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The Danger of Overconfidence

10: 1-22

The exercise of our **freedom in Messiah**, absent self-control, can lead to excess. And excess, if left unchecked, can **disqualify** our witness to those around us. That's the point **Paul** wanted to hammer home. And **he** used a perfectly appropriate biblical illustration to do so.

The Israelites were supposed to be a witness to the world. **They** suffered as slaves under the iron-fisted rule of the wicked pharaoh's of Egypt. In rather dramatic fashion, **YHVH** delivered **His people** and led **them** to the safety of their own Land. **ADONAI** led **them** by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. **He** led **them** through the Sea of Reeds. **He** supernaturally provided **them** with daily food and water. Yet, with all of those blessings and daily reminders of **God's** presence and provision, **they set their hearts on evil things (10:6)** and became immoral idolaters. Consequently, some were destroyed **by snakes (10:9)**. Still others were **destroyed by the Destroying Angel (10:10)**. At one point **23,000 died in a single day (10:8)**. And eventually that entire generation died in the wilderness. **Their** hard-hearted behavior disqualified **their** witness. This is the lesson we can learn from.



What we're sensing from the pen of **Paul** is the tension that exists between our **freedom in Messiah** and legalism. Legalism involves a man-made list of rules that,

by their very nature, tend to be arbitrary and will differ from person to person. Legalism is the mentality that says **God** gave us 613 commandments in the Torah (365 negative mitzvot and 248 positive mitzvot), but still, **He** left out a few. So, we're going to help **Him** out by adding to the list. Not only that, we're going to judge others who don't follow our rules. Invariably, however, when we add to the list, we come up with a catalog of absolute statements for which we have no scriptural backing. The comforting thing about such a list is that we don't have to exercise any sort of discernment; we just keep the rules. Black and white. Problem is, with no scriptural backing, many people rebel against the list and are viewed by others who are devoted to the list as sinful and unspiritual.

That being said, if we opt for **freedom in Messiah** versus legalism, we quickly encounter the reality that **for me, everything is permitted? Maybe, but as far as I am concerned, I am not going to let anything gain control over me (6:12)**. In other words, exercising my **freedom in Messiah**, if left unchecked, might result in behaviors that are harmful rather than beneficial. I might even find myself mastered by, or addicted to, something that might ultimately lead to my testimony to others being disqualified. Therefore, **Paul** rightly opted for **freedom in Messiah** over legalism, but with this one caveat: Don't let your **freedom in Messiah** do to you what it did to **the Israelites**.²⁴⁷

With that in mind, **Paul** tells **them** to **run away from idolatry**. In more literal terms, **they separate** themselves completely from anything even close to **idol** worship. This echoes the reaction of **Joseph** who literally bolted from a woman attempting to seduce **him (Genesis 39:7-12)**. It's not that **the** man-made **idols themselves** had any power, **Paul** continues, but the **demons** lurking behind **them** did. **Participating** in **the Lord's Supper** connected **them** to **Him**. And in the same way, **the Corinthians** would **become sharers** with **demons** if **they** willingly **participated** in pagan **sacrificial** feasts.

One of the surest ways to fall into temptation and sin is to become overconfident. Many of **the Corinthians** thought that **they** felt perfectly secure in how **they** conducted **their** lives. **They** had arrived. **Paul** surely had that attitude in mind with **his** sarcastic rebuke of **4:8-14**. **They** were saved, baptized, well taught, lacking no spiritual gift, and presumably mature. **They** thought **they** were strong enough to freely associate with **pagans** in **their** ceremonies and social activities and not be affected morally or spiritually, as long as **they** did not participate in outright idolatry or immorality. But, **Paul** tells **them** **they** were self-deceived.

When a believer becomes so confident of his strength that he thinks he can handle any situation, he is overconfident and in great danger of **falling**. **Paul** summarizes: **Therefore, let anyone who thinks he is standing up be careful not to fall (10:12)!** The danger is not **falling** from salvation, but of **falling** from holiness and disqualifying our witness to the world. It is a serious danger that **the Lord** does not take lightly.²⁴⁸