

*1 Corinthians 10:6-11*

## PREFACE

I would like to publicly thank the apostle Paul for giving us a passage that is so crystal clear in revealing its meaning. There are times when one scratches one's head, trying to ascertain what he is getting at. But not here. And we do not even have to wonder what he is referring to when he says "these things" (vv1-5); it is obvious, and we answered that already last week, So let's dive in.

**Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-11.**

This passage is also easy to outline, and constitutes an *inclusio* (v6 and v11) to tie it neatly together.

- these things happened as an example for us
  - do not be idolaters
  - do not act immorally
  - do not let us try the Lord
  - do not let us grumble
- these things happened to them as an example for us

Note, too, that just as he specified in vv1-5 that these blessings from the Lord were received by "all," in this passage he replaces that with "some of them." *Every* Israelite was under the gracious hand of their protective God, but only some of them behaved badly nonetheless (in v5 he says "*most* of them"). This is not to say that the simple and clear organization reflects a simple message; there is substantial meat here on which to feast.

## v6

*Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.*

We are familiar already with Paul's position on the value of the OT.

**Read Romans 15:4.**

In that verse he says that through such OT instruction we may find *hope*; in the context of Chapters Eight to Ten of First Corinthians, his purpose in citing the OT experiences of Israel is so that we and the Corinthians will be *warned*.

**Sidebar:** God's word is almost worthless to us if we do not learn from the mistakes made by some of its characters. That is why the stories are included, why God's word is more than just endless doctrine and precepts, but filled with very human stories. These reveal the benefits of righteous obedience, and the painful, sometimes fatal results of disobedience.

That word translated “craved” in the NASB (*epithymeo*) is captured even better in the KJVs: “lusted,” and this cues up and summarizes the four detrimental behaviors that follow. That is, idolatry (v7), immoral acts (v8), trying the Lord (v9), and grumbling (v10) all stem from Israel’s craving or lusting—like little children, wanting what they want, and wanting it right now! Only in the first example (v7) does Paul quote Scripture—in this case, directly from the Septuagint; in the others the pattern is to cite the offense or behavior and follow it with what happened to Israel as a result of the offense—that is, the price they paid for their bad behavior.

Paul’s choice of this word “crave” is not accidental, but tied to a specific event in which Israel cried out for meat. After the Lord supplied them every morning with manna, they still were not satisfied, but demanded meat.

### Read Numbers 11:4-6.

So the Lord said, *All right. I’ll give you meat to eat.* But is it just me, or do we hear something more than simple acquiescence in His reply.

### Read vv18-20.

Even so, the anger of the Lord was not finished. He sent the quail for Israel to eat, but he did more than that.

### Read Numbers 11:31-34.

It is not at all a stretch to imagine that this is the passage that came to Paul’s mind when he was looking for just the right word for v6: *epithymeo*, *craved*. The name of the place, *Kibroth-hattaavah*, means “the graves of the longing,” or “the graves of the craving.”

**Learning (from the text):** How many times have we been dissatisfied with God’s answer to *our* prayers? We dare to call Him “Lord,” but reject His sovereign will for our lives. If we crave something more, demand something “better” from Him, if we complain about His decisions and acts, we are no better than those who complained about the form of His mercy and grace during Israel’s sojourn.

v7

*Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.”*

**idolaters** = *eidololatres* (i-do-lol-at'-race) = an **image-servant** or **image-worshiper**.

In the three following examples the form is to cite the sin and God's judgment. But in the first example (idolaters) Paul cites not the judgment, but the biblical setting—that is, “the content of the evil thing” (Fee). And this evil thing is about as blatant an example of the sin of idolatry in supposed Yahweh-followers as is possible.

### Read Exodus 32:3-6.

Don't miss that the portion Paul quotes includes feasting—eating and drinking in the company of the graven idol. He could have easily illustrated his command about idolatry by using other passages, but this is the one he chose—which cannot be accidental, considering the context of chapters 8-10: eating meals in an idol's temple.

**play** = *tsahaq* = a primitive root; to laugh outright (in merriment or scorn); by implication to sport :- laugh, mock, play, make sport.

This verb often refers to cultic dancing, but here (and in the Septuagint of Exodus 32) it carries overtones of sexual play. We find an example of its more erotic connotation in the story of Isaac and Rebekah, when they are in the presence of Abimelech king of the Philistines and, like father like son, Isaac wants them to think Rebekah is really his sister.

### Read Genesis 26:8.

Here the same Hebrew word is translated “caressing” (KJV, “sporting”).

**Learning:** We can see in our own culture how idolatry—worshiping something other than the one God—inevitably, if not initially, descends into an absence of ethical and moral integrity, which ultimately includes a licentious sexual component.

Paul's message is clear: The ancient Hebrews ate and drank as part of their worship of the golden calf, and for them this led to gross debauchery. If the Corinthians persisted in dining in the pagan temples, they could expect the same result. The unregenerate know no better; that which believers call sin is just normal, everyday life to them. Christians, on the other hand, like to rationalize their sin, explain it away as just a small thing, no big deal, won't hurt anything. Paul is making the case that idolatry goes beyond bowing before a pagan idol. Israel did that, but they also ate and drank, “and stood up to play”; they acted immorally, they grumbled and complained, were ungrateful for the Lord's blessings. *All* of this, and more, is idolatry. “Small things” lead to big things; Israel's grumbling led to selling themselves to a golden calf and declaring it “god.” And this led to, for many, their destruction.