

The Book of 1 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Lessons from Israel; Flee Idolatry

1 Corinthians 10:1–33

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter uses Israel's history as a sustained warning and comfort for the church, and what is doctrinally at stake is the reality that those who have received great spiritual privileges can still fall away, together with the meaning of the Lord's Supper and the exclusive claim of Christ. The teacher should present 10:1–12 in line with the whole New Testament: baptism, the Lord's Supper, and a religious heritage are genuine privileges, but they do not guarantee final salvation apart from continued faith and obedience. Israel had every advantage and most still perished. This guards against the presumption that a believer is secure no matter how he lives. Present 10:16–17 as teaching that the Lord's Supper is a true participation in the body and blood of Christ and a sign of the church's unity as one body, and 10:21 as teaching that fellowship with Christ is incompatible with idolatry.

At the same time, the chapter is deeply formational and pastoral. It plants the great promise of 10:13, that God is faithful and always provides a way of escape, right in the middle of the warning, so that sober vigilance never collapses into despair. It exposes the grumbling, craving, and idolatry that still lurk in our hearts and calls us to flee idolatry and to do everything for the glory of God.

Aim, then, for humble watchfulness anchored in God's faithfulness. Send students home freshly sobered out of careless confidence, freshly assured of God's provision in temptation, and freshly resolved to flee their idols and give Christ the exclusive devotion he claims. The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says the Israelites were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all "were baptized into Moses," and all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, "for they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (10:1–4). What do these verses teach about the spiritual privileges Israel enjoyed, and what does it mean that Christ himself was present with them as their Rock?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk through the privileges Paul lists. Israel was under the cloud of God's presence, passed through the sea, was baptized into Moses, and ate and drank miraculous provision. Paul

deliberately describes their experience in terms that echo Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper, drawing a parallel with the Corinthians.

Open up the striking claim that the Rock was Christ (10:4). The Son of God was present with his people in the wilderness, providing for them. This affirms both the pre-existence of Christ and his active presence throughout redemptive history.

Stress the point Paul is building toward. These were not nominal privileges; they were real encounters with God. And yet, as the next verses show, they did not preserve a faithless generation. Privilege without ongoing faith is not enough.

Apply it. The Corinthians, and we, must not imagine that having the sacred privileges of the new covenant guarantees our standing if we drift into sin and unbelief.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Israel's real spiritual privileges, paralleling Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper (10:1–4)
- The pre-existence and active presence of Christ as the Rock (10:4)
- Privilege as genuine but not a guarantee of final salvation
- The parallel Paul draws between Israel and the church
- God's faithful provision to his people in the wilderness

Discussion Prompts

- What privileges did Israel enjoy, and how do they parallel ours?
- What does it mean that the Rock was Christ?
- Why does Paul emphasize how much Israel had before describing their fall?

Question 2

Student Question:

Israel had remarkable spiritual experiences and privileges, and yet most still fell. Are you ever tempted to rest on past spiritual experiences, your baptism, a powerful season, your church background, as if they guaranteed your standing today? Where do you need to move from resting on the past to walking faithfully in the present?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses Israel's example into our tendency to rest on past spiritual experiences as if they secured the present.

Help students name what they lean on: a baptism years ago, a powerful season of faith, a solid church background. These are good, but they are not substitutes for present faithfulness.

Draw the contrast Paul implies. Israel's deliverance at the sea did not save those who later rebelled. Today's walk, not yesterday's experience, is what God calls us to.

Aim for one shift from past to present. Ask each student to name one way they will walk faithfully today rather than coasting on a past experience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Resting on past experiences versus present faithfulness
- Baptism and heritage as good but not self-securing
- Today's walk as God's present call
- Coasting as a spiritual danger

Discussion Prompts

- What past spiritual experience are you tempted to rest on?
- Why is yesterday's experience no substitute for today's walk?
- How will you walk faithfully in the present this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says these things "took place as examples" and "were written down for our instruction" (10:6, 11), pointing to Israel's idolatry, sexual immorality, testing of Christ, and grumbling. Why does God preserve the record of Israel's failures, and what does it tell us about how the Old Testament Scriptures are meant to instruct Christians today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Explain Paul's view of the Old Testament. The records of Israel's failures were written down for our instruction, as examples and warnings (10:6, 11). Scripture is not merely history; it is God teaching his people through history.

Survey the specific sins Paul names: idolatry, sexual immorality, putting Christ to the test, and grumbling. Each had its parallel temptation in Corinth, and each has its parallel in us.

Draw out why God preserves failure stories. They humble our pride, expose our own hearts, and warn us off the same paths. A faith that only reads the victories misses half of Scripture's instruction.

Apply it to how we read the Old Testament. These accounts are for us, ends of the ages, who must learn from those who went before rather than repeat their rebellion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Old Testament written for the instruction of Christians (10:6, 11)

- Scripture as God teaching through history, not mere record
- The specific sins of idolatry, immorality, testing God, and grumbling
- Failure stories that humble and warn us
- Learning from those who went before rather than repeating their sin

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God preserve the record of Israel's failures?
- How are the Old Testament Scriptures meant to instruct us?
- Which of the sins Paul names most parallels our own temptations?

Question 4

Student Question:

Among the sins Paul names is grumbling against God and craving evil things (10:6, 10). Where does grumbling, complaining, or craving what God has not given show up in your own heart? What does that discontent reveal about your trust in God, and what would gratitude put in its place?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the sin of grumbling and craving into the student's own heart. Discontent is so familiar we often fail to see it as sin.

Help students notice their grumbling: complaint about circumstances, craving what God has withheld, quiet resentment toward his providence. Israel's grumbling was treated as rebellion against God himself.

Diagnose what it reveals. Discontent is, at root, distrust, a refusal to believe that God is good and that what he gives is enough.

Aim for the gratitude that displaces it. Ask each student to name one area of grumbling and one specific thing they can thank God for there this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grumbling and craving as sins against God (10:6, 10)
- Discontent as a form of distrust in God's goodness
- Gratitude as the displacement of grumbling
- Trusting that what God gives is enough

Discussion Prompts

- Where does grumbling or craving show up in your heart?
- What does that discontent reveal about your trust in God?

- What could gratitude put in its place this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul warns, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall," and immediately adds that "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" (10:12-13). How do these two verses hold together the sobering warning about falling and the comforting promise of God's faithful provision in temptation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hold the two verses together, for they are meant to be held together. Verse 12 sober: the one who thinks he stands must watch lest he fall. Verse 13 steadies: God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

Explain the warning. Overconfidence is itself a danger; the moment we are sure we could never fall in some area is the moment we stop watching, and the unwatched heart is the vulnerable one.

Explain the promise. No temptation is unique or unbearable; all are common to humanity. God's faithfulness guarantees a way of escape with every temptation. We are never trapped, never without an exit.

Resolve the apparent tension. The warning and the promise are not in conflict. We take heed precisely because we can fall, and we take heart precisely because God always provides the escape. The danger is real; so is the help.

Note the doctrinal point gently. Verse 12 assumes a real possibility of falling, which is why vigilance matters. We are kept, but kept through watchful faith, not in spite of carelessness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The real possibility of falling, requiring vigilance (10:12)
- God's faithfulness and the promised way of escape in every temptation (10:13)
- Overconfidence as itself a spiritual danger
- No temptation as unbearable or without an exit
- Being kept through watchful faith, not careless presumption

Discussion Prompts

- How do verses 12 and 13 balance warning and comfort?
- Why is overconfidence itself dangerous?
- What does it mean that God always provides a way of escape?

Question 6

Student Question:

God promises a way of escape in every temptation, but we must actually take it. Think about a temptation you face again and again. What is the “way of escape” God has likely already provided, and where have you been ignoring it or walking right up to the edge instead of fleeing? What would taking the escape look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the promise of escape into a specific, recurring temptation. The promise is useless to us if we never take the exit God provides.

Help students identify the way of escape concretely. Often it is practical and unspectacular: leave the situation, call a friend, cut off the access, flee rather than linger. The escape usually appears early, before the temptation peaks.

Expose the common failure. We walk right up to the edge, flirt with the temptation, and then wonder why we fell. Taking the escape often means acting sooner, not negotiating with the temptation at all.

Aim for one concrete plan. Ask each student to name a recurring temptation, the escape God has likely provided, and one way they will take it next time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Actually taking the way of escape God provides
- Recognizing the escape, often early and practical
- The failure of walking to the edge rather than fleeing
- A concrete plan for recurring temptation

Discussion Prompts

- What recurring temptation do you face?
- What is the way of escape God has likely already provided?
- Where have you ignored it, and how will you take it next time?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul commands, “Flee from idolatry” (10:14), and points to the Lord’s Supper: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ... we who are many are one body, for we all partake

of the one bread” (10:16–17). What does this teach about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper as a real participation in Christ and a sign of our unity as one body?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the command of 10:14: flee from idolatry. Not resist slowly or manage carefully, but flee. Idolatry is to be run from, as immorality was in chapter 6.

Open up the Lord’s Supper in 10:16–17. The cup of blessing is a participation, a sharing, in the blood of Christ; the bread we break is a participation in his body. The Supper is not an empty ritual but a real communion with Christ in his death.

Draw out the unity dimension. Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body. The Lord’s Supper both joins us to Christ and binds us to one another as his body. It is a deeply corporate act.

Set up the contrast Paul is building. Because the Lord’s table is a real participation in Christ, it cannot be combined with participation at the idol’s table. This prepares for the exclusive claim in verse 21.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The command to flee idolatry, not negotiate with it (10:14)
- The Lord’s Supper as a real participation in the body and blood of Christ (10:16)
- The Supper as communion with Christ in his death, not empty ritual
- One loaf, one body: the unity dimension of the Supper (10:17)
- The Supper as a corporate act binding the church together

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Supper is a participation in Christ’s body and blood?
- How does the one loaf express our unity as one body?
- Why does Paul command us to flee idolatry rather than manage it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Idolatry is rarely about literal statues for us; it is about whatever competes with God for our deepest devotion. What “idols” most tempt you today, money, status, comfort, approval, control, a person? What would it look like this week to flee, rather than negotiate with, the idol that has the strongest grip on you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question translates idolatry into its modern forms. Few of us bow to statues, but all of us are tempted to give our deepest devotion to something other than God.

Help students name the real rivals: money, status, comfort, approval, control, a person, a career. An idol is whatever we serve, fear, or trust in God's place.

Apply the command to flee. With idols of the heart, fleeing means refusing to feed the idol, removing what enthrones it, and deliberately returning devotion to God.

Aim for one act of fleeing. Ask each student to name the idol with the strongest grip and one concrete way to flee rather than negotiate with it this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Idolatry as whatever competes with God for our deepest devotion
- Naming modern idols: money, status, comfort, approval, control
- Fleeing the idol rather than negotiating with it
- Returning devotion to God concretely

Discussion Prompts

- What idols most tempt you today?
- How is an idol of the heart different from a statue, yet just as real?
- What would it look like to flee that idol this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul insists, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:21), and he sums it up: "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (10:31). Why does fellowship with Christ at his table demand a clean break with idolatry, and what does this teach about the exclusive devotion the Lord rightly claims over every part of our lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. Paul states the principle with stark clarity: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:21). Fellowship with Christ and fellowship with idols are mutually exclusive.

Explain what is behind it. Idol feasts were not harmless social events; behind the idols stood demonic powers, and to share in their table was to enter fellowship with them. The Corinthians wanted to keep one foot in the idol's banquet hall and one at the Lord's table. Paul says it cannot be done.

Draw out the exclusive claim of Christ. The Lord does not accept divided worship. Having given himself for us, he rightly claims all of our devotion. This is the first commandment carried into the new covenant: no other gods, no rivals at the table of our hearts.

Widen it with verse 31: whatever we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God. Exclusive devotion is not only about avoiding idol feasts; it is about a whole life ordered toward God's glory, with nothing held back as a private shrine to a rival.

Bring back the chapter's sober note. Israel tried to mix the worship of God with idolatry and fell. The warning of verse 12 stands behind verse 21: do not presume you can flirt with idols and remain Christ's. The call is a clean break and an undivided heart, lived for God's glory in everything.

End with the worth of Christ. Exclusive devotion is not a grim burden but the only fitting response to the One who shed his blood for us and gives himself to us at his table. He is worthy of all of us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The incompatibility of the Lord's table and the table of demons (10:21)
- Idolatry as real fellowship with demonic powers, not harmless custom
- The exclusive devotion Christ rightly claims, the first commandment in the new covenant
- A whole life ordered to the glory of God (10:31)
- The danger of presuming we can mix loyalty to Christ with idolatry, in light of Israel's fall (10:12)
- Exclusive devotion as the fitting response to the worth of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Why are the Lord's table and the idol's table mutually exclusive?
- What does it mean that Christ claims our exclusive devotion?
- How does doing all to the glory of God reshape every part of life?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. Paul warns us with Israel's fall, comforts us with God's faithfulness, and calls us to flee idolatry and live wholly for God's glory. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Corinthians 10 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone asks students to gather the chapter and name one way Christ is forming them. Let them speak first.

If needed, recall the movements: Israel's privileges and fall, the Scriptures as warning, the balance of vigilance and God's faithful provision, and the call to flee idolatry and live for God's glory.

Hold the chapter's two notes together as students respond: sober watchfulness and confident trust in God's faithfulness. Neither careless presumption nor anxious despair.

Push toward the specific and close in prayer that students would watch humbly, take the way of escape, and give Christ undivided devotion this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal formation through humble watchfulness and trust
- Fleeing idolatry and living for God's glory
- Holding vigilance and assurance together
- Moving from general agreement to a specific, named response

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter pressed on you most, and why?
- What is the one truth from 1 Corinthians 10 you most need this week?
- What named step is God asking you to take in response?