

STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP

HOW TO BE GROUNDED IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

STUDY TWELVE

Strengthening Your Grip on Godliness

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

No one suddenly becomes base. It happens slowly—in the mind, in the secret chambers of the heart, in the little things.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LITTLE by little, they swept it away. Heavy rains, strong winds, and powerful waves came, and the hill that stood tall by the seashore was reduced to flat terrain. The white crests, frothing and churning, slowly dislodged solid rocks, weakened sedimentary structures, and carried away the various layers of soil. Yes, it took some time. But, one day the steep hill was no more.

Wandering eyes, lonely souls, one minor compromise . . . and the process of spiritual erosion begins. New passions compete for the throne of our hearts. They soften our convictions and make prayers and religious activities perfunctory—just going through the motions. Subtly and gradually, the granite in our resistance wears away, and we give in to sin.

How can we shore up our defenses against moral erosion?

In previous *Searching the Scriptures* Bible studies, we strengthened our grip on purity and integrity in obedience to God’s command, “You must be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Now, we’ll examine another facet of holy living. We’ll strengthen our grip on *godliness*.

To be godly means to imitate God’s righteous character even when the forces of this world try to wear us down. “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world,” Paul urged, instead “let God transform you into a new person”—a godly person (Romans 12:2).

Godliness requires us to erect an erosion-proof wall against sin. The Lord has always desired His people to resist the lure of worldliness. Many, however, in their struggle against sin have succumbed, including the ancient Israelites.



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In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll look at how the Israelites' failed to achieve godliness. The traps that snared God's people in the past can snare us today, and being aware of them can help us remain wholly devoted to God.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask God to reveal to you His Word. Pray David's intimate prayer,

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23–24)*

In your own words, express your desire for the Holy Spirit to conform your heart to God's.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

How can we live “in a godly manner in this present age” (Titus 2:12 NASB)? Paul taught that we need “self-control in all things,” like athletes in training (1 Corinthians 9:25 NASB).

In Greece, athletes prepared for the Isthmian Games by undergoing a rigorous regimen. In a gymnasium, they developed the mental discipline and physical prowess to win. In his letter to the Corinthians, the seasoned minister dispelled the myth that the Christian life gets easier with age and experience.

So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:26–27)

What primary concern kept Paul wholly devoted to the Lord?

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Paul said, “I get hold of my bodily drives, my greed, my lust, my ambition, and I apply maximum self-control, lest after doing all this God-talk, I am a washout.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Observation: Learning from Israel’s Spiritual Erosion

Observation focuses on what the passage says.¹ As Paul emphasized, if we don’t exercise self-control, we can disqualify ourselves from future blessings—which is what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness.

Blessed Under Moses—1 Corinthians 10:1–4

On the road to the promised land, the newly freed Israelites reveled in God’s favor under Moses’ leadership. With what blessings did God sustain His people in the wilderness, according to [1 Corinthians 10:1–4](#)?

Swept Away in the Wilderness—1 Corinthians 10:5

God nourished His people *physically* with manna and springs of fresh water, and *spiritually* with His miraculous protection and presence. Surely, in loving response, the Israelites would give their hearts to the Lord in devotion and godliness. But no. They rebelled so brazenly that God had to discipline them. According to [1 Corinthians 10:5](#), what happened?

How did Paul describe sin’s erosion that swept them away little-by-little in [10:6–10](#)? Can you identify the five stages of their tragic collapse?

10:6: _____

10:7: _____

10:8: _____

10:9: _____

10:10: _____

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Observe *1 Corinthians 10:12–13* for the reaction that we should avoid as we look at Israel’s spiritual erosion. What promises should we claim?

Notice the progression. The Israelites began to crave evil, trying to satisfy themselves with everything but God. With God off the throne, anything goes, including gross immorality. Consequently, they presumed upon Him and grumbled against Him. Gradually, these sins swept away the hill of godliness upon which Israel stood, and they no longer shined the light of God’s glory to the nations.



Interpretation: Understanding Godliness

Grasping the lessons from Israel’s spiritual erosion through *interpretation* will enable us to better understand godliness. In *1 Corinthians 10:1–5*, we observed that Israel experienced supernatural deliverance, guidance, protection, and provision when they drank from the Rock, who was Christ.

For the backstory to this reference, read *Exodus 17:5–6*. In what way did drinking the water that gushed from the rock foreshadow the blessings of Christ, their future Messiah?

In *1 Corinthians 10:6, 11*, Paul mentioned that these things happened as examples for our instruction. The Greek word *typos* is translated as “example” in the NASB. Read its definition at billmounce.com and explain Paul’s point to today’s readers.

Instruction is a term that means “to place something in the mind.” And you and I know that it is the mind that becomes the basis of all decisions.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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We observed what led to Israel’s spiritual erosion. First, *they craved evil things*. Look at the word *crave* in the *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*. How would you explain “craving evil things”?

You can’t tolerate that kind of thing overtly, and so you tolerate it mentally. It’s little. It’s subtle. It’s so subliminal nobody even knows you’re thinking it. It’s just yours. It’s your toy. And the craving starts. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Second, *they became idolaters*. Although we may not bow down to idols, we can still be “idolaters” when we devote our hearts to something or someone other than God. What might idolatry look like today?

Idolatry is a mental substitute for the place God once occupied.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Third, *they turned to sexual immorality*. The backstory of Paul’s reference to 23,000 people dying in one day in 1 Corinthians 10:8 is *Numbers 25:1–9*, which is a disturbing example of human depravity and unabashed defiance. Read what happened, and then look up the Greek verb *porneuo*, translated as “commit sexual immorality” in the NASB. Rewrite its definition below. Why do you think sexual immorality saddens God’s heart so much?

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Fourth, *they acted presumptuously*. The Israelites put God to the test with their angry accusations. Read what they said against God in [Numbers 21:4–6](#). Resentment had poisoned their hearts, like the venomous snakes that God sent to afflict them. What does it mean for us to test the Lord as the Israelites did?

Fifth, *they grumbled*. How would you explain “grumbling” from its context in [Numbers 16:41–50](#)?

Presumption leads to grumbling, a cynicism toward God and biblical living.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How could the Israelites, who were so blessed by God, viciously turn against Him? They succumbed to temptation. Let’s take a closer look at how temptation poisons our hearts so we can reject it at first taste.



Correlation: How Temptation Works

James described how temptation works. What did he say in [James 1:12–15](#)? What is temptation’s source? How does it progressively bring us down?

How does the promise in [1 Corinthians 10:12–13](#) correlate with James’ description of temptation and give you hope?

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Jesus accentuates the necessity of cultivating a pure heart in *Matthew 5:27–28*. Read it carefully and compare it to *1 Corinthians 10:8*; *Proverbs 4:20–26*; *6:20–26*. How do external and internal moral boundaries act like fences to protect our hearts?

The temptation comes in a thought. And self-control says, “No way. Get out of my life.” Self-control comes to my rescue, “I see the erosion that temptation will cause. I give it up. In the power of the Holy Spirit, I give You my life, God. I give it afresh and anew.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Love God and Shine Brightly!

When God is sitting on the throne of our hearts, our whole lives become an expression of our devotion to Him. When we get too familiar with God, however, too comfortable, too “everyday,” we can forget He’s even there. How is your delight in the Lord? Is He shining brightly through you? What practical fences can you put up around your heart for a stronger boundary against temptation?

We are responsible to go right back to those areas that have begun to eat away and erode in our lives and clean them up. I challenge you to deal with it.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What areas of erosion in your life have come to the surface? What trusted friend or spiritual mentor could you communicate with for prayer and immediate guidance?

Your heavenly Father waits for you to come back home. He waits to cleanse, to forgive, but He also expects full repentance. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Renew your love for God with a heartfelt prayer of devotion as you close your Bible study. What would you like to say to the One who has blessed you in so many ways?



A FINAL PRAYER

Loving Father, I thank You for the unrest in my soul when I go astray. I thank You for opening my heart to the areas in my life where I may have lost sensitivity to Your special touch. Forgive me. Cleanse me. Change me. Let Your light shine brightly through me like a city on a hill for all to see. In the name of the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1981, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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