

**1 Corinthians 10:1-13 (Third Sunday in Lent—Series C)**

**“Watch for the Danger and Stand in Christ”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**

**March 20, 2022**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is Epistle lesson recorded in 1 Corinthians 10.

<sup>1</sup>For I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they were drinking from the spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>But God was not pleased with most of them, for they were scattered in the desert. <sup>6</sup>Now these things happened as prefigurements of us, to keep us from being cravers of evil things, as also they craved. <sup>7</sup>And do not be idolaters as were some of them, as it stands written, “The people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play.” <sup>8</sup>And we should not indulge in sexual immorality, as some of them were sexually immoral and twenty-three thousand fell there on one day. <sup>9</sup>And we should not test Christ, as some of them tested Him and were destroyed by the serpents. <sup>10</sup>And do not grumble as some of them grumbled and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup>Now these things that kept happening to them as a prefigurements, and they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the goals of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>So let him who thinks he is standing watch that he doesn’t fall. <sup>13</sup>No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your capacity, but will make with the temptation also the way out so that you can bear it.

Have you ever been disqualified from something? Being told that you are disqualified means that you are **not** qualified to be in the race or athletic competition. Being disqualified means that you are **unfit** for that job or that particular responsibility. Being disqualified—unsuitable, inadequate, and ineligible—can be heart-breaking and gut-wrenching. It can ruin hopes and dreams and aspirations. It can destroy careers and lives.

And as bad as that is, the danger of being disqualified—unfit—for eternal life with God is even worse. And that danger is real. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians his practice to keep his body in check so that it continually serves the great goal of pointing people to the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may

obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be **disqualified**" (1 Cor. 9:24–27 ESV, emphasis added). By disciplining himself, Paul's faith was active in loving service to all. If Paul were to live a life of self-indulgence, he would endanger not only the salvation of others, but also his own. You see, the danger of being disqualified is real. "Disqualification would mean nothing less than missing out on the crown of life. . . . The implication for the Corinthians should be obvious: it would be a tragedy if they forfeited their salvation by ceasing to exercise self-control and . . . relapsing into idolatry."<sup>1</sup>

Idolatry is a First Commandment issue—You shall have no other gods. For the Corinthians, idolatry would have most obviously meant worshiping in the temple of one of Roman gods or goddesses and taking part in their rituals by sitting down and eating in honor of that fake god or goddess. But idolatry is more than that. It is a matter of or a condition of the heart. Luther says it best in the *Large Catechism*, "What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 319-20.

these two belong together, faith and God. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god."<sup>2</sup>

Paul moves into chapter 10 of his letter to the Corinthian believers, not wanting them to be ignorant of the danger of disqualification, being unfit for salvation, ineligible to wear the crown of everlasting life. He illustrates how that danger was real for the Israelites so that the Corinthians will be aware of the danger themselves. Paul wrote about the Israelites, "But God was not pleased with most of them, for they were scattered in the desert." For the hundreds of thousands of men who experienced the exodus from Egypt, only two—Joshua and Caleb—were able to enter the land of promise! The rest were disqualified because of their unfaithfulness and false worship. Paul's point? Christians also face the danger of being unfit for salvation if they engage in false worship and fail to remain in repentance and faith worked by the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, then, this is a matter of great importance and all seriousness. The Corinthian believers were, as well as are Christians today, prone to the same sins as Israel. So Paul has written to them and to us, "For I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters. . . . Now these things happened as prefigurements of us, to keep us from being cravers of evil things, as also they craved."

God bestowed His grace upon the children of Israel as He led them out of slavery in Egypt by the hand of Moses. He blessed the Israelites with His gracious provision in the

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 359.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

wilderness. The Apostle said it this way, "Our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they were drinking from the spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ." The Israelites experienced God's glorious presence and power in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The Lord went before them in that pillar of cloud and even moved behind them to protect them at the Red Sea. Speaking of the Red Sea, Israel passed safely through the sea, the waters parted on their right and left. They ate the manna, the bread given from God in heaven. They drank the water from a rock as the Lord quenched their thirst. All the while Christ was their spiritual rock who was with them day in and day out, Israel's great protector.

But Israel succumbed to sin. Many, many were disqualified from entering the Promised Land. "Be warned, then," Paul says. "If Christians fall into the same sins of idolatry and unfaithfulness, they will be punished just as Israel was punished." And that is a frightening thought. So let us then take heed and watch so that we don't fall!

"Do not be idolaters as were some of them, as it stands written, 'The people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play.' This refers to the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. The Israelites broke the First Commandment. They had Aaron fashion a golden calf from their earrings. He constructed a "graven image" whom the people of Israel worshipped—"These are our gods who brought us out of Egypt!" The Corinthians might well fall into the temptation to worship the Roman idols in their temples. And what idols might you and I worship? The god of popularity? The god of food and drink known as gluttony? The deity of

sexual activity outside of marriage? Whatever receives your love and trust is your god. Idolatry can only have disastrous consequences.

“And we should not indulge in sexual immorality, as some of them were sexually immoral and twenty-three thousand fell there on one day.” Paul speaks here about Israel’s self-indulgent idol worship moving into fornication, as the people of Moab invited the people of Israel to enjoy their fertility rites in honor of the Baal of Peor. The Lord’s anger was kindled. A plague killed 23,000 in judgment. Christians in Corinth and Christians here are warned not to fall into the same trap of idolatry and the immorality that also may follow. You are temples of the Holy Spirit and your lives are to be characterized by holiness.

“And we should not test Christ, as some of them tested Him and were destroyed by the serpents. And do not grumble as some of them grumbled and were destroyed by the Destroyer.” Two more examples from the life of the Israelites in the wilderness cap off Paul’s warning. The people grumbled against God and Moses on the long trip around the land of Edom. The Lord sent fiery serpents among them. They bit the people and many of the people of Israel died. And another instance of grumbling by the Israelites (they grumbled a lot) found the earth opening and swallowing up Korah and company in Numbers 16.

All these instances, Paul says, happened to the Israelites as a prefigurements of the way God deals with His people in both judgment and salvation. These events were recorded for our instruction also. We live now in the “last days.” All the “ages” of this universe have by God’s grace reached their common goal in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Now we live in the shadow of the last great day, the day of Jesus’ final coming. Being mindful of this, Christians should not be complacent. “So let him who thinks he is standing watch that he doesn’t fall.”

After celebrating the Passover with His disciples, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. "He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed. . . . And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation'" (Luke 22:40–46 ESV).

Jesus' words to His disciples in the garden are also His words to His disciples through His apostle Paul. As believers in Jesus, we will face the onslaught of temptation to idolatry and immorality, to unfaithfulness and self-indulgence. And like the Israelites, sometimes we'll fall into temptation, and we will sin. But God's Word to you and me is that we need not remain in that sin. We do not have to stay in the pit of guilt and shame. We do not have to let sin have its way with us and so cause us to be disqualified from the crown of life.

Sin—all sin—already stands forgiven. Every time we have given our fear, love, and trust to something in this world, even to our own selves, that idolatry is already forgiven. The lust in our hearts, the perverse words that we have spoken, the immoralities that we have committed in body and mind—all are forgiven. Paul says about the Israelites, "They were drinking from the spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ." That Rock is still Christ, for He is the One who died to pay for all our sins on the cross. And He is the One who rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and has poured out on us through the Means of Grace His Holy Spirit.

By the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit, we confess Jesus as Lord. You and I have been baptized with one Spirit into one body and we are all given to drink of one Spirit (1

Cor. 12:13). We have partaken of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. The spiritual Rock who is our Lord Jesus personally comes to us by the power of the Spirit through the Gospel and brings us to repentance for our sins. Jesus through the Spirit by the Gospel delivers the real forgiveness of sins to us which was purchased and won by Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Through the Gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are given new life by the power of the Spirit so that we may overcome temptation and finally win the victory. "No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your capacity, but will make with the temptation also the way out so that you can bear it."

The Good News is that God is faithful to you in Jesus Christ. He does not abandon you in your times of need when you are faced with the temptations to idolatry and unfaithfulness and unbelief. Your Rock, Christ Jesus, is with you through His Holy Spirit, enabling you to stand firm in faith, to repent when you have sinned, and to receive with great joy His forgiveness and restoration.

The Lord Jesus has promised to be with you and me through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ's Word given to us by the apostle Paul, the Lord will enable us to watch for the dangers of sin and temptation that could lead to our disqualification. By the working of the Holy Spirit through Gospel Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, we are empowered to stand faithfully with Jesus as we receive His blood-bought forgiveness and the strengthening of our Christian faith. Through Christ alone and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will remain faithful unto death and so receive the crown of everlasting life. Amen.