

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING QUESTION

Can I now be certain of heaven?
When does that certainty become presumption?

RECAP

Use material from p1 of these notes to give some background to the issues

QUESTIONS

READ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Describe how Paul sees the Christian life. Why is it like a race?
What is Paul's daily routine like?
How (in the context of 1 Cor 9) does Paul 'make himself a slave/servant'?
What is the link between concern-that-many-others-are-saved and not-being-disqualified? surely behaving flexibly isn't how to deserve heaven?!

READ 1 Corinthians 10:1-11

How are we just the same as Israel-in-the-OT?
What is the shock in the OT story of Israel?
So what is the example for us (6, 11) from what happened to Israel? where did Israel go wrong?
Why is Paul telling us this here (after what he said in 9:24-27)?

READ 1 Corinthians 10:11-13

What is the lesson for us that Paul draws from the story of Israel?
Do you think 12-13 are written as a comfort for Christians, or as a warning?
How does God demonstrate his faithfulness to us?
How do these three verses fit, after 9:24-27 and after 10:1-11?

APPLICATION

Can I now be certain of heaven?
When does that certainty become presumption?
When do I need the warning of 10:12?

If 8:1-13 was about a concern for the salvation of my fellow Christians, and 9:1-23 about a concern for the salvation of non-Christians ... what is this passage about?

What should I be doing in response to all this?
If I was more like Paul in 9:24-27, what would I be doing?
How can we help one another not to be presumptuous?
How can we help each other give due attention to our own 'taking heed'?
Pray these things for one another right now ... lots!

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13

1 Corinthians 8-10 at a glance

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a reply to a letter they'd previously sent him. ch 8-10 is about one of the topics they've raised with him (cf 7:1).

Corinth was a city with a huge number of pagan shrines – one on every street corner! So in the city, much money could be made from meat which was needed as a present to be offered to the idols, and afterwards could be sold on in the markets for home use. The end of ch 10 asks whether it is right to buy and eat such meat at home. But earlier in ch 8-10, it's a different issue. It seems as if a lot of meat was served up in pagan temples as a C1st restaurant, where you'd be taken for a business dinner/meal out. And any invite out to dinner would probably be here, eating 'idol food' with connotations that this was part of a sacrificial feast. Should Christians go?

Paul's answer ranges far more widely than this. Again and again, he shows that there are far bigger issues at stake: people's salvation matters most!

Theme Sentence for 9:24-10:13

Do everything for the sake of the gospel (9:23)

Context

CONCERN FOR THE SALVATION OF CHRISTIANS (8:1-13)

There are two opinions amongst the Corinthians. One group is confident in the clear theology that they 'know': idols are nothing so of course it's fine to eat food previously offered to them. The other group, 'the weak', is less confident because their 'former association with idols' means that they continue to think of idols as real and as their food as contaminated.

The first lot is 'puffed up' by their knowledge and somehow persuades 'the weak' to join them in eating this food (even though they believe it is sin). Paul is aghast that these confident Christians are destroying their 'weak' Christian brothers, rather than being more concerned that they are saved.

CONCERN FOR THE SALVATION OF NON-CHRISTIANS (9:1-23)

That same passion for others' salvation drives Paul in everything. So he has put aside his 'right' to financial support in Corinth. Why? Because he doesn't want to muddy the simple issue of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' in his preaching (and passing round the collection plate could easily do so).

In every situation, and whoever he is with, Paul adapts his behaviour so that cultural baggage won't prevent people being able to hear the message of salvation that he preaches. He wants to see as many as possible saved!

[NS]

Commentary

These notes follow the outline of the 19 Jan 2014 sermon at Emmanuel

an example from Paul

9:24-27

Being a Christian is like being a runner in a race (24), an athlete in the games (25) or a boxer in a boxing match (26). What do these three illustrations have in common? All three put the emphasis on something lying in the future. Living the Christian life is just the same: running to win a prize, strict training in order to receive the victor's wreath and not being disqualified at the end.

What did Paul do to make sure he would win his crown? He 'makes his body his slave' (27 footnote), which is exactly what he said in 19. In other words, he's still talking about the same topic as 19-23. It took rigid self-discipline to develop the flexibility to become like different groups of people in order to win them to Christ. It's not that behaving sufficiently flexibly or winning people is the way to deserve heaven. But that the only way to share in the gospel's blessings is by giving up all insistence on my rights, dying to self-interest and embracing the gospel as our priority with every fibre of our being: we continue as Christians in exactly the same way we began – by putting salvation above my rights.

an example from Israel

10:1-11

Despite some strange phrases in verses 1-4, the main points are clear:

Israel were like us (1-4)

They were delivered (1-2) as God brought them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, 'in Moses'. And they were sustained (3-4) as God provided food (manna) and drink (water from a rock) for them (cf Exod 16:1-17:7). This is exactly our experience as Christians: we too are delivered (from sin) and sustained (as God provides all we need to keep going as Christians).

We should not be like Israel (5-11)

Nevertheless ...! 'Most of them' is a bit of an understatement: of the thousands of people who came out of Egypt, every single one of them (except just Joshua and Caleb) died in the wilderness. It is very shocking that they were delivered, sustained, yet (all bar two) 'disqualified' (9:27).

We are given four examples of what went wrong:

- idolatry (Exodus 32:1ff)
- sexual immorality (Numbers 25:1ff)
- testing the Lord (Numbers 21:4-9)
- grumbling (Numbers 14:1-38; 16:1ff)

We should learn from their example and 'not desire evil as they did'. But the bigger point is they had good reason to think they were 'in', but they were left 'out'. They thought they were standing firm (12), yet they 'fell'.

an example for us

10:11-13

Christians are the people 'on whom the end of the ages has come' (11b): we live in the very last moments of the 'last days'. All that Bible says was written for people like us (not for Jews who lived in the era before Jesus, and so before 'the end of the ages') and if we could just grasp this (and how near the race's finishing tape we are), we'd live with right priorities.

But instead (12a), we think we stand (... and we need to acknowledge this to get the point here). One of the ways that 'knowledge puffs up' (8:1) is that we become certain there is no danger of our disqualification: the 'weak' maybe, but surely not us who have such strong Biblical understanding! Paul is warning complacent, presumptuous Christians.

In other words, people like us. We need to 'take heed!' We need to be careful that we don't 'fall' (12b). Paul uses the same word as 'fell' in v8: what happened to 23,000 of them, left overthrown in the wilderness, could happen to us. And the more unlikely we think it is that God might send a plague of serpents to Bramcote, the more we need this warning.

Paul's statement that 'God is faithful' is all the more comforting if we have first heard the force of 12's solemn warning: if verse 12 has gone home, we'll be crying out for God to help us. And 'God is faithful' is also Paul's answer to the question: can a real Christian fall away?

Paul assures us that there's nothing special about any particular temptation we face: any temptation I face is one I could resist. And the basis for saying that 'I could always resist' is God's faithfulness. In his faithfulness to me, he will not let me be tempted beyond my ability to resist. If we say 'I couldn't help myself' we'd be saying that God is not faithful.

And in those resistible temptations we do face, God provides 'a way of escape'. We may think that this means God will make the temptations we face suddenly unattractive to us. But actually, what is promised here is not so much 'an emergency escape hatch', but 'a route for endurers'. The way out of temptation that God faithfully provides for us is our endurance! As I struggle and sweat to persevere as a Christian, God is being faithful and providing for me: when we're at work enduring, God is at work enabling me.

an example for Corinth

10:14f

The 'us' in 6, 11 is not so much 'us' today as (some of the) Christians in Corinth then. Of course, we should apply this passage more widely and to us. But first, let's note that there is a particular 'temptation' in mind. Paul will explain that eating idol meat as part of a sacrificial feast in a pagan temple is playing with idolatry (15-18) - a direct parallel to the stories of Israel in the desert. And behind the idols-that-are-nothing are the all-too-real-reality of demons (20-22). The 'certain' of ch 8 may think it is fine to share in these meals, but Paul warns that if they don't stop, the same consequences await them as Israel. Their 'way of escape' is 'flee idolatry!'