

INI

1 Corinthians 10,1-13

Trinity 9 — 2 July 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, which was read earlier:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: There is an old joke told about pianist Artur Rubinstein. He was walking along the street in New York City when a stranger came up to him and asked, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall." Rubinstein replied, "Practice, practice, practice."

In the women's World Cup, Carli Lloyd in part credited her hat trick and her outstanding play not only to practice but also to visualization of her in different situations.

Of course, whether it is in the world of music or in the world of sports, there are some people who have greater talents than others. But to be outstanding takes more than talent. It takes practice, it takes

visualization, and it also means learning from the mistakes of others (because that is a lot easier than learning from one's own mistakes) as well as one's own mistakes.

Paul is speaking to the Corinthians and us this morning. And Paul is saying we can and should learn from the mistakes of our spiritual fathers of ancient Israel. Why go that far back? Because God says we should learn from the deadly spiritual mistakes of God's Old Testament people. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**Learning From The Failures Of Others.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

1) God Blesses Equally

2) When God's People Fail God; and,

3) God's Promise To Guard Us From Temptation

1) God Blesses Equally. Paul begins by stating something that we might ordinarily miss: God blessed all the children of Israel who came out of Egypt. That's all – no exceptions. The first few lines of our text make that crystal clear – all were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized in Moses and in the cloud and sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank from the same spiritual rock, which was the preincarnate Christ.

Objectively, all Israel received God's blessing and grace. All Israel was strengthened spiritually. All Israel received a type of Baptism and all received a type of the Lord's Supper. Needless to say, these were shadows, they were types whose fulfillment would come in the New Testament Era with Jesus and the apostles.

What Paul is also saying, all the Corinthian Christians shared in God's blessings. Through the Holy Gospel, the Holy Spirit worked faith into their hearts. Through Holy Baptism, their sins were washed away and they were renewed in the Holy Spirit. Through the Lord's Supper, as they ate Christ's true Body and drank His true Blood, they received the forgiveness of sins. They all equally received God's gracious

blessings. No one received more forgiveness and no one received less. In addition to this, they individually received various spiritual gifts so that the Church might be built up and the gifts were to be used for the common good.

And I dare say the situation is exactly the same with us. We also have all equally received God's blessings. Through the Holy Gospel, the Holy Spirit worked faith into our hearts. Through Holy Baptism, our sins were washed away and we were renewed in the Holy Spirit. Through the Lord's Supper as we eat Christ's true Body and drink His true Blood we receive the forgiveness of sins.

In commenting on this text. Martin Chemnitz says:

Surely the text expressly and clearly deals with the point that the ancients among themselves had the same sacraments. For he says: "Our fathers all ate the same food." And the ancient church fathers, except for Augustine, interpreted this passage this way. ... Paul applies this statement to his own situation in this way: Just as the same Sacraments were held in common by all in the Old Testament, so also we in the New Testament all have the same Sacraments, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. But just as then in the Old Testament God was not pleased with all who used these Sacraments ... so also in the New Testament debauchers, fornicators, idolaters, etc. [1 Corinthians 6,9-10], should not delude themselves because they have the same Baptism and the same Supper as the pious use. It is perfectly clear that Paul instituted and proposed this in order that he might take away from the Corinthians that false delusion that debauchery, whoring, communion with idols [1 Corinthians 10,16-21], etc., could not hurt them since they had been baptized and used the same Lord Supper as the truly pious. [Chemnitz, The Lord's Supper, 259]

that leads us to verse five and just about our next point. Luther asks when the faith of the great majority of the people began to fail.

Luther says that “no longer until they came into the wilderness. There they began to despise God’s Word, to murmur against Moses and against God, and to fall into Idolatry” (Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 8: 183). It might be one of the vast understatements to say that with “most” God was not “well pleased.” We might ask: Out of the hundreds of thousands of Israelites who left Egypt, mind you, all of whom received God’s blessings, how many made it into the Promised Land? Our Bible Quiz for this morning gives us the answer: two! Joshua and Caleb.

This brings us to look at

2) When God’s People Fail God. One of Paul’s purposes in recounting Israel’s awful history of falling into apostasy is to warn Christians against a false sense of security. Paul wanted to draw a parallel to ancient Israel to show that “while many were disqualified because of their unfaithfulness and false worship, Christians too face the danger of being disqualified from salvation if they engage in false worship and fail to remain in repentance and faith worked by the Holy Spirit” (Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, CPH: 326).

Paul gives us several examples of the failures of the Israelites. Their failures, however, were failures of faith – they fell away from the faith.

The first example occurred almost immediately when they were in the wilderness. They were disgusted with the manna that the Lord had provided and wanted the meat and vegetables of Egypt. God sent them quail until it was coming out of their mouths. He also struck the people with a plague so the place where they received their meat was known as Kibroth-hatta-avah, or, “the graves of greediness.” (Numbers 11)

The next incident refers to the Golden Calf – when the people twisted the arms of Aaron and Miriam to make an idol for them. In their worship, the people sat down to eat and then rose up to play – which is a euphemism for sexual excess. While God wanted to exterminate all of

Israel, Moses interceded and only about 3,000 fell at the hand of the Lord. Many rabbis even today feel that Israel never was completely forgiven for this idolatrous excess. (Exodus 32)

The third incident refers to Israel accepting the Moabite invitation to engage in a joint worship service which, in effect, consisted of engaging in so-called sacred prostitution. The Lord then said the leaders of the people should be killed – and twenty-three thousand fell. The Old Testament text has twenty-four thousand. Some feel at this point Paul was using round numbers and deliberately understated things so he could not be accused of exaggeration. (Numbers 25)

Paul's fourth example refers to Israel putting God to the test. Originally they put the Lord to the test when they demanded water at Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17). But Paul also is thinking about the incident when, after the spies returned from scouting out Canaan, all the people – the whole congregation – did not believe that the Lord could lead them into the Promised Land. God pronounced His judgment – “Your dead bodies will fall in this wilderness” (Numbers 14,29). But since Paul refers to the Destroyer, Paul also has in mind Korah's rebellion. But since Paul refers to serpent, he is referring to the time when the people thought God had only brought them into the wilderness to die without food and water – then as a cure Moses was told by God to put a bronze serpent on a pole and all who looked at the serpent would not die from the bites but live (Numbers 21).

As Luther says about all of this, sin first disbelieves the Word and then finds things about God to criticize.

But all of this was not written down for Israel's edification – it was written down so that we might learn from the failure of ancient Israel and that we might cling to

3) God's Promise To Guard Us From Temptation. Luther felt that Paul's words were directed to the self-confident. They had all

shared in God's blessings – the Word, Baptism, Holy Communion – and yet the congregation was riven by factions, tolerated of immorality, dined in pagan temples, participated in sexual immorality, abused the Lord's Supper, abused spiritual gifts, and so forth. It seems as if the Corinthians thought that once they had participated in the mysteries of the faith, they were now kind of immune from God's direction – that they, in effect, had a perpetual “get of jail free card.” And so Paul warned them. The one who thinks he stands better watch out, because he can easily fall, and the falling of which Paul speaks is a falling away from the faith.

Paul thus tells us that God will allow no Christian to be tempted beyond that which he can bear and also will provide a means of escape.

When we hear this, we think of the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer – “Lead us not into temptation.” As Luther explains it:

God indeed tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that God will guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world and our flesh may not deceive us nor seduce us into misbelief, despair and other great shame or vice; and though we be assailed by them, that we may still finally overcome and obtain the victory.

God did not tempt the ancient Israelites. What or who did? The devil, the world, and their flesh.

God didn't tempt the Corinthians. What or who did? The devil, the world, and their flesh.

God doesn't tempt us. Who or what will? The devil, the world, and our flesh.

But God's promise is that he will either limit the temptation or strengthen us until such time as there is a means of escape.

None of us is to be too secure or too confident. I cannot tell what is a temptation for you, and you cannot for me – none of us can read hearts. But in whatever the situation, I am reminded and comforted of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness. When temptation would bite – don't look at the serpent, but rather remember that Jesus used this example of Himself – Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. He is lifted up to win for us the forgiveness of sins. On the third day, He was lifted up from the grave as the first fruits from the dead and promises to lift us up on the Last Day as well.

Conclusion: These Scriptures “were written for our instruction.” We are to be prepared for temptation as we go through life. And that will always start with the words that the serpent said to Eve in Paradise: “Did God really say?” Can we really trust in God, that He Who began a good work in Christ Jesus in us will bring it to completion?

God shows us how shared His blessings equally with the whole congregation of Israel when they came out of Egypt. God also shared His blessings equally with the Corinthians when they came to faith. God continues to share His blessings equally with us.

But then?

The Israelites didn't trust– and they were laid low in the wilderness.

The Corinthians were self-confident, but stood on the brink of falling.

And we? That God that God has given us these examples for our instruction. That is, better we learn from the errors of others than our own. But if we are caught up in error, we again look to God's Word, in which He would show us His Son, Jesus, raised up on a Cross for our forgiveness, and raised up on the third day to make us right with God.

Here is God's unchanging love made real for each one of us.

It is as the hymn says:

If thou but suffer God to guide thee
And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee through the evil days.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the Rock that naught can move. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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