JETS 54.2 (June 2011) 329–44

WHEN A CHRISTIAN SINS: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 AND THE POWER OF CONTRARY CHOICE IN RELATION TO THE COMPATIBILIST-LIBERTARIAN DEBATE

PAUL A. HIMES*

While discussions over free will and divine sovereignty have ever been at the forefront of theology, such debates have often failed to clearly define those philosophical concepts and have frequently neglected thorough exegesis in favor of a pre-rendered theological system. In other words, philosophical argumentation has often trumped exegetical analysis.[1]

To be fair, Scripture is generally unclear on such matters as the nature of the human will, human choice, and divine sovereignty. First Corinthians 10:13, however, may be an exception. If πειρασμός is interpreted as "temptation to sin" (rather than "trial" or "tribulation"), then Scripture's promise for a way out and limit to the temptation would seem to indicate the power of contrary choice. If so, then libertarian free will would be assumed, at least in any case where a Christian is faced with the temptation to sin.

In order to advance this thesis without overextending it, the first section of the article will set out definitions and boundaries, the second part will examine 1 Cor 10:13 in its extended context, and the third section will lay out the passage's philosophical implications in relation to the compatibilist-libertarian debate.

I. DEFINITIONS AND BOUNDARIES

Since the point of this article is to determine whether or not 1 Cor 10:13 supports libertarian free will as opposed to compatibilistic free will, specific definitions are in order. In general, "compatibilism" refers to that philosophy which views free will as compatible with some form of determinism. In other words, both "determinism" and "free will," however the latter is understood, can co-exist when a human makes a choice.[2] More specifically, "a will can be

* Paul Himes is a Ph.D. student in New Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He resides at 14 McDowell Drive, Wake Forest, NC 27587.

[1] The following are two noteworthy exceptions which attempt to approach philosophical understanding from a primarily *biblical* perspective: Paul W. Gooch, "Sovereignty and Freedom: Some Pauline Compatibilisms," *SJT* 40 (1987) 531–42; and Abraham J. Malherbe, "Determinism and Free Will in Paul: The Argument of 1 Corinthians 8 and 9," in *Paul in Hellenistic Context* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 231–55.

[2] "Introduction," in *Four Views on Free Will* (Great Debates in Philosophy; Victoria, Australia: Blackwell, 2007), states, "Traditionally, incompatibilists are those who think that free will is incompatible with the world being deterministic. Compatibilists, conveniently enough, are those hold [*sic*] that free will is compatible with the universe being deterministic." This introduction further notes

caused and still be free in the sense required for moral responsibility . . . even if it is caused by God or by natural events to choose or decide what it does."[3] A compatibilistic view of "free will" does not necessarily involve (and probably completely omits) the power of contrary choice.[4]

For compatibilist theologians, one's choices are determined by one's desires. Bruce Ware states, "We are free when we chose to act and behave in accordance with our strongest desires, since those desires are the expressions of our hearts and characters . . . we are free when we act in accordance with what we are most strongly inclined to do." Thus, "our freedom cannot consist in the power of contrary choice, but rather it consists in the power to choose according to what we are most inclined to do."[5] Robert Nash concurs, stating that "people's actions, choices, and decisions, then, are a reflection of their value scales at the moment of choice." In other words, human desires are mentally (or, perhaps, sub-consciously) ranked by value, and the highest value automatically wins.[6] What is more, those desires themselves are caused by other factors, including established character and various influences (possibly even sociological influences).[7]

In contrast, libertarian free will argues that one's choices spring internally and that each human possesses the power of contrary choice. Thus, as Robert Kane articulates, "We feel (1) it is 'up to us' what we choose and how we act; and this means we could have chosen or acted otherwise," and "this 'up-to-us-ness' also suggests that (2) the ultimate sources of our actions lie in us and not outside us in factors beyond our control."[8]

---

that "the compatibility issue is distinct from the issue of whether we have free will" (3; emphasis omitted). See also Robert Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), who states, "*Compatibilism* is the theory that in ways that may be impossible to comprehend, determinism and human free will are compatible in the sense that both can exist in the case of human actions. *Incompatibilism* is the theory that it is impossible for determinism and human free will to be true at the same time. If humans are indeed free, determinism must then be false" (327; emphasis original).

[3] Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Christians Should not be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003) 460–61.

[4] Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004) 86–87. Cf. John Martin Fischer, "Response to Kane, Pereboom, and Vargas," in *Four Views on Free Will* 185, who argues that "choosing and acting freely do not require freedom to choose or act differently; guidance control does not entail regulative control." Cf. Fischer, "Compatibilism," in *Four Views on Free Will* 71. The reader interested in further discussion on compatibilism is advised to read Ishtiyaque Haji, "Compatibilist Views of Freedom and Responsibility," and Bernard Berofsky, "Ifs, Cans, and Free Will: The Issues" 202–28 and 181–201, respectively, in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (ed. Robert Kane; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[5] Ware, *God's Greater Glory* 79–80; cf. Scott C. Warren, "Ability and Desire: Reframing Debates Surrounding Freedom and Responsibility," *JETS* (2009) 552–53, who argues, "I believe that what we mean when we say that one is free is that *one can do what one wants* . . . one is free to choose where one has the *ability* to act; however, within the parameters of one's abilities, one *will* choose only according to one's desires" (emphasis original).

[6] Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions* 334.

[7] Ware, *God's Greater Glory* 80–82; Warren, "Ability and Desire" 559.

[8] Robert Kane, "Libertarianism," in *Four Views on Free Will* 5. This writer, however, does dissent significantly with Kane in parts of his definition, especially p. 26. For further discussion on the definition of free will, see also Randolph Clarke, "Libertarian Views: Critical Survey of Noncausal and Eventcausal Accounts of Free Agency," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, esp. 356.

For the purposes of this article, libertarian free will is simply that which allows contrary choice at a particular time. Thus, agent (w) possess libertarian freedom if at situation (x) he or she could have chosen either (y) or (z). Libertarian freedom, then, is the ability to choose between two competing desires.

Having established those definitions, the boundaries of this article must be clarified. First of all, this article's thesis in no way concerns soteriology. In other words, the question of whether or not a Christian possesses libertarian freedom when confronted with the temptation to sin is completely distinct from whether or not an unregenerate person possesses libertarian freedom when confronted with the gospel. Libertarian freedom in 1 Cor 10:13 does not necessarily imply libertarian freedom in John 3:16 or anywhere else. Ware persuasively argues that "libertarian freedom simply cannot account for the human volition and moral responsibility that we see in Scripture" with, for example, the Assyrians in Isaiah 10.[9] Yet one does not have to take an "all-or-nothing" approach with libertarian freedom. It may be that in some cases humans possess compatibilistic freedom, while in others they possess libertarian freedom.

Finally, the issue of moral responsibility is likewise irrelevant to this discussion. The thesis of this article does not concern itself with whether or not Christians are morally responsible for their sin, but only with whether or not they could have chosen not to sin when they do sin. For now, this writer is tentatively convinced of the logic of Harry Frankfurt's famous counterexample against the alleged necessity of the power of contrary choice for responsibility.[10] The power of contrary choice may or may not be necessary for moral responsibility, yet this is irrelevant to the thesis of this paper, namely that 1 Cor 10:13 demands the power of contrary choice in order for the passage to make sense.

II. FIRST CORINTHIANS 10:13 AND ITS CONTEXT

Much has been written on the issues of idolatry and sin in 1 Corinthians 8–10. Regrettably, space prohibits a thorough theological or structural analysis of these chapters. Nevertheless, one must examine the broader context in order to understand the function of πειρασμός in 1 Cor 10:13.

1. *The issue of idolatry in 1 Corinthians 8–10.* Two brief observations may be made regarding these chapters. First, scholars are generally agreed that 1 Cor 8–10/11:1 is a self-contained unit of discourse.[11] First Corinthians

[9] Ware, *God's Greater Glory* 88.

[10] For one of the more easily understandable versions of Harry Frankfurt's counter-example, see John Martin Fischer, "Compatibilism" 58. Cf. Fischer, "Libertarianism and Avoidability: A Reply to Widerker," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995) 24; Michael Bergmann, "Molinist Frankfurt-Style Counterexamples and the Free Will Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (2002) 263–78; and (for a position contra Fischer) David Widerker, "Libertarian Freedom and the Avoidability of Decisions," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995) 113–18.

[11] For example, J. Smit, "'Do Not be Idolaters': Paul's Rhetoric in First Corinthians 10:1–22," *NovT* 39 (1997) 42; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 32; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 57; David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 362.

7:40 has just concluded Paul's discussion of singleness and marriage, and the formula περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων (ESV: "now concerning food offered to idols") introduces a new topic.[12] In the next few chapters, Paul seems to be responding to a specific Corinthian statement ("all of us possess knowledge").[13] The focus ultimately seems to be on idolatry; chapters 8–10 are, essentially, "Paul's exposition on idol offerings."[14]

Second, it must be stressed in light of the harshness in chapter 10 that more is at stake here than just Christian liberty. Indeed, as Joseph Fitzmeyer notes, "Paul sees the immediate problem of eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols against a larger background and with implications that some of the Corinthian Christians do not realize."[15] Bruce Winter argues that Paul "seeks to persuade them to abandon their destructive flirtation with idolatry and commands them to imitate him in discharging their gospel responsibilities as he himself has done in imitation of Christ (8:1–11:1)."[16] Thus idolatry is closely connected to temple meals. As Harm Hollander states,

> In 1 Cor 10.14–22 the apostle Paul warns his readers to refrain from idolatry. That means, according to Paul, *in concreto* that they should not participate in cultic meals for the glory of a pagan deity. Since Christian believers share together in the worship of God, they should not share with pagans at their *symposia*. Taking part in a pagan cultic meal is idolatry and is absolutely incompatible with a true Christian life.[17]

David Garland stresses that participation in temple meals went beyond mere social interaction. Rather, "in the ancient world, people did not compartmentalize their religion, economic, and social lives, and it is anachronistic to think that they did . . . the god or gods were honored by the meal and were considered to be present."[18] The point, then, is that much was at stake for the Corinthians; failure to choose correctly in these circumstances was tantamount to idolatry.[19]

[12] Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* 32. Unless otherwise noted, the Greek text is from the Nestle-Aland 27th edition and the English text is from the English Standard Version (ESV).

[13] Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 620, states, "Few doubt that Paul is quoting a Corinthian slogan or maxim"; cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* 330: "[it is] a topic that has caused trouble in the Christian community, of Roman Corinth, about which he [Paul] has learned in some way. . . . Paul may be quoting them (vv. 1b, 4b)."

[14] J. Smit, "Do not be Idolaters" 42; cf. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians: A Biblical/Jewish Approach," *NTS* 52 (2006) 211–12, where they argue that chapters 8–14 are dealing primarily with idolatry.

[15] Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* 331.

[16] Bruce W. Winter, "Carnal Conduct and Sanctification in 1 Corinthians: *Simul sanctus et peccator*?" in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (ed. Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 194.

[17] Harm W. Hollander, "The Idea of Fellowship in 1 Corinthians 10.14–22," *NTS* 55 (2009) 469.

[18] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker: 2003) 349. Cf. E. Coye Still, III, "Paul's Aims Regarding ΕΙΔΩΛΟΘΥΤΑ: A New Proposal for Interpreting 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1," *NovT* 4 (2002) 342, where he states, "There is no temple event in which the Corinthian who is compliant with the apostle's instructions will participate."

[19] Cf. E. Coye Still, III, "Divisions Over Leaders and Food Offered to Idols: The Parallel Thematic Structures of 1 Corinthians 4:6–21 and 8:1–11:1," *TynBul* 55 (2004) 40, who points out that in 1 Cor

2. *The connection of 1 Corinthians 9 with 1 Corinthians 10.* How, then, does 1 Corinthians 9 fit into the argument? At first glance, this chapter seems like a rather odd digression on Paul's part. As Abraham J. Malherbe points out, however, "The idea of freedom was integrally related to that of *exousia* and is implicit in 8.9–13. It becomes explicit in chapter 9."[20] Indeed, 9:1–27 is a very real part of the broader argument of 8:1–11:1.[21] Since chapter 8 has been dealing with the need to forgo one's own rights in light of another's spiritual needs, the apostle Paul can now point to himself as an example of this paradigm. An apostle, just as much as anybody else, has certain rights; yet Paul has voluntarily deprived himself of those rights in light of the needs of the gospel, for he states, "Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (9:12b; ESV).

Yet how does Paul transition from this discussion in chapter 9 to the harsh warnings of chapter 10? The answer lies in the function of 9:24–27, a section which goes beyond the theme of simply setting an example and introduces a real danger, that of becoming ἀδόκιμος. In this way, the section naturally leads to the subsequent warning passage.[22] The ending of chapter 9 essentially introduces a new topic (within the broader topic of liberty and idolatry), namely the issue of "not losing one's contest after having begun, as those Israelites mentioned in 10:1–10 did."[23] Indeed, as Joost Smit Sibinga notes, "The *transitio* 1 Cor 9:24–27 anticipates—as it should—what is to come: a warning."[24] Paul, then, goes from discussing "his own personal concerns about not being disqualified" to "some events of Israel's history in

---

4:6–21 and 8:1–11:1, "both problems are pride problems, both solutions are self-abnegation solutions." The reader should note the following helpful discussions of these chapters in 1 Corinthians, especially regarding the issue of idolatry: Gordon D. Fee, "Εἰδωλοθύτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8–10," *Bib* 61 (1980) 172–97; Anders Eriksson, "Special Topics in 1 Corinthians 8–10," in *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference* (JSNTSup 180; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 272–301; Joop F. M. Smit, "The Function of First Corinthians 10,23–30: A Rhetorical Anticipation," *Bib* 78 (1993) 377–88; Gerd Theissen, "Social Conflicts in the Corinthian Community: Further Remarks on J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*," *JSNT* 25 (2003) 371–91, esp. 390–91; Andrew L. Minto, "1 Corinthians 10:1–13: Paul's Interpretation of Exodus and Desert Wandering Narratives and the Divine Pedagogy," *Fides Quarens Intellectum* 2 (2003) 182–226; David Horrell, "Theological Principle or Christological Praxis? Pauline Ethics in 1 Corinthians 8.1–11.1," *JSNT* 67 (1997) 83–114.

[20] Malherbe, "Determinism and Free Will in Paul" 238–39. Malherbe's article as a whole views 1 Corinthians 9 as dealing with the issue of free will and choice in light of Greek philosophy. The reader should especially note pages 343–45 for his helpful discussion of Stoic conceptions of freedom and determinism. While Malherbe's views on Paul's interaction with Stoic thought may be debated, at the very least one must acknowledge with Malherbe that the concepts of liberty and free will, however defined, play a key role in chapter 9.

[21] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 718.

[22] Ibid. 95.

[23] Jerry L. Sumney, "The Place of 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 in Paul's Argument," *JBL* 119 (2000) 331.

[24] Joost Smit Sibinga, "The Composition of 1 Cor. 9 and its Context," *NovT* 40 (1998) 137. Note that Sibinga also suggests on page 137 that 1 Cor 9:24–27 concludes the previous context and that 9:27 may form an *inclusio* with 10:1–2.

which large numbers of God's people were indeed disqualified from the prize of the promised land."[25]

3. *Idolatry and the wilderness generation: 1 Corinthians 10:1–14*. As we have seen, 1 Cor 10:1–13 flows naturally from the preceding context.[26] The structure begins with "five positive examples of God's redemptive actions received by the Israelites, marked by the five-fold repetition of the adjective 'all,' that will balance the five negative examples of their rejection of God's redemptive actions in the exhortations in vv. 6–10."[27] As Meeks notes, "the five positive and the five negative *exempla* are both punctuated and linked with the paraenetic conclusion in verses 12–13 by means of an *inclusio*, verses 6 and 11."[28] Collier also notes that verse 6 is essentially a "heading statement" for verses 7–10 and that 7–10 are "set apart" from verse 6.[29] Minto points out that verses 7–10 essentially consist of "ABBA chiasms of alternative imperatives (second person plurals) and hortatory subjunctives, which are all followed by a comparative clause."[30]

The first line of verse 1, οὐ θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἀγοεῖν, functions to introduce a special exhortation to the audience.[31] The subsequent lines then chronicle the ways in which the Israelites participated in the blessings of their covenant relationship. Verse 4 culminates in the surprising declaration that "they drank from the spiritual rock . . . and the Rock was Christ."

Verse 5, however, introduces a dramatic reversal. Despite the incredible privilege of partaking of Christ in the wilderness, the covenant people "were overthrown." The five sins listed in the subsequent verses are drawn from Numbers, but the citation in verse 7b is from Exod 32:6.[32] Interestingly, as Collier points out, "each of the examples cited in the exegesis receives increasingly harsher punishment . . . finally, in the closing statement of the inclusio (v. 11), all of this is said to be instruction of eternal import."[33] The central focus,

[25] Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 342. Cf. Sumney, "Place of 1 Corinthians 9:24–27" 333.

[26] Although the reader should note Wayne A. Meeks, "'And Rose up to Play': Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22," *JSNT* 16 (1982) 65, where he famously argued that "verses 1–13 are a literary unit, very carefully composed prior to its use in its present context." J. Smit, while acknowledging the difficulty of the passage, nevertheless argues that "it forms a distinct and coherent round of argument within Paul's exposition on idol offerings" ("Do not be Idolaters" 40 and 42). Cf. also Gary D. Collier, "'That We Might not Crave Evil': The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians 10:1–13," *JSNT* 55 (1994) 57–60. Collier is perhaps right to suggest that the use of the first person in verses 1 and 14, together with the *hoti*, sets these verses apart ("That We Might not Crave Evil" 60).

[27] Minto, "1 Corinthians 10:1–13" 182; cf. Smit, "Do Not be Idolaters" 49.

[28] Meeks, "And Rose up to Play" 65; cf. Collier, "That We Might Not Crave Evil" 60; cf. Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SacPag 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999) 366.

[29] Collier, "That We Might Not Crave Evil" 60. For a somewhat different take on the structure here, see Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *HTR* 77 (1984) 278–79 and 288–89.

[30] Minto, "1 Corinthians 10:1–13" 184.

[31] William Baird, "I Corinthians 10:1–13," *Int* 44 (1990) 286.

[32] Meeks, "And Rose up to Play" 68; note that Collier, "That We Might not Crave Evil" 63, argues that Numbers 11, not Exod 32:6, is "the midrashic basis of the passage."

[33] Collier, "That We Might not Crave Evil" 72.

however, remains the citation from Exod 32:6, a citation which links the act of idolatry with eating and drinking, "a connection that has considerable rhetorical force in Paul's argument against *eating* and *drinking* in pagan temples."[34]

Anthony Thiselton, however, points out that the theme of ἐπιθυμία is critical to 10:7–13 (although technically the noun in v. 6 is the cognate ἐπιθυμητής). All four sins flow from the concept of ἐπιθυμία in verse 6 and this structure "entirely coheres with Paul's theology of human sin" and its emphasis on human desire.[35] Collier similarly argues that this passage is "a self-contained midrash on ἐπιθυμία in Numbers 11," and ultimately, the Corinthians' desire for the "wrong kind of 'food'" (food in an idol's temple) stems from a more significant issue, namely "a selfish craving which proceeds without concern for the will of God or for others."[36] The synonyms τύποι and τυπικῶς bracket this section, indicating "that the full bearing and signification of the event(s) are borne by the narrative . . . and actualized by the Christian community through contact with Christ."[37] By extension, then, the dangers facing the Israelite community remain relevant for today. With the Corinthians, as with the Israelites, "evil desires and practices have disastrous consequences and bring terrible judgment; baptism and eucharist provide no guarantee of protection."[38]

4. *Temptation and escape in 1 Corinthians 10:13*. While the previous verses emphasized the theme of ἐπιθυμία, verses 12 and 13 function together by discussing πειρασμός.[39] The preceding verses naturally transition into the warning in verse 12, for as Andreas Köstenberger notes, the example of the wilderness wanderers "serves as a salvation-historical reference point for the apostle's warning against pride."[40] What is more, verses 12 and 13 function together as "a chiasm, pinpointing the center of concern and bringing the immediate pericope to a focused conclusion and exhortation."[41] These verses knit together the "moral" of the previous context.[42]

Most scholars portray verse 13 as the positive counterbalance to verse 12.[43] Yet Anthony Thiselton makes a valid point when he argues that verse 13, instead of functioning as a positive encouragement *per se*, should rather

[34] Richard B. Hays, "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians," *NTS* 45 (1999) 398 (emphasis original). Cf. Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 86.

[35] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 733–34, 741.

[36] Collier, "That We Might not Crave Evil" 74.

[37] Minto, "1 Corinthians 10:1–13" 186; cf. Collier, "That We Might not Crave Evil" 60; James W. Aageson, "Written Also for Our Sake: Paul's Use of Scripture in the Four Major Epistles, with a Study of 1 Corinthians 10," in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 172.

[38] Horrell, "Theological Principle" 96.

[39] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 746.

[40] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Hearing the Old Testament in the New: A Response," in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* 288.

[41] Collier, "That We Might not Crave Evil" 62.

[42] Meeks, "And Rose up to Play" 71.

[43] For example, Minto, "1 Corinthians 10:1–13" 187; Smit, "'Do not be Idolaters" 44; Meeks, "And Rose up to Play" 71; Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυτα Once Again" 193.

be viewed as a rebuke against those who argue that they have no choice in the matter of cultic meals:

> Paul rebukes the notion that those who are accustomed to *taking part in* cultic meals are victimized. They see themselves as those who (as politicians and Union leaders often claim) "have no choice but to . . . ," i.e. the *craving to be accepted* by the pagan peer-group "strong," and to join the cultic festivals or feasts *seizes* them or **fastens upon** them as special victims.[44]

In other words, no one is without excuse, and those who attempt to excuse their choices in light of sociological pressure are worthy of condemnation.

The primary issue in verse 13, of course, is the nature of πειρασμός and its verb cognate πειράζω. Do they refer to trials and tribulations or to temptation to sin? If the former, then this article's thesis is substantially weakened, if not invalidated. If the latter, then at least the argument can proceed.

The semantic range of the two words encompasses both options. For the noun, the sense of "trial and tribulation" is attested to in Luke 22:28, Acts 20:19, Jas 1:2, Deut 29:3 (LXX), and other passages.[45] The sense of "temptation to sin" occurs, among other places, in Matt 26:41, Luke 22:46, and 1 Tim 6:9. Some usages are somewhat ambiguous and could go either way (e.g. Heb 3:8). For the verb form, the basic sense of "test" occurs in such places as Acts 16:7 (in the sense of "attempt"), 2 Cor 13:5, Heb 11:17, Gen 22:1 (LXX), etc., while the sense of "tempt to sin" occurs in 1 Cor 7:5, Heb 4:15 (as indicated by χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας), and Jas 1:13 and 14.[46]

Since both senses are well attested in Scripture, context must determine meaning. Scholars are split on the issue, though some choose to remain ambiguous and not discuss it directly.[47] Others clearly prefer the sense of "trial." Verlyn Verbrugge argues,

> The rest of this verse suggests that the meaning 'trial' (whether as a result of persecution or as anything that might tempt us to give up on the faith) is also within Paul's semantic range here. Perhaps in the back of Paul's mind here, too, is the awareness that if the Corinthians do, in fact, flee from all idolatry (cf. v. 14), they will suffer from social isolation and perhaps even persecution from their neighbors.[48]

[44] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 748 (emphasis original).

[45] All searches were performed by using *Accordance* 7.4.1 (OakTree Software, 2007).

[46] A numerical advantage may be granted to the more general sense of "test," but it is difficult to decide how to take the verb and the noun when it has God or Christ as the object. In other words, were the Israelites tempting God to sin (to be contrary to his nature) or putting him through a trial? Both concepts seem ludicrous, at first glance. At the very least, Jas 1:13 points out the absolute impossibility of the former, though perhaps the Israelites in the OT were attempting the impossible.

[47] For example, Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* 339. Fitzmyer states that "the noun *ekbasis*" may refer to "the eschatological trial, but Christians may also rely on God for the *ekbasis* of lesser struggles throughout the course of life. In this context, Paul seems to be thinking primarily of trials involving idol meat or seduction to idolatry." It is difficult to pin down precisely whether or not Fitzmyer has in mind actual temptation to sin. This ambiguity stands in stark contrast with the earlier Anchor Bible commentary by William Orr and James Walther, which will be cited below.

[48] Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians" 344.

David Garland likewise argues that "temptation" in this passage implies "external testing." rather than "some internal temptation to sin." He contends that the perfect form εἴληφεν (from λαμβάνω) "suggests that these trials come from outside their own willful desires" while pointing out that ὑπενεγκεῖν (from ὑποφέρω) refers to persecution in its two other occurrences in the NT (2 Tim 3:11; 1 Pet 2:19). Interestingly, Garland then suggests that the "testing" here refers both to idolatry and the persecution which would stem from not succumbing to that temptation.[49]

In response, it is unclear why exactly the perfect εἴληφεν would argue against "internal temptation to sin." In each instance of the perfect of λαμβάνω in the NT, the semantic range does not differ substantially from λαμβάνω in the other tenses (the perfect form occurs in Matt 25:24; 1 Cor 10:13; Rev 2:28; 3:3; 5:7; 8:5; 11:17). The tense here seems largely irrelevant to the discussion. As to the concept of internal vs. external influence, Thiselton argues,

> Paul is always more concerned with sin as an *attitude, stance, state,* or *orientation of will* than the concrete acts of 'falling short' which assumes more prominence in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We have already seen what fuels the *four formative models* which occur as *events* is the attitude of ἐπιθυμία or **craving** (v. 6). Paul here addresses the *craving* in terms of a **temptation** which draws, seduces, beguiles, attracts, and corresponds to the deeper nature of sin which may be found shared by Paul, Augustine, and the recent analysis of historical theology by Pannenberg.[50]

Perhaps it is better to see πειρασμός as both an external and internal influence. On the one hand it has to do with the desires of the heart, but this concept is not incompatible with external temptation to sin as described in Scripture (e.g. Satan as the instrument of temptation, both in Christ's own temptation and the temptation of Christians in texts such as 1 Thess 3:5, though in Christ's case the temptation would have been wholly external).

As for the use of ὑποφέρω, there is no reason why it could not be used in the sense of "enduring" temptation to sin.[51] One must remember that temptation is, of necessity, a trial in its own right, though the converse is not necessarily true. In other words, although every trial (e.g. losing one's job) is not a temptation to sin in of itself, every temptation to sin is a trial. Thus Christ can legitimately be said to have suffered in his temptations regardless of whether or not he could have sinned (Heb 4:15 seems to imply that Christ himself suffered "weaknesses" like we do, and that those "weaknesses" are connected with temptation).[52]

[49] Garland, *1 Corinthians* 467.

[50] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 747 (emphasis original).

[51] Three total occurrences in the NT are hardly sufficient to establish usage, especially given its wide range of contexts outside the NT (e.g. Philo, *Embassy* 270; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.66; LXX 2 Macc 2:27).

[52] Regarding Heb 4:15, William Lane states, "The emphatic statement that he was 'tested' κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότα, 'in every respect, in quite the same way as we are,' implies that he was susceptible to all the temptations that are connected with the weakness inherent in the frailty of humanity (cf. Cullmann, *Christology*, 95). This was necessarily the condition for his full equipment with the fellow-feeling required for the discharge of the priestly ministry of helping. Suffering produced sympathy by endurance" (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* [WBC 47a; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991] 114).

More importantly, however, the context of 1 Corinthians 10 overwhelmingly argues for the sense "temptation to sin" for πειρασμός. Verse 12 is a direct warning for believers not to fall into sin. Verse 14 urges believers to flee from idolatry. How, then, could one argue that the apostle Paul would have trials and tribulations in mind, the sort that God himself ordains and the Christian is expected to embrace, when the entire context describes something from which a Christian should flee? Indeed, the Israelites did not fail because they somehow grew weary or discouraged in the face of difficulties. Rather, they failed because they sinned when confronted with cravings stemming both from their own heart and from the pleasures and convenience of idolatry and sexual immorality. Illicit cravings, not difficult sojourning, is the issue (though the latter is certainly linked with the former in the narrative). Furthermore, verses 6–10 deal with specific sins rather than tribulations, and verse 11 links all this to the Corinthian Christian.

Clearly, then, the "context implies the possibility of sin."[53] As noted above, Thiselton's emphasis on ἐπιθυμία is important. Paul often prefers to focus on sin as an "attitude" or "orientation of will," and this is certainly the case in 1 Cor 10:13.[54] Like the wandering Israelites, Christians are completely without excuse when they give in to idolatry.

Furthermore, Christians who succumb to idolatry are without excuse because this temptation has its limits. Such temptation is "common to man," a phrase which here indicates magnitude and intensity rather than source.[55] All humans are faced with temptation, and no Christian belongs in a "special category" of being forced to capitulate.[56] This verse is, in effect,

> a rejection of special pleading by a special group ('the strong') who perceive their temptations as exercising a unique force . . . God always provides his people with a choice: the situation brings a temptation; but alongside the temptation God will also provide an exit path . . . [which] will provide a positive (and better) alternative and take away their alibi.[57]

Finally, the reader is advised to consider the function of the rare word ἔκβασις. While in light of its Koine usage the ESV's "way of escape" (or Thiselton's "exit path") may be somewhat of an over-interpretation, the word does imply a sense of completion or limit, and this would fit well with how the passage limits the scope of the πειρασμός.[58] God makes an "end" of the πειρασμός and does not let it continue beyond what a Christian can endure before sinning. This stands in stark contrast to trials and tribulations which often make

[53] William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *I Corinthians: A New Translation* (AB 32; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976) 247.

[54] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 747.

[55] Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an Die Korinther (1 Kor 6,12–11,16)* (EKKNT 7/2; Zürich: Benziger, 1995) 409–10: "Das Attribut ἀνθρώπινος bezeichnet Ausmaß und Intensität der Versuchung, nicht deren Ursprung, wie die Fortsetzung lehrt."

[56] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 748.

[57] Ibid. 748–49 (emphasis removed).

[58] The only three LXX occurrences are Wis 2:17; 8:8; and 11:14. Note, however, Josephus, *Ant.* 1.91 (one of the few places where the word actually has the sense of "escape" or "exit") and 10.195 (again with the idea of "end").

an “end” of Christians and usher them into glory. Since martyrdom may indeed be the result of trials, 1 Cor 10:13 makes no sense if God is promising to limit the severity of the trials that come upon Christians, for Christians are never guaranteed that they will endure (in the sense of “outlast”) such trials and tribulations. In contrast, if temptation to sin is in view, then it makes perfect sense for God to offer a limit, for unlike martyrdom, falling into sin is never a desired result of being confronted by πειρασμός.[59]

Thus the most likely interpretation in light of the context is that πειρασμός refers to temptation to sin, something which a Christian should not embrace but rather resist. Indeed, “if the believer must attend to how it is removed, God takes care of what force it can exercise in relation to the believer’s capacities to appropriate divine grace in favor of it.”[60]

III. THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

What, then, does 1 Cor 10:13 have to do with the compatibilist-libertarian debate? To begin with, one must stress the limits that 1 Cor 10:13 places on the nature of temptation. The verse indicates that the Christian is not forced to succumb to temptation and possesses the capability to resist. In other words, the temptation has its limits and does not possess the power to *force* the Christian to succumb to it (or, more accurately, it does not possess the power to render the Christian unable to endure). In other words, the temptation is such that *not* succumbing to it is possible.

Consider the following: (1) Paul is addressing believers (as evidenced by “our fathers” in verse 1, the use of the first plural throughout the passage, etc.). (2) Believers are tempted to sin. (3) Believers commit sin. (4) There are limits placed on the power of each temptation to sin. (5) The limits are such that the believer can endure without sinning. In light of statements (3) and (5), one can only conclude that it is possible not to have sinned in circumstances where one did, in fact, sin.

Thus, “in situation (x), when confronted with temptation (y), it is possible that believer (w) will not sin.” Replacing “not sin” with “endure” (since “endure it” in verse 13, if our interpretation of πειρασμὸς is correct, refers to overcoming temptation, that is, not sinning), then we have “in situation (x), when confronted with temptation (y), it is possible that believer (w) will endure.”

Furthermore, by “possible,” we must mean “a legitimate possibility.” One could argue that resisting sin is physically or mentally possible, but that the Christian’s pre-set scale of values has already decreed that he or she will not resist the temptation to sin. Yet this would seem to miss the whole point of the passage and allow the Corinthian believers the very excuse that Paul seeks to deny them. In other words, the Corinthians could simply argue that their scale

[59] One could, of course, counter by arguing that enduring trials successfully (not beyond one’s ability) refers to not expressing bitterness at one’s circumstances. This would make no difference, however, for certainly bitterness is a sin, and thus the passage still implies the power of contrary choice (i.e. a Christian may or may not fall into bitterness).

[60] Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 749.

of values has been set such that they naturally value the city's social life over their own sanctification. Since their own scale of values were set by things outside of their control (including their own character), they could legitimately say, according to a compatibilist scheme, that the temptation was too strong for them at that particular situation, the very point that 1 Corinthians 10 denies.

Therefore, "in situation (x), when confronted with temptation (y), it is possible that believer (w) will endure, but it is also possible that believer (w) will not endure (since Christians do, in fact, sin)."[61]

Furthermore, if (x) stands for all the factors leading up to that temptation, including the value scale of agent (w), then (x) must be the same whether the Christian endures or not. Otherwise Paul would have qualified the statement as follows: "God . . . will not let you be tempted beyond your ability *so long as your value scale is set correctly*." First Corinthians 10:13 thus seems to imply that (x) is not the *deciding* factor in the decision of agent (w) when confronted with (y), since (x) remains the same whether or not (w) sins.[62]

If, then, (x) is not the deciding factor, we can state the problem as follows: (1) Agent (w) sinned at situation (x). (2) According to 1 Cor. 10:13, (w) was able (δύναμαι) not to have sinned at situation (x), no matter what (x) represents (i.e. no matter what value scale, no matter what the temptation, etc.). Thus, at situation (x), (w) could have chosen either to sin or not to sin.

Consider the converse: "at situation (x), agent (w) sins and thus could *not* have chosen *not* to sin." If this were true, then "at situation (x), agent (w) was

[61] Yet simply because a Christian may always possess the ability *not to* sin, that does not mean that he or she always possesses the ability *to* sin. The converse is not always logically true (and is irrelevant to 1 Cor 10:13). It is quite possible that the Lord, in order to carry out his plan, determines that in a certain circumstance a particular Christian will not even have the ability to sin. Likewise, as widely argued, the eternal state is a perfect example of a situation where Christians will not have the ability to sin.

[62] Ware, *God's Greater Glory* 86, is critical of the implications of the power of contrary choice, arguing that this would mean that "there can be *no choice-specific reason or set of reasons* for why the agent chose A *instead of* B, or not-A. It rather is the case, according to libertarian freedom, that every reason or set of reasons must be *equally explanatory* for why the agent might choose A, *or* B, *or* not-A. As a result, our choosing reduces, strictly speaking, to arbitrariness" (emphasis original). In response, it is not at all clear why this is a problem. For all practical purposes, my choice of cookie dough ice-cream over cappuccino ice-cream may appear to be arbitrary, especially if a week earlier I chose the opposite. Both ice-cream flavors represent genuine competing desires (as opposed to strawberry ice-cream, which I have no interest in) and I cannot, as I write this paper, even attempt to predict which I would choose in a given circumstance. If "arbitrary" here means "unpredictable," then Ware is correct in his observation, but it must be pointed out that libertarian freedom, as discussed in this paper, is simply the choice of one competing desire over other competing desires. The source of that ability to choose between competing desires, if it exists, would lie in the very nature of humanity made in God's image.

More significantly, however, Ware's argument opens up some disturbing possibilities when applied to God. Consider the following: "God chose to elect John Smith to eternal salvation but chose not to elect Joe Jones to eternal salvation." If libertarian freedom is illogical, then God's choice in election must either stem from his character or from external influences. Since the latter would no doubt be repugnant to most theologians, the answer must lie in the former. Hence, something in God's character compelled him to elect Smith but not Jones. Yet the idea that within God's character lies both some element of "pro-Smith-ness" and some element of "anti-Jones-ness" is disturbing, to say the least. Is this really better than the concept that God, to all outside appearances, acts arbitrarily in election (if, for the sake of argument, we accept unconditional election)?

not able to *not* endure the temptation." The problem, of course, is that then "at situation (x), when confronted with temptation (y), agent (w) was *not* able *not* to sin" ≠ "in situation (x), when confronted with temptation (y), agent (w) was able not to sin," where the latter is the best interpretation of 1 Cor 10:13.

Thus, if this paper's interpretation of 1 Cor 10:13 is correct, one must assert that a believer, no matter what the situation, has the ability to choose not to sin (since God does not allow the temptation to get to the point where the end result is, by necessity, sin). Since Christians sin, if they have the power/ability not to sin at any given situation (regardless of their current value scale), then they must possess the power of contrary choice. In other words, Christians, in the face of temptation, possess libertarian freedom.

Clearly there are limits to the power of contrary choice. When this writer is confronted with the choice between lima beans, peas, or asparagus, the possibility of choosing asparagus does not even exist unless there are special circumstances (i.e. being a guest at somebody else's home). On the other hand, the choice of lima beans vs. peas could go either way. Thus actions/choices are not created *ex nihilo*, but stem from the will's choice of pre-existent, competing desires.[63] It is not that a Christian *creates* his or her desires, but rather that a Christian chooses *between* his or her desires and thus controls the *strengths* of those desires. Furthermore, simply because choice may be influenced by other factors (including spiritual disposition) does not necessarily mean that choice is determined by those factors.

Yet what would the compatibilist say about the situation? As noted earlier in this paper, the compatibilist position stresses that a person acts according to his or her value scale.[64] One's actions, then, "are expressions of the person that one is—of her character, whether the actions are caused by factors outside her control or not."[65]

Yet does a human being possess power over his or her own desires or have the ability to change them? Ware argues,

> We are free to seek to change our desires. Much of Scripture admonishes just this . . . but, no, we do not have control over all the factors that play into our having just the desires we have. Everything from the ways in which we were raised, the features of our own genetic makeup, the places we've lived, and the people who have influenced us—these factors and many, many more indicate that there are limits to how much we can redirect the desires of our hearts . . . only God can work in us so that our deepest desires are changed . . . we change our behavior only when our strongest desires and inclinations change."[66]

[63] Contra Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions* 329, who suggests that in the libertarian scheme, "once a will is affected by prior influences or causes, it is no longer free." Yet the key is the term "affected." A libertarian does not have to deny that his will is *affected* by other factors. Simply because something *affects* the will does not mean it *determines* the will, especially in light of the fact that the will is certainly affected by more than one influence at a time (and it is not at all clear that we can quantify the various influences on the will).

[64] Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions*, provides one of the clearest and most helpful illustrations of the compatibilist position on pages 337–38.

[65] Baker, "Why Christians Should not be Libertarian," 471.

[66] Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 80–81.

Yet consider Ware's first statement: "we are free to seek to change our desires." Does not "seek to change" in of itself imply a desire, and would not that desire already be predetermined? In other words, the question "can we change our desires?" is not answered, only pushed back a step to "are we free to desire to change our desires?" In situation (x), agent (w) cannot change his desires and cannot desire to change his desires unless something has already propelled him to seek to change his desires. Yet in order to desire to change his desires, the Christian must desire to desire to change his desires! Furthermore, in the compatibilist scheme, the desire to desire to change one's desires must stem from circumstances outside one's control.

Yet Ware is certainly correct when he states that "as we *become* more like Christ, we *choose and act* more like Christ" and that such change depends on whether or not "we submit to the disciplines of the Spirit." Such transformation naturally causes our desires to change.[67]

Yet here lies the problem: if, through the Spirit's power, the Christian's desires have changed, how then is it even possible that a Christian (especially a mature Christian) sins at all? If one's actions are driven by one's character, and if the Holy Spirit is the driving force behind character transformation, then would not the Holy Spirit outrank all other competing influences and desires in a Christian's life? Furthermore, would any sin at all be possible for a mature Christian, one whose character reflects the working of the Holy Spirit? This writer does not dispute the importance of progressive sanctification in Christian doctrine, yet is it helpful to say, as Ware does, that "we will do what we want most, and because we are not as transformed as we ought to be we will want to sin . . . believers, then, act out of their natures just as unbelievers do"?[68] Saying that when a believer sins, he or she acts out of his sinful nature, and when a believer does not sin, he or she acts out of his new nature (via the Holy Spirit) does not solve the problem, for it fails to address *why* a believer acts out of his new nature one day and the old nature the next, especially when the temptation is the same on day one as it is on day two (indeed, how often does a Christian's value scale radically change to that extent within the space of twenty-four hours?).

Under the compatibilist view, then, at situation (x), faced with temptation (y), agent (w) cannot *desire* to choose not to sin, for his desire is already determined by his value scale, which is already determined by factors out of his control. If (w) cannot *desire* to choose not to sin, then he is not able to choose not to sin, hence he is unable to endure temptation. Thus, for the compatibilist, "in situation (x), faced with temptation (y), (w) cannot endure" (and "could not have endured"). Thus compatibilism has not adequately explained 1 Cor 10:13 (if πειρασμός refers to temptation to sin).

Naturally, many unresolved issues remain. One is the nature of the will itself. Another is the issue of God's foreknowledge and "certainty" vs.

[67] Ibid. 94 (emphasis original).

[68] Ibid.

"necessity."[69] Furthermore, it is quite possible that compatibilism has an acceptable answer to the implications of 1 Cor 10:13, even if πειρασμός is taken to mean "temptation to sin." Yet at the very least, to this point compatibilism has not adequately dealt with the issue of how a *Christian* (as opposed to an unbeliever) sins and whether such sin is necessary or not.[70]

IV. CONCLUSION

If this article's exegesis is correct, 1 Cor 10:13 implies libertarian will (the power of contrary choice) and thus presents a difficulty for compatibilism. If whether or not a Christian sins at a particular point in time is already predetermined by his or her value system, then 1 Cor 10:13 loses all of its homiletical force. The apostle Paul's entire argument in both 1 Corinthians 9 and 10 seems to presuppose the ability of a believer not to sin at a particular situation.

Yet compatibilism as a whole offers much for theology. In particular, the emphasis of Ware and others on character change and the role of the Holy Spirit should be embraced by all theologians, regardless of their philosophical leanings. Furthermore, this writer believes that in many matters compatibilism provides an excellent, self-coherent, scriptural understanding of anthropology. In the matter of a *Christian's* temptation to sin, however, a belief in the power of contrary choice should be retained. The Christian who is faced with temptation endures a legitimate struggle, and both capitulation and endurance are legitimately potential outcomes. Christians, then, have

[69] Jonathan Edwards declares, "To say, the foreknowledge is certain and infallible, and yet the connection of the event with that foreknowledge is not indissoluble, but dissoluble, and fallible, is very absurd. To affirm it, would be the same thing as to affirm, that there is no necessary connection between a proposition's being infallibly known to be true, and its being true indeed" (*Freedom of the Will* 2.12 [ed. Paul Ramsey; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957] 258). Yet Robert E. Picirilli, for one, has provided a convincing argument against the equation of necessity with certainty (see Picirilli, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future," *JETS* 43 [2000], esp. 262–63, and "An Arminian Response to John Sanders' *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*," *JETS* 44 [2001] 473). Interestingly, the reader should note the following discussion by Augustine: "The Lord, in His foreknowledge of the future, foretold by the prophet the unbelief of the Jews; He foretold it, but did not cause it. For God does not compel any one to sin simply because He knows already the future sins of men. For He foreknew sins that were theirs, not His own; sins that were referable to no one else, but to their own selves. Accordingly, if what He foreknow as theirs is not really theirs, then had He no true foreknowledge: but as His foreknowledge is infallible, it is doubtless no one else, but they themselves, whose sinfulness God foreknow, that are the sinners. The Jews, therefore, committed sin, with no compulsion to do so on His part, to whom sin is an object of displeasure; but He foretold their committing of it, because nothing is concealed from His knowledge. And accordingly, had they wished to do good instead of evil, they would not have been hindered; but in this which they ere to do they were foreseen of Him who knows what every man will do, and what He is yet to render unto such an one according to his work" (*On the Gospel of Saint John*, tractate 53.4, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, First Series [ed. Philip Schaff; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994] 292).

[70] The latter point, especially, is in need of more discussion. Katherin A. Rogers, "Does God Cause Sin? Anselm of Canterbury Versus Jonathan Edwards on Human Freedom and Divine Sovereignty," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003) 376, raises an interesting point—"McCann says explicitly, and Edwards suggests, that God *needs* evil choices to accomplish His ends. But how did He come to find Himself in such an unhappy situation? He is either the absolute author of the situation or He is not."

no one to blame; the limits have been set on their temptation, and the Holy Spirit provides the way out. Since no desire, temptation, or circumstance can possibly negate the work of the Spirit, the Christian always has the ability to resist and is thus without excuse.[71]

[71] This paper was originally presented at the Southeast regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (Spring 2010). I am grateful for the feedback and encouragement of those who were present. All errors, faulty logic, or outright heresy remains the sole responsibility of this writer.