I used to teach Bible to 9th and 11th and 12th graders at a Christian School. And one of the FAQ that seemed to constantly pop was some version of this question, "Is it okay for Christians to listen to secular music?"
Now how do you answer that question? If you have teenagers in the home, this is certainly a discussion you've had.

There is of course a technical answer to that question. The answer is yes, Christians are free to listen to secular music. There are no laws that say you can or cannot listen to one type of music or another. You are not sinning by listening. You are absolutely free.

But here's the question that is far more significant. Why do you want to? What desire do you have that you find being met by secular music? The sin is never in the doing; it's always in the wanting. And music is tricky because of course there is the desire for the music itself, but there are themes, there are lyrics, there are messages that can appeal to the flesh. And so any discussion of music needs to focus on the desires.

This is exactly what Paul is doing in our passage today. If you can back up in your mind to a few weeks ago, the question the Corinthians have been asking is a simple one on the surface. Is it okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols? Same thing. Is it okay to listen to secular music. Same type of question. So a simple question deserves a simple answer, right? Is what I am doing right or is what I am doing wrong? Give me an assessment as to the rightness or wrongness of my DOING. And there is a technical answer: God does not prohibited eating meat sacrificed to idols. Idols can't spiritually poison meat. You are free in Christ.

But there is far more to say than just that. There are a thousand traps along the way. Paul won't answer simply. In fact, his answer to this simple question is 3 chapters long. He's going to ask the Corinthians to go deeper than what they are merely doing. He's going to ask them to start thinking about what they are desiring that
then leads to the doing. The question isn't are you doing the right or wrong thing. The question is are you desiring the right or wrong thing.

That question might throw you a bit. Because we rarely think about where our desires come from.

- Isn't what I desire just part of who I am?
- The question can frustrate. Why do I desire what I desire? I don't know? I just do.
- Why do I want one thing and someone else wants something totally different? I don't know? I just do.
- If I desire something I shouldn't how can I tell myself to just stop desiring it? I can't control them.
- Am I to be held responsible for these seemingly uncontrollable evil desires?
- Can we really change what we desire?

Paul is going to probe in these waters and the conclusion is somewhat startling. Not only can we change our desires, but we will be held accountable for the evil desires we don't change.

The Corinthians want to ask a simple question, "Can I eat meat?" We love the simple questions, "Can I listen to secular music." But God traffics in areas much less simple.

Don't get stuck on the external action only. Paul tells them. Beware your own heart. You want to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Fine. But why? Go beyond the surface. Are you so sure that it is strictly social? Don't simplify this. It's complicated. Sure you there is a social reason. And there's a practical hunger reason. Those are the obvious reasons you point to. But don't stop there. Don't ignore the subtle undercurrents. What other reason may exist?
• Is your reputation as a strange Christian slightly improved because of this?
• Is there a nerve of the flesh that gets scratched? Your innocent participation in meat sacrificed to idols may enflame evil desires.

Paul warns that ultimately God judges our desires, not our actions. Our evil desires will witness against us. And to illustrate this, he's going to turn to the history of Israel.

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink.

Paul begins by explaining why he's telling about Israel's history. He's making them aware. He says, I'm fearful you will be unaware, so let me make sure you know something important.

And then he starts to list. And what's the common denominator in this list? This list is trying to make us aware of the spiritually privileged position of Israel.

• They were all under the cloud? Meaning what? They saw the glory of God manifest in a physical cloud. They literally saw with their
eyes supernatural glory.

- They all passed through the sea. Israel witnessed the greatest miracle ever recorded in the Bible. Miracles just don't get grander than that. And all 2 million of them witnessed it.
- They all ate the manna and watched water come out of the rock.

Now what's the point of this list. Why is Paul leading with this? Well, he's about to issue a stern warning. When you give a warning to someone who doesn't feel they need it, they instinctively try to find reasons why the warning your giving does not apply to them. You might tell your kids, "Hey, see this guy right here. I knew him in high school and he got involved with drugs and now look at his life. Don't get involved with drugs." And that warning might feel ludicrous. And they say, "Dad, I would never do that. I'm nothing like that guy."

And at that point what does dad do? He points out the similarities. Son, don't be unaware, this guy grew up in a Christian home. He went to church and sat under great teaching his whole life. He went to Christian school. He drank water from the same spiritual drink you do.

This is what Paul is doing here. Corinthians, don't think you are somehow above Israel, that you are immune to the sin of Israel. There are more similarities to Israel than there are differences. They have rich spiritual blessings just like you. You think you are special because you have Christ. So did they. Look at the end of verse 4.
For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

So even with all that spiritual blessing, they were overthrown in the wilderness. They were able to harden themselves against it all and with most of them, God was not pleased.

Now of course this is the overstatement of the century. You have two million men, women and children leave Israel? How many made it into the promise land? Two. Yes, I suppose that is accurate. With most of them God was not pleased.

Now there's a point. There's a reason this story is preserved for us.
Can I eat meat sacrificed to idols? Absolutely. You a free, as long as you don't desire evil like Israel did.

So what evil did they desire? What evil desire did they embrace? What evil desire did they coddle in their heart that ultimately undid them such that they fell in the wilderness, a judged nation?

The Rock as Christ

This text really opened up to me when I started thinking about what Paul means when he identifies the rock they drank from as Christ. This particular reference has always puzzled me. Because when you read it, it is so unexpected and it seems so strange. It's positioned as the capstone of his argument. Israel was so privileged.

- they went through the cloud
- they went through the sea
- they ate manna
"They drank from the rock which is Christ."

Why does he throw that in there with hardly an ounce of explanation? How is this the capstone argument? Why is this particular episode chosen as the capstone evidence of the grace and mercy of God?

Well it's actually genius. And to get at that genius we need to turn to that passage. So open to Exodus 17. Now the historical context of chapter 17 is very important.

Israel has just experienced as series of pretty incredible miracles.

- Chapters 1-13 is the narrative of the 10 plagues of Egypt
- Then they Crossing of the Red Sea
- Bitter water made sweet at Marah
- They experience the manna from heaven!

And now they are on the move again. It's hard to really get firm time markers here but all these events happened in the order of days and weeks. So Israel is getting regularly accustomed to seeing God provide for them. They have seen dozens of history altering miracles in a very compressed period of time.

And so with that backdrop we look at 17:1
Exodus 17:1-7, "All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

It says here in verse 2 that the Israelites quarreled with Moses. If you watch the story in Exodus, you'll see a progression. They start out murmuring which in Hebrew is an automotopia. Just like in English, when the word itself is pronounced it sounds like murmering. So they start out with a light murmer under their breath. It's a signal that things better start changing. There's discontent in the ranks. But a murmer is self-contained. It's a complaint that you say to yourself and it's just barely vocalized.

Then it progresses from murmuring to grumbling. So now it's not just an undercurrent; people are talking to one another. People are openly complaining one to another and trying to see if they can find agreement. They are grumbling trying to find sympathizers. I'm not the only one who thinks this, right. Miserly loves company. Can you believe this Moses guy? Can you believe he led us out here in the wilderness with no water? What is he even thinking?

The Court Marshall
But now here in chapter 17 it's more. It's a quarrel. They are dug in and ready to fight. But the word means even more than that. The Hebrew word used here has a legal sense. It's the word used for a covenant lawsuit. It's almost better translated sue. It has the idea of lodging a complaint or making a charge with associated evidence.

Do you remember when David cuts of the corner of Saul's robe? He's defending his innocence and he's lodging a complaint against Saul. He says, may God be the judge and plead my cause.

1 Samuel 24:15, 15 May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand.

That word plead is the same word quarrel in Exodus 17. Do you see the way the word is being used. It's a legal matter. There's evidence and David wants God to use that evidence and fight on his behalf against Saul. That's the idea.

So when the text says,
This was a legal charge. This is literally a court marshall.

In fact, The famous Old Testament scholar Gerhard Von Rad whose no lightweight Hebrew scholar observes that the names Massah and Meribah are derivatives of this same Hebrew word for quarreling - this place was named after a court trial that went down. It would be like naming a place RoevWade.

They are pressing charges. They felt they had evidence they were going to leverage against Moses. Moses comes to God and says, “They want to stone me.” In other words, this is a capital offense. They are rushing to a verdict.

They felt that Moses had seriously betrayed them, something akin to treason. Moses took us out here with willful intent to kill us and we have evidence to prove it.

Now this might sound ridiculous to you but it’s not as ridiculous as it seems. In a culture that lived in the desert everyone knew the
consequences of the desert. You were trained from the time you could walk don't you dare head out into the desert unless you have a plan for water. Here's one of the possible locations of the waters of Marah where Moses turned the water sweet with a branch.

You can tell what kind of dessert we are talking about here. If you leave this area, here's what you are greeted with.
This is a no kidding around desert. You drag two million people out here, you better have a plan. Where's the next water hole? I mean these days, we'd be accused of willful intent to kill our children if we sent them to school without a water bottle. Even an absolute amateur would not lead 2 million people into a dessert location without knowing exactly where the next water source could be found.

This was a reasonable conclusion. This guy is working for Pharaoh. He's trying to kill us under the guise of trying to help us. He's fully conned us. It's either flagrant treason or criminal stupidity but either way this guys bones will be the first to bleach in the sun.

Do you see the legal nature of this. They are lodging an official complaint. They’re suing him and they have evidence.
And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

But Moses knows they’re not really suing him. Moses knows they’re really angry at somebody higher up, and that’s why he says, “Why do you put the Lord to the test?”

Really Moses is not on trial. God's on trial but since they can't yell at God they yell at Moses. This how all humans think. If some situation is difficult, if some person is hurtful, if some trial is thrust upon us we start looking to blame.

We’re just like they are. Things started getting difficult and they complain, “Our exodus is not going right, and we believe we know how it ought to go, and we want to be in charge.” In all reality, that’s treason.

It wasn’t Moses who was treasonous; they were being treasonous. Moses was the last person they should have blamed. How did they get into that absolutely miserable situation? How did they come to find themselves in that water-deprived state? Answer: God took them there. According to verse one they were obeying the command
of the Lord.

It actually reminded me of Jesus. Trent preached last week on the temptation of Jesus and that text opens by saying Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.

It is common for God to lead us into situations that feel like the wilderness. We don't like it. We hate wilderness experiences. So we argue, "We don't like the way this whole wilderness wandering it going." We were expecting the promise land a little sooner. We think to ourselves, This is insane. "By now I really would have thought I'd be married, or have a better marriage or made a little more money or advanced a little further in my career. There's an awful lot of subtle suing of God going on?

It's subtle because most of us intellectually know how silly it is to get into the car of our lives and to kick God out of the driver's seat saying, "Get out of here! Give me the wheel. You're making a mess of everything. You're going to wreck the car. Get in the backseat."

Wait a minute. This is the Lord of the cosmos who stretches out the earth as a canopy. "To whom will you compare me?" he says.

But we are looking for someone to blame. We are looking for someone to kick out.
Again, what are they doing. They are trying to blame someone. When a tragedy hits, everyone looks for a finger point. I guarantee you if another plane flies into a tower in NY someone will be blamed.

Whose in charge of security around here? Who let the terrorist on the plane? And they track it down and they find an 22 year old girl.

- She says, "Don't blame me." Blame the pilot. He told me to.
- The pilot says, don't blame me, blame the FAA and the
- FAA says, don't blame me, blame the secret service and the
- secret service says don't blame me, blames the president.

But eventually people stand back and say, "You know the real problem here is God himself. If God cared, he wouldn't allow this kind of evil and injustice. If God cared, we wouldn't be suffering like this. What a joke."

The upward blaming travels all the way to God himself. We've gotten to the supreme court. We've come to the supreme cause. It's time to
court marshall God.

So whose on trial here, really? God is on trial. God we are dragging you into court and we are putting you in the prisoners dock. "We don't trust you any more. Our suffering demands an explanation."

The wilderness was supposed to be a place of testing for the nation of Israel. Ex 15:25 says that he tested them at the waters of Marah. In Exodus 16:4 a chapter later God tested them when he sent manna from heaven seeing if he would follow his instructions.

But Israel is trying to turn the tables. Israel is testing God.

So this is the ultimate setup for a trial. You have the plaintiff - Israel is bringing their complaint. You have the defendant - Moses. Justice is being demanded. Here's where the text goes supernova. So unexpected what happens here.

5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

Now, you know how this text ends, but disabuse yourself of it. Just
take the setup we've walked through.

Israel is like a walking sharpie just leaving behind them a non-stop trail of complaint and grumbling. Every where they go, is the stain of complaint.

- they complain when Moses tries to free them and Pharaoh gets upset - but then God redeems
- they complain when Moses leads them out of Israel and they are trapped next to the Red Sea - but God graciously, miraculously, rescues.
- they complain when they are led into the dessert and the waters are bitter - but God rescues and they throw a branch in the water and the water is sweetened.
- they complain when they run out of food - but God provides manna.

Israel suffered from spiritual amnesia. They forgot the provision, the protection, and the presence of God. Psalm 95 remembers this:

Psalm 95:7-9, ...Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, 9 when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work."

They have had evidence after evidence after overwhelming
evidence that God will care and provide for them. Given their sassy attitude, given their entitlement, given their insolent attitude of thinking they are in the position to judge God, when I hear God say, Okay Moses, bring out the rod and elders, I'm thinking it's time for a smack down. Everyone duck. It's time for judgment. Right?

What does that rod represent? Moses was given the staff at the burning bush which was to be the sign of the presence of God. The rod is the symbol of authority. It's the symbol of judgment. This was the rod that Moses used to strike Egypt in judgment. A king is always pictured with his rod. Somebody is going to get it. It's a symbol of execution.

He takes the elders, and the elders are representative heads for the nation. But they don't just represent, they decide. The elders passed judgment on disputed matters. You only get the elders together when they’re going to make some kind of decision. The elders represent the people.

So it’s very clear that God is saying in response to these very, very, very serious charges, “There’s going to be a trial,” but whose trial is it?

Somebody here surely deserves a trial but who? This will blow your mind.
6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Whose on trial? Here’s the incredible answer: It's astonishing and so unexpected. Verse 6 says, “I will stand there before you there on the rock at Horeb.”

The rock of Horeb was the place where God had first appeared to Moses in the burning bush and God chose this place to appear to them again. But notice something very carefully here. And the grammatical construction here is crystal. It's not that the nation of Israel is going to stand before God. The construction is that God will stand before them. The hebrew is כְּפַל, which is a super common word which literally translates as "before the face." To stand before someone means that you are coming before a superior. One Hebrew scholar I read in studying for this says that the word usually means, almost always means, a servant standing before his master waiting either for a command or a sentence of judgment.

It's a super common word. And it's really helpful that it's common because we have lots and lots of usages to compare against. Here's the kicker. In the hundreds of uses NEVER in the entire Bible, never
do we have God standing before men. Always, it's men standing before God. That is always the case EXCEPT here.

This is absolutely astonishing and unprecedented that God would say, “I will go and stand before you.”

In other words, God is on trial. The picture is this. In every courtroom there is a dock where the prisoner or the defendant sits. And the passage is setup such that God is in that place.

God says even though this is the most unjust thing in the world, even though you are the criminal, “I will stand in the dock.” What have I done? I have delivered you. I have spared you. I have given you life. I have ransomed you and protected you. I have fed. I have given you water to drink. When have I failed you? You should be the one in the dock.

It's the most insane thing in the world, but I will stand in the dock. God stands before Moses in the midst of that rock and what does he say to Moses? “Raise the rod and strike the rock,” the rock of God.

Can you imagine the blaspheme of man hitting God? Think of all the presidents we have in Scripture of man interacting with God. Isaiah gets a wiff of God's presence and falls on his face an the angels are screaming out holy, holy, holy.

Nobody could possibly raise a rod against YHWH, the embodiment of glory itself? How are you going to land that blow? Paul hundreds of years later in 1 Corinthians 10 identifies the rock as Christ being struck by the rod of judgment.

Do you see the powerful imagery here? Can you imagine the
amazement of Moses when God says, “Hit the rock?” You’re not supposed to touch something God is on. Do you remember what happened if people or even animals touched Mount Sinai when God was on Mount Sinai? Do you remember what the penalty was? Death. Here is God saying, “I will stand there and I want you to bring down the rod.” So up goes the rod of God, the rod of his judicial wrath, and down it comes onto the rock of God.

What did God do? He provided. He nourished. He cared. He protected. He loved. And you want me to raise my rod and hit him?

What does this all mean? Paul tells us that the “The rock was Christ.”

We should be on trial. Israel should have been put on trial. But in Exodus 17 God put himself on trial instead. Why? In order to teach them the way of salvation, he submitted himself to judgment—not their judgment, but his own! The rod of judgment stricks and out flows water, life. It was through the blow of judgment that life sprang forth.

We should be guilty of cosmic treason, but God stands in the dock. If we are to be spared for putting God in the dock, he has to stand in the dock himself and take the blow we deserved. And he does it.

Alright so now we know what Paul meant when he said the Rock was Christ.

The Evil Desire

Now let's answer the question we started with. We aren't in Exodus 17. We are in 1 Corinthians 10. So Paul is recounting Israel's
unbelievable privilege and he culminates this by saying,

1 Corinthians 10:4-6, ...For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

Is it okay to eat meat? Paul says, Yes as long as you don't desire evil like Israel. What's the evil?

Let's pull it all together. Look at the spiritually privileged position of Israel. They saw God in the cloud, they were led by God through the water, they drank from the rock. And the climax of the passage is, even when Israel deserved extreme judgment, God spared them by taking that judgment in himself. The Rock was Christ.

And what did Israel do? Next week we will see the continuation. They complained. They continue to put God on trial. They ordered another court marshal against God.

What evil did they desire? In their suffering they desired to put God to the test. Is God who he says he is? Let me stand in that seat of judgment and I will tell you if he is worthy of following or not.
C.S. Lewis wrote an article entitled, God in the Dock

“The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge...man is on the bench and God is in the dock.” - C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock

Here’s the fundamental evil: we believe we have the right to ask the question. We stay on the bench; God stays in the dock until he justifies himself to us. On the surface, it seems so innocent. What’s wrong with a simple question?

But it's evil to the core. Think about what Trent preached last week. Was this not Satan’s EXACT strategy when he tempted Jesus? Exact. He was putting Jesus in the dock. He was trying to get Jesus to prove himself.

- He took Jesus out to the wilderness, just like God did with Israel and said, if you are God prove it.
- He took him to the highest point of the temple he said, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. If you are God, prove it.
- Satan was putting Jesus in the dock. He was trying to get him to prove that he really was the Son of God.
But Jesus refused to submit to Satan's test, not because he couldn’t pass, but because the trial itself was wrong.

So what does Jesus say? “It is also written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’ ” (v. 7; cf. Deut. 6:16).

That's the evil desire. It is not our place to bring God to trial. We can't court marshal God. The real question is not “What do we think about him?” but “What does he think about us?” It is not a matter of us reaching a verdict about him, but of him declaring his verdict on us.

If you want to drink from the Rock of Christ, you have to get the order right. You have to put the right person in the dock. Even the pagans understood.

- God is your Judge.
- You deserve the blow.
- When you finally see that and stop making excuses,
- Stop thinking God owes you something because you have to suffer.
- Stop making yourself the judge,
- Stop putting yourself in the center and inflating your own importance.

And instead stand before Jesus Christ, the judge and say, “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to the cross I cling,” you can start to drink. Not before.

We are scared to allow Christ to take the seat because of what we fear. That he will rightfully condemn us. But this is not the character of God. He takes the blow and out comes the water - the life. But you have to drink from that rock. How do you drink from the Rock?
Of course nothing actually happened that day. It was all symbolic. But one day God did take the rod right in the heart. That sword thrust into Jesus' side and out flowed blood and water. Blood symbolizing death, water symbolizing life. Because of that, Jesus Christ says in John 7, “Anyone who comes to me will never thirst again. In fact, out of him will flow streams of water from his insides.”

We never test God. We allow God to test us. Lewis was right. People often claim the right to reach their own verdict about God. They demand some answers before they will even think about becoming Christians. Some of the questions are legitimate, such as “If God is good, then why does he allow evil?” or “If God is love, then why did he come up with such a narrow way of salvation?”

It is not wrong to ask, but our motivation for asking makes all the difference. Are we asking from a genuine desire to know God, or are we raising objections that are really based on a refusal to submit to him because you like calling the shots? God loves to answer the questions of an honest seeker, but for those who expect God to meet their demands, his ways will forever remain a mystery.

Let's be so careful of this attitude in our suffering. Don't belittle their suffering. It's not pretend. It's real and significant. It's crushing. There have been many, many, many times in which we have cried out, like Job in his agony, in which we have accused God of things. We have said, “I don’t think you know what you’re doing.”

But if God is willing to take the blow for us, can you not trust him and see that he loves and cares for you. This is your greatest evidence that he will never leave you or forsake you or allow you to endure anything that you cannot bear. How can you question a God that would do that for you?
Will you not trust him?