolatry and relentlessly seek to smash those idols and worship the true Christ in the way he's prescribed in his Word.

#3 – Sexual Immorality (v. 8)

The third negative example, what we must be aware of and avoid if we are not to be fake Christians is sexual immorality. Verse 8 – "We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day." This is a reference to Numbers 25, the Baal of Peor incident in the wilderness wanderings between the Red Sea and the Promised Land. Do you know this story?

Moab was a pagan nation that was afraid of Israel and was seeking a way to attack them. They tried other methods, but in the end it didn't take a military battle. How did they do it? Sex. They invited the Israelites to their orgiastic sacrifices. That's how most pagan religions worked – it was a mix of ritual and sex (the perfect religion for a depraved mind to make up!). And it seduced many of the Israelites. One guy even got so

brazen that he brought a woman with him back to his tent right in the sight of Moses and the whole congregation. Sex is a powerful drug.

But God takes sexual immorality deadly seriously, as we've already seen in this letter. He sent a plague upon the people for this whoring. Numbers 25 tells us that 24,000 people died as a result. Paul says it was 23,000. How do we explain the discrepancy? There are several possible solutions. Maybe the numbers are rounded differently, maybe people were less precise with numbers then, maybe Paul is quoting from memory and approximates, maybe he's unintentionally or intentionally conflating different stories... but the general point is clear – a lot of people were struck dead for their sexual immorality. This isn't a joke.

I have a pastor friend who described to me a situation he is currently dealing with. He has a young man in his congregation that showed all the signs of believing the right stuff. He had become a member in college, was in their pastoral training track, had recently gone with him to a solid conference. My friend was hoping this guy was going to become an elder eventually. But then suddenly and surprisingly the young man stopped showing up and started saying weird things that contradicted everything my friend thought this guy had espoused about theology and church. It seemed out of nowhere and caught him off guard. As I listened to him tell this story I shared his disappointment, but then it occurred to me – "I'm 95% sure that this guy has gotten caught up in some messed up sexual sin and you've got to try to go after him and see if you can rescue him from it or it's going to destroy him. He's probably addicted to pornography or doing something deviant and trying to deal with it in an unhealthy way."

Brothers and sisters: beware of sexual immorality. It will kill you! Don't make excuses for it or room for it. Attack it viciously at the heart level. Don't play around here. How many times has an apostasy been connected to sexual immorality? It's the case the vast majority of times. If you're here today and you're flirting with adultery... if you're looking at pornography or chatting with a sexbot... if you're sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend and coming up with some crazy rationalizations... if you're doing any kind of sexual immorality repent and do whatever it takes to bring it into the light and let the church community help you gang up on it and beat it down or else it will eat you alive. Learn from the story of the Israelites and the Baal of Peor and countless other men and women throughout church history who have succumbed to the illicit pleasures of sex and shown themselves to be no lover of Christ's.

#4 – Insubordination (v. 9)

The fourth negative example is harder to give a label to that starts with 'i', but I think we can call it insubordination. Look at v. 9 – "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents." They put *Christ* to the test. Here again we see Paul finding Jesus in the OT. What OT incident is this referring to? It's Numbers 21, another occasion in the time between Egypt and the Promised Land that is analogous to our journey between conversion and heaven.

In Numbers 21 we read – "And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.' Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died." When Israel felt and talked this way, they were putting

God to the test. They were trying to put him in the hot seat, blame him, accuse him, examine him. That's ridiculous. It's insubordination.

This is completely backwards! We cannot put God on trial. He is the Judge, not us. We must always submit to him. Such an upside-down attitude of arrogance and self-centeredness is always at the core of a false profession. There's a former Christian pop star that I follow on Instagram. She's now deconstructed and posts things like this quote from Walt Whitman – "Re-examine all you have been told in school or church or in any book, and dismiss whatever insults your own soul." That attitude is extremely foolish, but being true to your deepest self is the philosophy *de jour*.

For professing Christians who still operate from this worldview, Jesus is not really their Lord; they see him as their servant. And when he doesn't do what they want him to do, they get upset with him. "I did all this Christian stuff and my loved one died... I lost my job... I didn't get what I wanted!" And so they turn against God. Oh, brothers and sisters, can you see how your heart could go this direction? Are you repenting of that attitude right now as we're talking about it?

God is God. He knows what he's doing. He only does what is good. Don't think you know better. Don't try to stand above God and make him answer to you. This is the error behind so many people who defect from orthodoxy due to stated intellectual objections. You can try to insist on judging God, but in the end there's no way around it – he will judge you. Are you smug? Or submissive?

#5 – Ingratitude (v. 10)

Two things Christians do – baptism and the Lord's Table. But not everyone who does those turn out to be actual Christians. 5 negative examples of things not to do in order for this not to be you. Don't give in to inordinate desires, don't play around with idolatry, don't yield to sexual immorality, don't insist on insubordination, and finally don't have ingratitude. Verse 10 – We must not "grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer." This is alluding to Numbers 14. There the people grumbled against God. They were not full of thanksgiving, but ingratitude. They were complainers, cynics.

Is that you? Are you a critic? Always finding fault with others, not yourself? There are a lot of people who always seem to have some criticism of the Church or their church. They aren't content. They think their pastor is not doing enough for them; it's his fault. Or the community is letting them down; it's never enough, it's never quite right, it never lives up to your expectations. They go from church to church to church and often drop out of church altogether because nothing's good enough. This mindset will pickle your soul and make you become embittered and isolated. Battle it. This coming week's holiday is a good time to cultivate genuine, humble gratitude for God's blessings and express it. Don't be hard to please. Don't be like Israel and miss out on the Promised Land by grumbling. Don't grumble, be grateful.

What God Does (vv. 12-13)

So we've seen what Christians do – baptism, eating and drinking at the Lord's Table. But we've seen that not everyone who's done that is really a Christian. We must be vigilant against inordinate desire, idolatry, sexual immorality, insubordination, and ingratitude – an 'I' mentality. We have many negative examples to learn from here.

Lastly, let's see what this text tells us that God does. What does God do to keep us going on the right path. 2 things: he confronts and he comforts; he prods and he promises; he warns us and he warms us; he calls us out and he consoles us.

First, he gives us warnings. That's really what all these examples of what not to do are. They are warnings. But we see it summed up in v. 12 – "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." That's a strong warning. It's a blow to our pride. This confronts and chastens us all to take warnings seriously. Really take stock. Examine yourself. Be open to correction and be confrontable. Don't resist rebuke. Don't be presumptuous. Let these warnings sink in.

And don't think that strong warnings are bad. They are good. And they don't have to unsettle you, they can strengthen you. Warnings in the Bible are meant to disrupt false assurance and actually increase real assurance of salvation. They are loving divine means of keeping you. I like how Tom Schreiner puts it. He says, "The warning is not designed to instil [sic] terror or to paralyse [sic] the Corinthians... Such warnings are not a threat to assurance, for those who heed the warnings grow in their assurance."² Warnings work! If I tell my kid that some kids have run into the street and been hit by a car and killed in order to teach them to look both ways before crossing the street, it's a loving and effective method.

So, brothers and sisters, let's all take God's warnings to heart. Don't think you're fine, you're better than others who have messed up, it can't happen to you. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). See these tragic stories and let them humble you and cause you to cry out, "Lord, I don't want that to be me! Help me! Keep me!" And he will answer those heartfelt prayers.

"The section ends with a word of comfort..., reminding believers that God will faithfully keep from apostasy those who belong to him."³ Look at the comfort found in v. 13. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." It's normal, it's not weird or unusual to face fierce temptations in this life. Don't think you're unique when you're being tempted by evil desire and that nobody else understands how strong it is, that you are doomed to give in because you are dealing with a temptation that nobody else understands. No, you're not facing an impossible challenge.

And "God is faithful." He's not a liar. He won't abandon you. You're not on your own. And he has promised – "he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape." Paul's talking here specifically about the temptation to throw it all away, but this also applies more generally to every-day temptations and trials. "The imagery is that of an army trapped in the mountains, which escapes from an impossible situation through a pass."⁴ Just when you think you cannot persist any more, there will always be a way out.

Craig Blomberg helpfully reminds us – "We never have to give in to temptation; no one 'makes' us sin. Certain factors may generate greater temptations for some individuals than for others, as with the exponential increase in dysfunctional families in our day, but ultimately we are accountable for our own free choices. And for believers, one of those choices remains to accept God's escape-hatch from sin."⁵ Don't believe the lie that you are an addict and you have to do the destructive things you do. Trust this promise and take the escape-hatches he offers.

Blomberg also adds – "Our culture would rewrite the end of verse 13 so that it said, 'But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you don't have to

stand up under it any longer,’ but that of course is the opposite of what God actually inspired Paul to write.”⁶ It says “he will... provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” He will not make it easy, but he will help you endure.

So, what does God do? He confronts and he comforts. He warns us to wake us up, so that we can hear his words of comfort and keep clinging to him in faith. I often have fears about the future? What if I run out of energy to keep going, but I trust God’s promise that “he who began a good work in [me] will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Ph. 1:6). I sometimes think about what ifs. What if Andrea dies and I’m a widower and faced with strong temptations to do something stupid. But I put those fears down by trusting that whatever situation I may come in in the future, the Lord will help me. What if some disaster comes that causes me to doubt God’s goodness? What if I face intense persecution to renounce my faith under pressure? I try not to borrow tomorrow’s troubles and just trust that whatever I face, he will help through it.

God is faithful! Paul’s already said that in the beginning of this letter. 1:8-9 – “[God] will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Similarly, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 – “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

Hear the warnings and hear the comfort, and let the warnings spur you to cling to the promises. It’s true: **not everyone who does Christian things turns out to actually be a Christian.** But that doesn’t have to be true of you. Let this word do it’s work in your life.

The Lord’s Table

As we prepare to come to the Lord’s Table and eat and drink this spiritual meal, maybe some of you are callously living in sin – your heart is cold, you’re in love with the world, you’re involved in sexual sin, you’re prideful, you’re grumbling. Don’t just go through the motions. Repent!

Maybe some of you are very aware of your sin and you have ignored the escape-hatches that God has given you and fallen back into sin and you’re wondering what that means. Is there any hope for you? You too can repent and know God’s forgiveness and love again today. In that story of Israel’s insubordination and the venomous serpents biting the Israelites in Numbers 21, many people died, but some came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you.” And what did God do? He directed Moses to make a bronze serpent, in the likeness of the consequences of their wickedness and to lift that up and whoever looked upon it in faith would be healed. The NT tells us that the bronze serpent was a ‘type’ of Christ, who became sin for us and was lifted up on the cross. And every sinner who looks to him is saved. Fellow sinners, let’s look to him again today... This is your way of escape that he’s provided for you today. Will you take it?

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, November 23, 2025. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

¹ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1958]), 140.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 207.

³ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴ Morris, 144.

⁵ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 199.

⁶ *Ibid.*