

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 10:1-6 - Don't Bank on Your Religion

The more I study this section of chapter 8-10 the more amazed I am at the complexity of the argument that Paul makes. It really is an amazing argument he makes against idolatry and for loving our brothers in the Lord by giving up our rights as Christians.

That was in part why I wanted to get through all of chapter 9 last week because seeing the flow of Paul's argument is sometimes very helpful.

This morning I want to slow down and focus in on these first 5 verses of chapter 10. This is basically a warning passage that he expects his congregation to pay attention to and I think we would do well to pay attention to it as well.

And the warning is basically this: Just because you go through all the motions of being a Christian - and even claim to be a Christian - does not mean you are one. I think we all know this but we constantly need to be reminded that our salvation is not based on simply doing things that Christians do. That would mean our salvation is based on works, on ritual.

Our salvation is based on our faith alone in Jesus alone and that faith is evidenced by a transformed life that seeks to love God and keep his commandments because he first loved us.

True Christians will do Christian things. But doing Christian things doesn't make you a Christian.

Most of you know we're coming up on a holiday where millions of people pretend to be something they're not. They dress up like pirates and ghosts and tigers and football players. They do that, of course, so they can get the reward of sugar and chocolate and sweet things.

Now, not too many people are fooled by this. No one is surprised when they discover this 8 year old is not, in fact, a firefighter - but really a little guy just out for candy.

What *is* surprising, to many of us, is when someone close to us turns out to not really be a Christian. When it seems as though they've just been going through the motions.

What Paul is getting at here is just that. It has always been the case that many people appear to be part of the people of God and it turns out that not all of them actually are.

Jesus said: For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are what? Many. (**Matt. 7:13**)

Many people think they are on the path of salvation, they think they on the path of eternal life, but really they are on a path of religious rituals without any relationship to Jesus at all.

And the warning from history Paul gives us is from the most defining point of Israel's history: the exodus from Egypt. Ellis is taking us through Exodus for Sunday School.

In Exodus we have the people of Israel in slavery in Egypt. They've grown to almost 2 million people and they are slaves. And so God raises up Moses through a series of events to rescue his people out of Egypt. And God pours out the 10 plagues on Egypt.

1) All the water in Egypt turns to blood.

2-4) A plague of where the country is filled with frogs just everywhere.
gnats that were just suffocating and another with flies.

5) The plague where all of the livestock of the Egyptians die - but remember that the livestock of the Israelites don't die. God is making a very clear distinction between the pagans and Israel.

6) Boils that affect only the Egyptians and their livestock.

By the way these things keep happening because the Lord is hardening Pharaoh's heart. He's raising Pharaoh up as a punching bag to show his power.

7) There's the massive hail storm that destroys crops and trees. Think about that. There's hail...in Egypt...during the summer...so bad it destroys the crops. Also while hail is coming down you know what else is coming down? The Bible says fire was coming down. This is probably lightning. But it's the craziest storm since the flood in Egypt.

8-10) There's locusts that eat everything. There's darkness that covers the land. And of course there's the death of the firstborn where God kills the firstborn of every Egyptian in every house. He destroys 15-20% of their population in a night.

By the way: All those plagues? Many scholars believe that each one was an attack on an Egyptian false god. The Egyptians worshipped the sun, so God made it dark for days as an attack on their idolatry of the sun god. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile river as the giver of life? So God turned it to blood and death to show their river god was a false god.

He condemned their idolatry through the plagues.

And then they leave Egypt through the Red Sea that has been parted. They're following a massive pillar of fire, by the way. That's how they can see at night. A column of fire like a tornado is lighting up the night like a massive torch.

They get through the sea running from Pharaoh's army who's following them. Just as they get through, God closes the sea and drowns the entire army of Pharaoh.

So now 2 million Jews are standing on the Sinai peninsula with just the clothes on their back and a few pots and pans. No water, no food. And what's God do? He miraculously feeds them manna from heaven.

The word manna literally means "What it is?" This was not a man-made bread, it was from God. God had opened up a supernatural bakery that delivered all the manna they would need every morning for the whole day. And he did that for 40 years.

He supplied water for them in the middle of the desert. I don't know if you've seen a satellite image of the Sinai peninsula recently. It's basically a 200 mile wide, 200 mile long triangle of sand and rock. There's no blue or green on the map except around the border. Israel lived in the middle of that and God sustained them all.

And here's the crazy part to me. I would have loved to have been there for that. To see the plagues. To see the awesome power of God.

To see sea parted. There's this part in the movie Prince of Egypt - which of course is historically precise in every way - where they're passing through the sea and there's a bolt of lightning and you see this shark light up in the wall of water as they're walking by. It would have been awesome.

They experienced all of that along with God's power at Mt Sinai which was thunder and fire and smoke and angels blaring trumpets and it was so amazing and profound the people were scared to death.

But look at Vs. 5. Read

Here was a whole generation of people who saw God's amazing power and provision and most of them are in hell today. Because they didn't believe and obey the God of Wonders. They were idolaters. **Read 6-7**

They watched one of the most amazing things and they didn't actually believe God.

Look over at **Hebrews 3** for a moment. We have the same warning here. The tragedy of seeing and experiencing amazing things from God and still refusing to believe. **Read 12-19**

The whole nation of Israel that came out - the adults anyway - have become an example for all of us of what not to do.

They never entered the rest of the Promised Land. They came out of Egypt, God said go in to the Promised Land, they were afraid because they didn't believe God could do what he said he would do. They had seen everything he had done in overthrowing the largest and most powerful nation on the planet - and yet they didn't believe he could overtake the Canaanites.

And so their dead bodies filled the desert wilderness. That's why they wandered around.

Back in **1 Corinthians** Paul gives relates a similar warning. Just because you're with the people of God and act like the people of God doesn't mean you're actually part of the people of God.

And he gives us 4 things that we can't bank on for our salvation.

1) Don't bank on your family for your eternal outcome. **Read 1**

So Paul wants the Christians in Corinth to understand that their family heritage doesn't define who they are - for good or for bad. And he calls the Israelites "our fathers" which is a very interesting term.

It's interesting first because in Corinth there were Jews and Gentiles in the Church but all the people in the Exodus were Jewish. He sees a spiritual connection between Israel and the Church. There's a lot of people who want to say that Israel and the Church are completely separate entities. Well, there are some distinctions, but it's hard to deny that there are connections.

Paul says in **Eph. 2** that through faith in Jesus we've been made 1.

Paul says in **Romans 11** that through faith Gentiles have been grafted in to Israel.

In **Galatians 6** Paul says that all those who have faith are the Israel of God.

So we have a connection to Israel of old through faith in Jesus. When we were going through Nehemiah in our men's Bible study I would joke that we were learning about grandpa Nehemiah. He's our great great great grandfather in the faith. I'm not Jewish, so there's no physical connection. But through faith in Jesus I become part of the family of God.

Here, we see that the fathers of the faith - just like the church now - are sometimes a lesson in what to do and sometimes a lesson in what not to do. Here the lesson is in what not to do. **Read 1,5-6**

So God was unhappy with most of our fathers who came out of Egypt and they are an example of what not to do.

Sometimes we have to have family conversations and tell our children, "You know uncle so and so, yeah don't do what he does. That's the definition of foolishness." "You know cousin so and so - take a look a what they do and just...not."

He says all these amazing things involved in the Exodus happened to our **fathers**. These are people who were part of the physical people of Israel. They were the people that God appears to have rescued out of slavery but in the end God himself puts them to death in the desert because of their disobedience.

And so this cuts 2 ways. First, just because you or your family go to church or identify as Christian or go through Christian motions does not mean you're part of the redeemed people of God.

God brought millions of people out of Egypt - they looked like the covenant people. But over a million of them died in the desert. They were part of a group called Israel. A group that God blessed in many ways. But most were not believers.

Jesus says there will be many on the last day who say to him “Lord, Lord did we not do this and that. And he will say to them: Depart from me you workers of iniquity, I never knew you.”

They called him Lord, they did many things, they identified with the church, they went to youth group, they volunteered but their lives were as workers of lawlessness. They never repented.

So just because you or your family identifies as Christian, doesn't mean that you are.

But this goes the other way too. Just because your family is disobedient or not truly saved does not define who **you are** now. Just because other people who claim to be Christian in the church or in your family fail miserably or turn out to be utter hypocrites doesn't mean that has to be your lot in life.

That's what Paul is getting at: You know you're fathers who saw all that amazing stuff: **don't be** like them. Which means we don't have to be like them.

Not only should we not be surprised that this happens - because it has always happened that those who claim to be the people of God are not - but do something about it. Change it. Learn from them what not to do!

Not so much here but in many Christian circles there's talk of generational sin. Generational sin is this idea that somehow the sin of my parents and grandparents can get passed down to me and it will plague me all my life just by virtue of our relation.

That's not true. There might be sins that we struggle with that our parents struggle with or grandparents struggle with. It might even be that they taught us those sins. But that's not always the case. Sometimes we struggle with other sins entirely.

As Christians we're not subject to some sort of fatalistic cosmic force that inevitably forces us to follow in our parents' footsteps. We have the choice to put our sin to death. We have the choice to obey the Lord Jesus.

So don't bank on your family for your eternal outcome - either good or bad. Your faith - **your faith** - in Jesus alone is what matters in the eternal scheme of things.

2) Don't bank on your baptism for your salvation. Now, here's where it gets interesting. **Read 1-2**

Basically the point Paul is going to make here is that there's a sense in which Israel got baptized and Israel took communion and yet most of Israel was destroyed by God because he was mad at them for their idolatry.

What do you mean Israel got baptized? Well, Paul is making a clever observation here. He sees in the exodus a type of baptism. When the 2 million people follow the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night they are led through the Red Sea. And so, in a way, Israel is in water. It's as though they were baptized.

God delivered them out of Egypt and he baptized them in the Red Sea.

It's like for us, we are saved by faith in Jesus, then we get dunked in the tank.

We are baptized into Christ, our mediator of the New Covenant. But Israel was baptized into Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant.

And his point to the Corinthians is, “Look at Israel. There's a sense in which they all got baptized. But did that saved them from the wrath of God?” Absolutely not.

Listen, your baptism is a good and necessary thing. If you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, your first act of obedience is to be baptized. It's to get dunked.

1 Pet 3:21 says we get baptized as a type of prayer to God for a clean conscience. We also get baptized as a way to publicly declare that we have faith in him and identify with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection.

But listen: baptism is just an outward sign. And the sign is only as good as the faith the person has.

Baptism is like wearing a baseball jersey. If someone signs a contract with the Mariners, they put on a Seattle Mariners jersey to show everyone that they're on the team. That's just what they do as part of the team.

But you and I could put on a Mariners jersey, couldn't we? Does that mean we're on the team? No. It means we're wearing a Mariners jersey.

In the same way, just getting baptized is like putting on the Christian jersey. But baptism only really matters if you're actually on the team; it doesn't prove you are on the team.

I've baptized dozens of people over the years. Many, it turns out, aren't on the team. I didn't know that, they probably didn't know that.

Paul says - just like Israel - just because you go through the water doesn't mean you're on God's team.

3) Related to that: Don't bank on taking communion for your salvation. Paul does the same thing with the Lord's Supper that he does with baptism. **Read 1-4**

So Paul is again making some spiritual connections between OT Israel and the Church. They got baptized, in a manner of speaking. So do we. They took communion - spiritual food - in a manner of speaking and so do we.

What spiritual food and spiritual drink did the Israelites eat and drink? Well, it was the manna and the water. The manna was spiritual in a sense because it was given by God. He supernaturally provided the manna to sustain the people in the wilderness.

When the people got up every morning to go collect their manna they were reminded that a sovereign God supernaturally provided for them and sustained them. He was good and took care of them in a sandy wilderness where it was impossible to grow anything.

And the spiritual drink Paul is talking about is actually the physical water that God provided for Israel in the desert. Remember, the Sinai peninsula is sand and rock. It's the size of the top half of Idaho except all rock and sand. And God provided water for 2 million people for 40 years. That's a lot of water. I always imagined it was this like garden hose people came to and filled up their pots with. No. It was a medium sized river to supply water to a population of 4 times Spokane county.

And every time they went down to get their water they were reminded that this water was not normal. It was not natural. It was spiritual - provided by the Lord to sustain them.

Paul says that was like their communion. Every day they ate and drank this food and water that was supplied by God who is himself spirit.

And these people literally ate and drank supernatural, spiritual food and water every day for 40 years and rejected God for idols. That seems incredible. That seems impossible.

Paul uses that situation to warn us that the same thing happens in churches week in and week out when people take the Lord's Supper.

In the same way when take the Lord's Supper it is more than just physical food. It is spiritual food. It's a reminder that the Lord laid down his life for our sins. When our teeth crush the cracker we are reminded of the spiritual reality that Jesus was crushed for our sins.

And when we take the cup we are reminded of the blood that Jesus shed for our sins. We encouraged again by grace. We are strengthened by a Savior who will never leave us nor forsake us.

But for those who are not believers, it's nothing more than a preschool snack juice and crackers. You can take the Lord's Supper a million times and it adds absolutely nothing to your salvation.

If you take 40 years x 365 days you get 14,600. Some of these people had eaten this spiritual food - this proto communion - over 14,000 times. And God was displeased with them for their unbelief and idolatry.

Taking spiritual food and drink has never added to salvation. It's never ensured someone is, in fact a Christian. So we can't bank on it to prove our salvation.

4) Don't bank on God's blessings in your life as a sign that you're saved. There's an unusual incident that Paul mentions here in relation to all of this. **Read 4**

In the wilderness there were basically 2 times when Moses miraculously got water from a rock. That's a pretty amazing thing, by the way: water doesn't normally just come out of rocks. But in the wilderness it did.

Now, the OT only records 2 times when this happened. But apparently Jewish scholars had passed down a tradition - that Paul seems to verify - that there was a massive rock that sort of followed the people around in the desert perpetually providing water for the people. It was like God was moving this massive boulder that was providing a river of water for his people.

Paul says that the rock was Jesus. Not that it was literally Jesus, but that Jesus was the one who provided this water for them.

But they would have seen this blessing day in and day out for decades.

And those Israelites could have pointed to God's blessing as a sign that they were saved. "Hey, God's moving with us, he's providing for us and so he must be happy with us! We're good - God's on our side."

All the while they were committing gross acts of sexual immorality and idolatry.

So here's the danger: just because there are blessings in your life does not mean that God is pleased with you.

Jesus says that the Father pours out rain on the just and the unjust. And he causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust. Sometimes, y'all, it feels like the unjust are getting more blessings than we are. That God is more for the ungodly than for his own chosen people that he has redeemed.

That's not true, but it can often feel like that.

But here's also the trap: people who think they are Christians when they are not can deceive themselves because they say "Look, God's following me around like that rock in the wilderness blessing me. God would never bless someone who's not his child. He's blessing me so I must be good to go."

Not true. Financial success, marital success, popularity, knowledge, power...none of those things ensure that you are part of the Kingdom.

How do you know you're in the Kingdom?

It's when your only hope in life and death is Jesus. Not your family, not baptism, not communion, not service or religious experience or God blessing you. It's just Jesus. His sacrifice for your sin and his righteousness for your justification.

And that your faith in Jesus is such that it moves you to holiness and godliness. It moves you to be like the one who saved you.

Listen, the warning is here - like all warning in the Bible - as a grace of God. He warns us because he loves us and wants us to draw near to him through faith and obedience.

Pray