

STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP

Strengthening Your Grip on Godliness

1 Corinthians 10:1–13



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Have you ever felt like you were surrounded by the things of God—the programs, people, and praise of God—but couldn't find God anywhere? People smack-dab in the middle of Christian organizations sometimes forget about God. Pastors and members of churches. Administrators in parachurch ministries. Children in Christian homes. Students in Christian schools. It's much easier than we think to lose our sensitivity toward God in a Christian environment. When we're around His people regularly, talking His language, watching Him work, enjoying His blessings, we can start to take Him for granted. In short, we can loosen our grip on God while we're handling all the things that pertain to Him.

This problem is nothing new. Who had more of God than the Israelites in Moses's day? They were a people selected by grace to be God's own . . . freed from Egypt's chains . . . rescued from Pharaoh's army . . . sustained by God's miraculous provision in the wilderness. But they were ungrateful, hardened, and faithless. As cold and dark toward God as charred sticks in a doused campfire. Their Great Deliverer, in their eyes, had become a cruel taskmaster.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Israel: So Much of God, So Little Godliness (1 Corinthians 10:1–6)

The Israelites had no reason to cry, "Oh, God, if You would only show Yourself." His presence was all around them. The Lord divided the sea and delivered them from Egypt. He guided and protected the Israelites with a cloud by day and a fire by night. He provided manna from heaven and water from a rock. But God's people complained and disobeyed, and as a result, they wandered in the desert for years.

In Paul's day, the Corinthians also managed to miss God. The apostle tried to convince them that there's more to spiritual growth than simply being exposed to God; that maturity requires self-discipline and consistency (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). In 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, Paul cited Israel as proof that privilege doesn't guarantee piety.



Quotable

*"That which
will keep a
ministry on target
is a faithful
commitment to
the Word
of God."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Five Perilous Circles (1 Corinthians 10:6–10)

How did the Israelites bring tragedy on themselves? They swam into a swirling vortex of disobedience by taking one stroke at a time—like passing through a series of concentric circles until the suction pulled them down. Let's look at those five perilous, concentric circles.

1. **Craving evil things:** The Israelites knew they should have followed God, but they followed their appetites instead. When the going got tough, they grumbled against Moses, stopped trusting God, and longed for the security of their former captivity.
2. **Idolatry:** When we, like the Israelites, put something besides God on the throne of our lives, it becomes idolatry. Idols slowly and subtly tug at our attention, time, and devotion.
3. **Immorality:** Both the Israelites and the Corinthians had issues with immorality. The Israelites incorporated pagan rituals into their worship of God (Numbers 25:1–4). The Corinthians didn't take steps to rid their congregation of incest (1 Corinthians 5:1–2).
4. **Presuming upon God:** The Israelites' perspective was so distorted by sin that they accused God of carrying out an evil plan. How arrogant, after all God had done for them.
5. **Grumbling:** God didn't judge the Israelites for merely mumbling idle complaints under their breath but for heaping blame on Moses and Aaron for their difficulties and for despising God's chosen leaders (Numbers 16:41–50).



A CLOSER LOOK

The Path That Leads Away from Godliness

Both the Corinthians and the Israelites fell into the trap that hindered them from pursuing godliness. They took one small step at a time down the path that led away from godliness, toward sinfulness and eventually death. Many of God's people perished in the wilderness because of their sin, never laying eyes on the Promised Land.

When we're far from God, we tend to blame Him, and those who speak for Him, for our troubles. We must remember, though, that God does not lure us down the dark path to evil but instead, "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14–15).

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Continued from previous page

So how can we determine if we're on the dark path away from God? Here are some tough questions we can ask ourselves.

1. Have I lost my delight in the Lord? Do spiritual things taste a little dry? Am I craving something I shouldn't?
2. Have I stopped taking God seriously? Am I tolerating things in my life that I didn't five or ten years ago? Are there any areas of erosion in my values?
3. Do I realize that I may wander in the wilderness for years if nothing changes? Do I really understand the danger I may be in?
4. Am I willing to confess the deadness of my spirituality to the Lord and to others and let them help revive it?

As we answer these questions, we must not get discouraged. Remember, we serve a risen Savior, so there's no such thing as dead Christianity. He lives and rules in the church, at home, at work, and in our hearts. And He loves to bring us restoration, healing, and hope.



LET'S LIVE IT

As we walk the path toward godliness, let's remember that God knows our limits even better than we do. When temptations come, He won't give us more than we can handle, and He will be right there to provide a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In what areas of your life are you most susceptible to temptation? Who is on the throne of your life, ruling over your passions?



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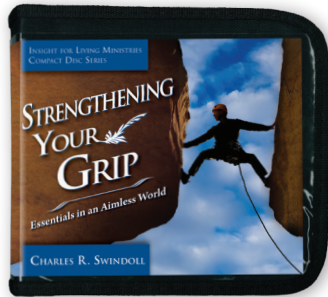
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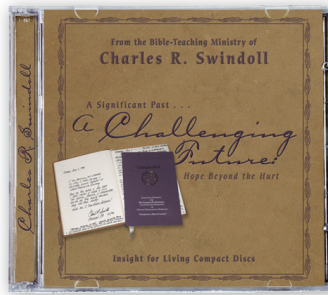
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