

But then suddenly, an old hamstring injury in his leg flared up, and he fell to the ground in agonising pain. Naturally, the other runners finished ahead of him, and then several officials came onto the track over to Derek as he crouched there.

Suddenly, he got back on his feet, and he started to sort of limp and half hop at the last 150 metres or so to the finishing line. The officials who were there were urging him to get off the track.

[10:23] The race was over, and they wanted to get on, but he just pushed them away. Suddenly, his father came onto the track as well, went up to his son, put his arm around him, and shooing away any officials who were now trying to get them both off the track.

They together finished the race that Derek had begun, to a standing ovation from the crowd watching on, the cheers and the like. How we start the Christian life, which Paul likens to a race, is not as important as how we finish it.

I'll say that again. How we start the Christian race is not as important as how we finish it. And the church in Corinth was a church that had started the race well.

We read about that in Acts 18, where Paul went and preached the gospel. The church is established. Many are converted. A wonderful work is taking place. So much so, says Paul, earlier on we read about this, that there were those who were slanderers, swindlers, sexually immoral, homosexuals, adulterers, and so on and so forth.

These were the people that were converted and saved and brought into the church. They'd started so well, but now, as Paul writes them, he is very much afraid that they may not finish the race, that they may not compete and complete the course, which is why at the end of chapter 9, we have this, even concerned for himself, I myself may not be disqualified for the prize.

[12:05] They had become sidelined by old problems that had flared up. Sinful attitudes, sinful ways of doing things, which they had carried over from their pre-conversion days into the life that they now live for Christ.

They stressed their individual rights. They quarreled over personal preferences with one another. They condoned immoral behavior, and they had very little regard for one another's conscience. Paul was deeply concerned for them. So right back in chapter 3, he spoke of them as being worldly, mere infants in Christ, and not spiritual.

He'd already given them some very clear pointers, some very clear teaching, and instruction about these failings, and how they should be seen for what they are and doubt with. And in the last chapter particularly, we saw how he elevated his own example and showed them that by his own life, this was how you are to live for Christ, a life which is devoted to him and to his gospel, not a life which is caught up with all of these other temporary and foolish things.

And now to continue to back up, as it were, his own example and the way that he has lived for Christ, he then brings and draws examples to their mind from their spiritual forefathers, from those Israelites who we're told whose history was written down as a warning for us here in verse 11.

[13:42] Now these Corinthians, of course, were not Jews, so when he talks about their ancestors, he's talking about their spiritual ancestors, the Israelites. Because as the Bible tells us, everyone who is in Christ is of the seed of Abraham.

We are a child of Abraham, our spiritual forefather. And so, Paul wants them to see that these two families of the church, the Old Testament and the New Testament, share a great deal in common. and that the lessons that have to be learned have to be learned for God's people today just as they needed to be learned for God's people of old. There is nothing new under the sun, says the writer of Ecclesiastes.

Those of you who are getting a little longer in the tooth, including myself, see again and again, repetition, things that were happening decades ago still happening today.

The same problems, the same difficulties, the same needs. But there's a great deal of common experience between God's people now and God's people throughout the ages, even all the way back through into the Old Testament.

[14:53] And so that's what he talks about there in verse 1. I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud. They all passed through the sea.

He's talking, of course, about that great deliverance of God through the Red Sea when he brought God's people out of slavery by his grace and power. That's something that we've experienced if we're a Christian.

God's great salvation, delivering us from sin and slavery to our old master, bringing us out into this living relationship with God.

He says in verse 2 that we have both been baptized into a new relationship with God. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

They were baptized into and through a mediator. Notice they were baptized there into Moses. It was Moses whom God gave them as a deliverer, a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, one who gave them God's word, one through whom God gave them provision for forgiveness of sin in the sacrifices, and so on.

[16:04] He is our type of the Lord Jesus Christ into whom we are baptized, through whom we have forgiveness for our sins. Baptism is a symbol of unity.

It's aligning ourselves with somebody. So we are baptized into Christ's name or into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are uniting ourselves or aligning ourselves or identifying ourselves or our children with that same God.

And clearly the baptism that Paul is speaking about here is that spirit baptism, not that water baptism, because, of course, there was no water involved.

Nobody got wet, did they, when they went through the Red Sea? That's the wonderful thing about it. Not even the soles of their feet were wet. It's that spirit baptism that is necessary.

1 Corinthians, as we'll see later on, for we were all baptized with one spirit, so as to form one body. That's the important baptism. That's the baptism that matters.

[17:05] Not whether we were baptized with water as infants or adults. The baptism of the matter is, are we baptized with the Spirit? This is what we're going to see all the way through. That there are external things associated with being a child of God, one of God's people, but they are not the things that save us.

We see as well, verse 3, that they were sustained and provided for in their journey from God's goodness and from Christ's supply. They all ate the same spiritual food.

That's the manna, isn't it, that came down to them. They drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that was Christ. To occasions, when they were in the wilderness, when God commanded Moses to draw water from a rock.

And on both those occasions, the rock opened and water was given. And Paul says, this rock is a picture of the Lord Jesus. And of course we know that's very true.

Jesus said himself in John 4, whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. He spoke of himself, of course, about being the manna. I'm the living bread that comes down from heaven.

[18:18] John chapter 6. Jesus is the one who provided for them, that living water. And Jesus is the one who quenches our spiritual thirst.

So, God's people in the Old Testament who were brought out of slavery and on their way, on their race, on the journey to the promised land, that picture of heaven, made a good start.

They experienced God's power in their lives, delivering them and setting them free. They experienced this baptism into Moses. They had their needs met over the course of several years, so much so, we're told, that later on, Moses speaks to them and says, look, the sandals on your feet didn't wear out.

The clothes on your body didn't rot or wear out. God provided. And yet, and this is, of course, the fact that Paul does not want us to be ignorant of, is this, verse 5, nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them.

Their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. That's what he wants us not to be ignorant of, that in spite of all the blessings that they enjoyed and experienced, in spite of all that God did for them, in spite of all that they, they themselves did as well and experienced, the majority of them did not reach the promised land.

[19:38] The majority of them fell short of the finishing line. when they died in the desert. Now that raises a very important question, doesn't it?

What went wrong? How could they have started so well with the power and the grace and the mercy of God? How could they have experienced all these things in God's supply and nourishment and feeding and yet still fail to make it to the end?

And as those of us who declare ourselves to be Christians, declare ourselves to be those who are baptized into Christ, who are fed and drink from the spiritual rock of Christ, isn't there a warning here?

Can we be sure that we are going to make it to heaven? Can we be sure that we truly will arrive there? Or will we, like these people of old, God's people of old, fail to reach the finishing line? What went wrong? What went wrong? Clearly, as we've seen, there's a link. Paul is making a strong link between God's people in the Old Testament, God's people in the New Testament, the Corinthian church today and the church of God before.

[20 : 53] And in one sense, what he's saying is this, Corinthians, you have received so much from God, you have started so well in the race, but you must be aware of the fact that you may not make it.

you must be aware that there is a chance that you too will fall short at the end. And so he tells us in verse 6 that these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things. They're given as examples of how not to live the Christian life. They're given as examples of how not to follow Christ or follow God. They are those examples not to imitate, but to avoid.

And there's four examples that he brings out here. Four examples from incidents in the Old Testament, particularly in Numbers, but also in Exodus as well, that show what we are to avoid, to help us.

They are those hurdles that we are to run around or jump over and not to be tripped up on. They are those sins that so easily ensnare us and keep us from following to the end.

[22 : 12] First of all, Paul says in verse 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 revelry.

What's he talking about? Seems very clear. He's talking about that incident in Exodus 32. In that time, God had spoken to Moses and called him to go up to the mountain and the people became impatient.

So impatient did they become that they said to Aaron, make for us an idol to lead us. Make us gods, they said in Exodus chapter 32, verse 1.

Make us gods who go before us. And Aaron foolishly, as you know, got them to give him his gold and he fashioned together a golden calf.

An idol, a statue of a calf as they probably had seen even when they were back in Egypt. And in chapter 32, verse 8, we're told, they bowed down to it and sacrificed to it.

[23 : 18] What's that idolatry? What has their idolatry in the past got to do with the Corinthians? Is it just simply a matter of avoiding having statues? Are we good Bible Christians simply because we do not have a statue of Jesus here or a cross there or a crucifix?

No, an idol is much more than that. An idol is anything that takes the place of God in our lives. Anything that we love more than God.

Anything that we worship more than God. Anything that we trust more than God is an idol. Well, what's so wrong with that? What's so wrong with having idols?

Because idolatry is actually the activity of saying this thing is better than God to me. This thing is more desirable than God to me.

It is more pleasing to God to me. It is more worthy of my faith than God is. That's exactly what they were doing, weren't they? In bowing down and worshipping and offering sacrifice to this calf, they were saying this is our God, this is the God who we can trust, this is the God we can help, this God of Moses, we don't know about him, we don't know if we can trust him or if he deserves our worship, but this one we do.

[24 : 38] It's the transference of our love, of our hearts to anyone or anything. Remember for the Corinthians, they had all sorts of idols, didn't they?

Their rights, we looked at that, didn't we? My rights is the most important thing in my life. We recognize that that's something of the thinking of our own day and age.

There's something much more important than right or wrong. It's my right to do with my life as I please. Their freedom to do whatever they wanted was more important and they had become close to committing idolatry in setting up in their own hearts, in their own lives, self-serving pleasure.

Is that true of you and me, dear friends? Are there those things in our lives, whoever, there may be people, there may be family members, there may be possessions, there may be our job, there may be all sorts of matters, there may be our own delights, our hobbies, there may be our own particular ways.

And as long as God doesn't cross us on them, all is fine. But they are the most important thing when it comes down to it.

[25 : 52] It's idolatry. Then we see, of course, that they fell into the sin of immorality. Verse 8, we should not commit sexual immorality as some of them did.

And in one day, 23,000 of them died. Again, Paul seems to be thinking of another event. It's in Numbers 25. It's a time when some Moabite women seduced a number of Israelite men so they committed sexual immorality with them, but also engaged in the worship of the god Baal. We're told that God sent a destroying angel and many of them were killed. Now, in the Corinthian church, as we've seen, sorry, in Corinth itself, rather, there were all sorts of temples, pagan temples to various gods.

And as part of the worship of those gods, temple prostitutes were engaged and men and women would sleep with and have sexual relationship with a prostitute as their way of worshipping their pagan gods.

We've seen, of course, that in the church at Corinth, sexual immorality was something which actually they didn't care too much about. They thought it was quite a good thing because if you could be free to exercise your sexual desires and still be accepted by God, it was a sign that God's grace was so big that you could do whatever you like and God would accept you.

[27 : 31] They thought that this magnified God's grace. In chapter 5, Paul writes, it's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and then verse 6, your boasting is not good.

They were boasting, look at us, we're so free in the grace of God that it doesn't matter how we sin and what we accept. And sadly, sadly, they were so very wrong and yet we see it in the church today, even now.

God accepts everybody. Yes, he does. But he doesn't accept every practice. He doesn't accept every way of living. He doesn't say that all these things are equal.

He says that one is right and one is wrong. We thought about that this morning too. The Corinthians were those who were being pressurized into the example of the world around about them.

And for us, dear Christians, that is the real struggle that we have, not only in the matter of sexual immorality, but in every area as well, we are being pressurized to compromise, to become more and more like and to take on board the attitudes, the mindset, the way of doing things that the world around about us does, just as the Moabites did to God's people of old.

[28 : 48] And that opens us up to destructive and dangerous sinful practices. and the truth of the matter is, very sadly, that a large part of the Christian church in the UK is engaged in those things whereby it is seen that if the world accepts it, we should accept it.

If the world says that's okay, we should say that's okay. That the authority rests upon popularity. The authority rests upon what is the common consensus of the majority, not what is it that God says in his word.

Thirdly, the example that Paul brings here is a matter of ingratitude. He writes there after he's mentioned that sexual immorality, we should not test Christ as some of them did and were killed by snakes.

Now we know what he's talking about there because that incident is written in Numbers 21. This time, God's people were caused to sin over the food that God was giving them, the manna.

They were ungrateful for what God had done for them and was giving them and so they complained. They said in Numbers 21, we detest this miserable food.

[30 : 06] That's the miraculous manna that God sent every morning for them. They provoked God to anger by moaning about him. complaining about him.

They were dissatisfied with his goodness and they wanted more. In other words, the sin was greed. Dissatisfaction.

Isn't that what motivates a lot of people in their lives today? Every day, particularly every Saturday, if you go to the post office, you'll have to wait behind a queue of people getting their lottery tickets.

And they are greedy because they're dissatisfied. and their hope is that if only I could have more money, then my life would be better. My life would be happier.

I would not be dissatisfied. And we too, dear friends, can be sucked into such a frame of mind without realizing it. how often do we express our thankfulness to God for what we have.

[31 : 10] That's why it's so good that we say grace before a meal, isn't it? It's good to do that. I know it can become a habit, but it's a good thing. Father, we thank you for what you're giving us. Because we can become so ungrateful, we can become so ungrateful for what God has given us.

And again, we find that pressure upon us around and about. If only, look at those people down the road. They've just bought a new car. Ah, look at what you've given me, God.

This old banger that I have to keep patching up and repairing. Look at what they've got, that big 50-inch TV on the screen with plasma. Oh!

Why can't I have one of those? There's a natural sinful tendency, isn't there? To be dissatisfied with what God has given us. Not to be grateful. How much do I thank God?

How much of my prayer is actually giving thanks to God for what he's got? And how much of my prayer is about, God, give to me this and give to me that and I want this.

[32 : 16] And it doesn't just have to be physical things. It doesn't just have to be material things. There can be an ingratitude in our hearts for the spiritual blessings we have. And fourthly here, dear friends, we find that they committed the sin of insolence.

Verse 10, do not grumble as some of them did and were killed by the destroying angel. They were grumbling against God. People were insolent towards God. They spoke badly of him is what we find.

We're not sure exactly what this incident is but it seems to me that it comes from the time in Numbers 16 where we have the rebellion of Korah. And just to remind you of that situation, Korah and some of his friends were very unhappy by the fact that God had appointed Moses and Aaron to lead them.

And so they spoke against Moses and Aaron and they said to them, who do you think you are? We are able to lead God's people just as much as you are. We're able to do this and do that.

And what happened was that because they grumbled against God and his servants, they were put to death. God was stirred up by their grumbling and they were put to death.

[33 : 30] But what happened was after that, God's people were angry with God for killing Korah and punishing him. And so they complained at Moses and Aaron and said, you killed God's people.

when in fact it was the Lord himself. What was happening was this. These people were much, their sin was even more grievous than the sin of ingratitude.

It was outright rebellion against God, against those that he had set up to lead. But it was more than that. It was accusing God of doing wrong by punishing the wicked. Korah and the others had acted wickedly and God had punished them and they said, that was wrong of you, God.

That's a serious thing, isn't it? To say, God, you are doing wrong. You are acting wickedly. Now, I don't believe that many of us or any of us do that consciously.

But is there not within our hearts at times an attitude to God which is something akin to that? Lord, why have you allowed me to suffer this thing?

[34 : 48] Why, oh Lord, am I going through such a difficulty as this? And behind it there is almost the accusation which is saying to God, you've done wrong in letting me suffer this way.

You've done wrong in allowing me to go through such grief or sorrow or difficulty in this way. Now, we don't say it but it's there. At least the seed of it is there.

What Paul is saying in all these things, whether it be their immorality, their adultery, their insolence, their ingratitude, the end result for every single one of those sins was this, death.

They died in the wilderness. They didn't make it to the end. And Paul is saying, look, this is not ancient history. Verse 11, these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.

For us on whom the culmination of the ages has come, what does he mean? He means on us who've received greater privileges and blessings than them. God's people in the Old Testament had just the shadow, we have the reality.

[35 : 59] They had the outward appearance, we had the substance. Everything that they lived for and hoped for we have seen fulfilled in the coming of Jesus.

The sacrifices pointed to his cross. The water from the rock pointed to his quenching our thirst and so on and so forth. We have received such great privileges from God, privileges to see things that they could not see, to understand things they could not understand.

But that blessing that we have must not cause us to become self-confident. Verse 12, If you think you're standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

We stand by God's grace alone. We know that. But that should make us all the more aware of our inability to please God and make us all the more aware of our own need of his grace.

Three things to close, which Paul speaks about here, to help us. How can you and I avoid these sins? How can we avoid this way of behavior?

[37 : 19] how can we avoid not finishing the race? First of all, by thinking of ourselves with genuine humility.

If you think you're standing firm, be careful you don't fall. Whatever sin they fell into, we are just as susceptible of falling into as well.

Whatever mistakes others make, whatever failures, whatever sins, whatever struggles they have, we are no better than they.

We have no more power or strength to overcome those things than they. We are just as likely to fall. Do you remember that boast of Peter just before Christ's death when Jesus said, the shepherd will be struck and all the sheep will scatter?

And Peter said this, even if everyone else falls away, I won't. Have you ever said that to yourself or thought that to yourself? When somebody has sinned or fallen into sin, somebody has passed back slidden and gone away from the Lord, has there been within your heart, well that's never going to happen to me.

[38 : 36] I'm never going to sin in that way. I'm never going to let you down, Lord. I'm always going to be faithful. Please, dear friends, please, dear friends, don't think of yourself higher than you should.

With genuine humility, remember that you're a sinner, as fallen, as helpless as any other, and but for the grace of God. That sin would be your sin.

Secondly, dear friends, we need as well to avoid such sin by excusing sin in our lives, by saying the temptation was too great and I couldn't help it.

That's what Paul says, no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man and God is faithful. Well, you don't know the sin that I've committed, you don't realize just how hard it was, you just don't realize that I just couldn't help but sinning.

Saul said something, that King Saul back in Samuel 13, 1 Samuel 13. Samuel had said to him, don't offer any sacrifices, make sure you destroy all the things, do as God has commanded.

[39 : 54] And Saul, when he failed and failed, he said, I felt compelled to do it. In other words, I couldn't help it. I had to do it, I had to sin, I had to do this thing which I thought was the right thing to do.

Dear friends, let's give no excuse to sin. We can so easily. While the temptation is so strong, it's so hard and yes, it is hard and the temptation is strong and yes, it is difficult.

Dear friends, if it was easy for us to live the Christian life then we wouldn't need the Holy Spirit of God but we do need Him. It is not easy. It never has been easy.

It will not be easy for you. It is not easy for me. And so Paul's last, as it were, instruction to us to keep us from sinning against God is this.

Look to the exit that God has provided. God is faithful, verse 13, He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear so none of us can say that we couldn't help it but when you are tempted He will also provide a way out.

[41 : 04] God always provides a way out. Do you remember Joseph? Not the stepfather of Jesus but Joseph back in Genesis 39, that godly young man who was placed into prison, taken from prison and became the servant of Potiphar and he worked hard and looked after his master but his master's wife, Potiphar's wife, took a fancy to Joseph and she wanted him to commit adultery with her and he kept saying no until one day we're told that she caught him by his cloak and said to him, come to bed with me but he left his cloak and ran out the house.

That's a great example of how we get away from sin. Get out the exit that God has provided. If there is a sin that is tempting you at this time, dear friends, then there is an exit that God has provided.

There is a way out for you. He does not leave you to, as it were, be overcome and to be vanquished by that sin. Take the exit that God has given.

Why does God say these things? Why does he give us these examples? Because he wants us to see, dear friends, that it is possible with his grace and power to finish the race.

Yes, we may stumble and fall, we will stumble and fall. There is no doubt about it that you and I, even in these next few days, will be tempted and we will sin.

[42 : 47] It is going to happen. It is going to happen. But we have one who lifts us, who sustains us, who keeps us, who carries us.

If you have started the Christian race, dear friends, let me ask you, how are you faring now? You may have started with great joy and excitement and prayerfulness and Bible study and you may have started with attending every possible meeting you could and being with God's people and sharing the gospel.

How are you faring now? Has that old injury, that old sin, that old habit flared up again? selfishness, selfishness, selfishness, greed, carelessness.

Dear friends, let's bring them to Christ to be dealt with. Let's ask Him to heal. Let's ask Him to change. Let's ask Him to work that we may tarry on running.

Yes, like Jacob, we may have to hop a little bit and limp a little bit, but let us keep on going in the strength and with the grace that God provides.

[44 : 02] The writer of the Hebrews says this, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, those men and women of God who have gone before us, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. May God give us the grace to run the race, to finish the course.

to cross the line. Let's sing together. Our final hymn this evening is a prayer.

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour, dwell in me from day to day. 642. Let's make this our prayer as well. Verse 5 says this, May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe, looking only unto Jesus as I onward go.

Let's sing 642. May the mind of Christ, my Saviour, live in me from day to day.

[45 : 36] by His love and power controlling, all I do and say. May the word of God will wish me in thy heart proper to arm, so that all may see as I am holy to his power.

May the love of Jesus build me as the waters build the sea, in exalting, in exalting, self-evasing, this is victory.

may the love of Jesus may his beauty rest upon me as I see the lost to him, and may they forget the shadow seeing only him.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

[47 : 48] Amen.