

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Take Heed Lest You Fall

March 22nd, 2015

1 Corinthians 10:1-22

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(Note to Worship Leader and A/V folks: This morning we will have the Scripture passage read by a member of the worship team immediately prior to the message. It must be read in the ESV. Please work with the reader to ensure that all words can be pronounced. The full text is printed below for word count purposes only – I will not be re-reading it. A/V folks, please make sure the reading is recorded as part of the sermon file. Thanks.)

¹ 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. 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. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:1–22 ESV)

Introduction:

Good morning! Please have your Bibles open to the Scripture that you just had read to you. That's on page 957 in your pew Bible. We are the final section of an argument that the Apostle Paul began back in chapter 8. Back in chapter 8 Paul began to correct their wrong understanding of Christian liberty. They thought that Christian liberty was about being free to live at the limit of their permission because they were saved by the grace of God in Christ. In a sense they were right, but in another sense they were dangerously wrong. Paul begins to show that while it is true that Christians are free from the law, we are not free from the law so that we can live to the limit of our appetites. We are free from the law but we are actually subject to other, narrower and more significant concerns. A mature Christian isn't asking "how far can I go until it's a sin" a mature Christian is asking "how much can I give up so as to advance the Gospel, so as to glorify God and so as to protect the welfare of God's people". That is the argument that Paul began to make in chapter 8 and then went on to illustrate in chapter 9. He's made a positive argument thus far – living within your technical permission is good for the spread of the Gospel and it is good for the glory of God – that's a positive argument. Now here, in chapter 10, he makes a more negative argument; he begins to warn them of the consequences of indulging their sense of liberty. Thinking about your liberty is a very dangerous thing to do, Paul says. Not only can it cause other people to stumble, as he argued in chapter 8, it can also make you stumble. Not everyone who runs, finishes. Many fall and they fall because they think too much about the very things you have begun to think about. Paul makes this point by referencing a well known Old Testament story.

We'll look at that story and the 4 point argument that Paul seems to be making in just a moment, but before we get there I just want you to notice a few of the things that Paul says to set this story up. These preparatory points won't take long, but I think we need to see them. Look at verse 1:

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud (1 Corinthians 10:1 ESV)

Both of the things I want to say to set this message up come out of the verse. The first thing I want you to see is that Paul thinks that what we are about to talk about is very important business. I'll let the cat out of the bag here and just tell you that we are going to talk about apostasy and perseverance. Some Evangelicals HATE these sort of sermons. Some Evangelicals have been

raised on a steady diet of easy believism, wave your hand at Jesus and live however you want in full assurance of salvation-ism. They like to talk about “once saved always saved” but they don’t like to talk about how the Bible says that many people who think they are saved are not and so they hate passages like this one. But Paul says that this is an important topic. He thinks that knowing this doctrine might actually save your soul and I might add that it might also get you praying again for the souls of your adult children whom you think are saved but who have long since stopped following Jesus. So we need this, even though we might not enjoy this.

Second thing that comes out of that verse is that little phrase:

our fathers... (v.1)

The “our fathers” in question here are the ancient people of Israel which, if you think about it, is a strange thing to say to a largely Gentile church. Paul is saying to a bunch of Greco-Roman Gentiles that they should think of the ancient Hebrews as “our fathers”. That just needs to be said. Some folks in the Evangelical church like to chop up the Bible and say: “These bits belong to the Jews and these bits belong to the church”. Utter nonsense and heresy. The Apostle Paul said:

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. (Galatians 3:7 ESV)

And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29 ESV)

If you are in Christ through faith then you are a child of Abraham and the Old Testament is a collection of stories that illustrate how God tends to deal with our family. That’s why we read these stories. These are not stories about some other people, they are stories about us. This is our family history and God is our Father and he hasn’t changed in his love and concern for his children. Therefore take heed. There is a lesson in this story for us and you should see it.

An Example For Us:

Now, the lesson itself is not hard to discern. Paul is drawing out 4 principles from this Old Testament story. First of all, the story suggests that:

1. Not all who begin this journey complete it

That is the unavoidable, undeniable, main point that Paul is working in this passage. As Pastor Jody mentioned last Sunday, verses 24-27 of chapter 9 function as a hinge between what Paul was saying from his own life and what he is now saying from the story of “our fathers”. Self indulgence is the enemy of God’s people. Paul explains in chapter 9 that self interest and self indulgence and these false notions of liberty actually obstruct the spread of the Gospel. They are dangerous feelings to entertain as indeed they always have been. Not only do they keep people from hearing the Gospel, they have often disqualified those who proclaim it. That’s the turn that Paul makes at the end of chapter 9. Self indulgence is dangerous to others AND it is dangerous to US. He provides an illustrates from athletics; he says:

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. (1 Corinthians 9:24 ESV)

Not all who begin to run win the ultimate prize. Then he says at the end of his illustration:

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27 ESV)

Some runners are disqualified! They don’t finish! They wander out of bounds and in the end, they lose it all! Don’t be like that, Paul says. I don’t want to be like that therefore I discipline my body and I keep myself under control. In verse 26 he switches metaphors and talks about boxing and the implication is that Paul is not just flailing about here, he is BEATING HIMSELF intentionally so as to keep himself under control. Paul is at war with HIMSELF because he knows that PRONE TO WANDER LORD I FEEL IT! If Paul is that concerned with his own capacity to apostasize and make ruin of his soul then how much more you! How much more me? Not all who begin this journey of faith complete it.

Now before you start accusing the Apostle Paul of a false Gospel for writing this or me for preaching this, let’s do a quick check in with Jesus. Jesus said stuff like this didn’t he? In Luke 8 Jesus tells the parable of the sower. He says that a man went out to sow. The seed fell in various ways upon the ground and produced a variety of different results. Afterwards the

disciples asked him to explain the parable and he said this:

¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. **But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.** ¹⁴ And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵ As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:11–15 ESV)

Jesus said that some people believe for a while – they start out on the journey of faith. They come alongside of us. They sing the same songs as us, they sit beside us and share in our experiences; they make a profession of faith, but then for some reason, they never go very deep. They stall. They camp out in the merge lane and never seem to make any spiritual progress and then, somewhere down the line something bad happens. Things get tough at home, a job is lost, a marriage sours and in the heat of that moment, in the trial, they fall away. They die in the desert. They had no root, Jesus says, they were never really alive. And so whatever they were, for a while, it wasn't real and it didn't last. There are people like that Jesus says. And there are people who hear the Word and believe and they too come alongside for a while. But then the cares of the world, the pleasure of life begin to squeeze out all thoughts of faith. There are hockey tournaments to go to, promotions to seek, vacations to take, pleasures to indulge and all of the sudden the Bible is not read, prayer is not made, church is not attended and faith grows cold. And they too fall away. They slip into a sort of semi-Christian coma and they may stay there in nominal faithism until the day they die. Perhaps they trust in a record of past involvement or prior profession that they hope will serve them well should they face the Lord on Judgment Day. But Jesus spoke about that too. He says:

²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:22–23 ESV)

I never knew you. Notice well that he does not say: "I once knew you, but now I don't". He doesn't say that. Because he didn't say that I am not arguing that people lose their salvation. I am arguing that many people who think they are saved, because they once, for a while followed Jesus, are not. The Bible says:

the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:22 ESV)

The Bible does not teach that everyone who at any point professes faith in Jesus will be saved. The Bible teaches that many who make such professions fall away; but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Secondly, Paul uses this Old Testament story to remind us that:

2. Not all who have spiritual experiences are truly saved

Look at verses 1b-5:

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. 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. (1 Corinthians 10:1-5 ESV)

Commentators generally agree that Paul has used very specific language in this passage in order to make explicit parallels between the spiritual experiences of the exodus generation and the spiritual experiences of present day Christians. Paul is saying that our fathers were “baptized into Moses” in order to make an obvious parallel. He is saying: “Not everyone who participates in the rites of redemption is truly set free. Not everyone who went through the waters actually entered the Promised Land. In the same way, not everyone who makes a profession of faith and who goes through the waters of baptism actually goes to heaven. Not everyone who takes communion – who eats of the spiritual bread and drinks of the spiritual drink – is truly saved.” God was not pleased with many folks in the Old Testament who had those experiences and they died in the wilderness. God will not be fooled by mere participations in our day either.

Pause and hear that. Paul is concerned that we understand that the mere fact that we stood in that tank and we made a profession of faith does not thereby ensure that we are well and truly saved. Now, I don't think Paul means that people are trying to deceive us. I don't believe I've ever baptized someone who was trying to pull the wool over my eyes and infiltrate the church as an agent of the devil. I don't think that is what Paul is saying. I think he is saying that many people who think they are trusting in Jesus are not. Many people who go through the motions of redemption are not actually saved. They make a public profession – they BELIEVE IN THAT

PROFESSION, even if they don't truly believe in Christ. Right? You can actually have faith in your faith rather than faith in Christ, and many do. Many people have faith in their faith and many people, Paul says have faith in their experiences of faith. In Matthew 7 Jesus seems to be talking about people who have had faith experiences, some of which we might even call "charismatic faith experiences". But even those folks, Jesus says, were never truly saved. No spiritual experience – neither a sacramental experience nor a charismatic experience - actually certifies your salvation. Many people lie to themselves in the tank and many people are lied to in their experience. The Bible warns of that. 2 Thessalonians 2 says:

⁹The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and **lying** wonders,¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had **pleasure** in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12 NKJV)

Do you hear that? People who enjoyed things they shouldn't, believed things they shouldn't and as a result were ultimately condemned. In the Old Testament and in the New we are taught that spiritual experience, whether of a sacramental or charismatic nature – is not certification of saving faith. Many who start don't finish, and many who experience are deceived.

Thirdly, Paul uses this Old Testament story to teach us that:

3. Those who fall away are often characterized by unrestrained self indulgence

There is a connection in the Bible between pleasure and apostasy. Paul makes that connection in 2 Thessalonians 2, as we read just a minute ago. Those who had PLEASURE in unrighteousness believe the lying wonders and are led astray. Similarly here in 1 Corinthians 10:6-8 Paul makes that same point:

⁶Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might **not desire evil** as they did.⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and **rose up to play**."⁸ We must **not indulge in sexual immorality** as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. (1 Corinthians 10:6–8 ESV)

All throughout the Bible there is a connection made between wrong desire and eventual apostasy. It goes right back to the story of Adam and Eve. God gave them EVERY TREE in the Garden to eat from except one. And still the devil managed to convince Eve that God was withholding

God and that she had every right to indulge her appetite and eat the forbidden fruit. Eve looked at the fruit, she saw that it was a delight to the eyes and able to make one wise and she took and she ate and she fell. That theme DOMINATES the story of the Bible between the fall and new creation. Paul reminds us here of how wrong desire caused many of our fathers in the desert to fall away. In the desert when our fathers were wandering and waiting for the Promised Land God gave them manna to eat and water to drink but that wasn't enough for them. They WANTED MORE! They wanted MEAT – do you see why this story makes sense in connection to 1 Corinthians 8? In 1 Corinthians 8 the issue was MEAT sacrificed to idols. MEAT they shouldn't be DESIRING as the children of God. Now Paul reminds them of how their fathers WANTED MEAT also. Now is meat a sin? No of course not BUT wanting things that God hasn't given can lead to very big problems. As it was then, so it is now. Do you remember the story of the quails? Its found in Numbers 11. Verse 4 says:

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! (Numbers 11:4 ESV)

The people had a strong CRAVING. They wanted MEAT! And so God gave them what they asked for but God was angry because they WANTED what he hadn't GIVEN. The story goes on to say that God sent a wind that caused a large flock of quail to crash into the desert. The people went and caught them and they began to eat. Verse 33 says:

While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague. (Numbers 11:33 ESV)

Desiring what God hasn't given is a very dangerous thing to do. Paul also cites a story from Exodus 32, the story of the Golden Calf. That story strongly suggests a connection between idolatrous worship and sexual immorality. They sat down to eat and drink and they rose up to play. The Jewish community always understood that as a reference to sexual immorality. Paul's point in using both stories is the same. Unrestrained appetite – whether we're talking about substances or sexuality – is the enemy of persevering faith. If you feed your addiction you are digging your own grave. The battle of faith is ultimately a battle of appetites. That is why Jesus said:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matthew 5:6 ESV)

Our fathers were in the desert to learn that hunger; the hunger for God; instead, they indulged other hungers and they died. Take heed to that, Paul says, and keep yourselves under control.

Finally, Paul tells this story to remind us that:

4. Those who persevere in faith are singular in their communion and devotion

He begins to bring this section in for a landing in verses 19-22:

¹⁹What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²²Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:19–22 ESV)

Do you want to persevere in faith? Flee youthful lusts. Don't play around with this stuff. You are not strong enough to flirt with demons. Don't ask stupid questions like "how far can I go until it's a sin" ask instead "how close need I walk with Christ in order to be safe until the end." You are not as strong as you think so, take heed. Be careful. Be singular in your communion with Christ. Be fearful in your fidelity to God. Do not put great stock in prior confessions or spiritual experiences, those can be deceiving. Keep your appetites under control. FEED your HUNGER for God and PRAY for grace to endure. For the one who endures TO THE END will be saved. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.