

Inclusion and Holy Fear

1st Corinthians 10:1-22

¹For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." ⁸Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. ¹³No 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, so that you will be able to endure it.

¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. ¹⁶Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? ¹⁹What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No,

but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in 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. ²²Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

1. Inclusion and Holy Fear

As we see from the passage, Israel was entirely under the covenant, yet with most of them, God was not well pleased. This is the danger for God's people. We can all share many things, and all experience many of the blessings of God, but they are unilateral graces. We might look at those things and think that we have well pleased God, whereas we have not; rather he has blessed us graciously and unilaterally far more than we could ever have deserved. And so we might think more favourably of ourselves, in our favoured situation, than we ought.

In this we are reminded of Christ, with whom the Father really was well pleased, and yet his life was not one of ease nor of privilege. Once we are in Him, His righteousness is ours in terms of justification and indeed a state of sanctification, or setting apart as holy. We are made holy by Him.

And yet it is good to live in such a way in which our conscience is clear that we are not in active disobedience to God. We are holy to the LORD; let us live like it. We know from the example of Israel that it is possible to be in one sense, right with God; by faith saved by Him as God's people – and yet to simultaneously be trying Him in such a way that He is angry with us, and may teach us a harsh lesson. He often does so with Israel throughout her history. Abraham suffers in his family because of his early refusals to trust God fully, and desire to take the reins of his own life. Moses himself fails to enter the promised land because of going beyond the command of God in the supply of water to the Israelites. David loses his firstborn because of his sin against and with Bathsheba.

The passage cited by Paul from Exodus 32, is one of the grossest of all desertions of the one and true living God by the Jewish people; as they worship the golden calf at Horeb, while Moses is away on the mountain. On that day, God commands a very great temporal punishment on the Israelite people; the Levites slaughter many in the camp for their idolatry. They are still God's people, and so we assume that the slain inherited eternal life; in fact, they all drank of the same spiritual rock, and that rock was Christ. And yet God was not pleased with them, and their first bodily lives were cut short.

From this we should, as our forebears at times have done, take holy fear. We should be anxious to respect and honour and fear the most high and holy and real God. He is the one who made us, who made all things, and who will wrap

up the ages and all human history on the last day, and render to each according to what they have done. It is a dreadful thing, even in this life, to fall into the hand of the living God, when He has wrath to dispense, and severe chastisement to bestow. Our covenant, as Hebrews says, is not one which has the severity of the first, so much that the Israelites could not bear to listen to its conditions of severity nor even in their terror to approach God Most High on His most holy mountain. And yet, even though ours is a pleasant covenant, how much better if we can remember the awesome and holy nature of our God with just and reverent fear, and receive, in addition to our salvation in Christ Jesus, our Father's commendation on the last day for a truly God-fearing life of service, "Well done, Good and Faithful Servant".

2. Examples for Believers

The second point I would like to bring out in this passage is that Paul tells the Corinthians (Verse 6) that these things were recorded in Exodus and Numbers and Deuteronomy in order to be instructive to New Testament Believers.

"Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved."

We are not to crave the evil things that they also craved. They were idolaters and sexually immoral (verses 7 and 8) and so God had large numbers of them slain by the Levites and killed by the plague that He sent (Exodus 32). They tried or put to the test, or provoked the LORD, (1st Corinthians 10:9), by questioning the goodness of His plans for them (Numbers 21), and so many were killed by God's fiery serpents, unless in trust in God for the removal of their sins and for their deliverance, they looked to the Serpent on the pole (which foreshadowed Christ). They grumbled (verse 10) in Numbers 16, such that God killed many of them with His destroying angel.

Now all of those things are particularly instructive to us as New Testament believers because in God's design, they were chastisements not of the pagan nations who did not know of follow God, but of God's own people, at least, God's own covenant community. It is interesting to see that with the exception of the final example of grumbling, each of the examples applied to those who looked to be believers. The examples of idolatry and sexual immorality, and of resentment of God cited by Paul really do pertain to us *as believers* given to disobedience, and needing chastisement, to cause us holy fear.

Even the last example of grumbling, by some Israelites who followed Korah in his rebellion, makes the point. Korah's rebellion is the most explosive. We ought to flee from the outright rebellion that their grumbling entailed and which in both Numbers and Jude are associated with a rejecting of divine authority, immoral behaviours and a refusal of trust in God. Korah and his followers experienced much of Israel's experience, but do not look to have been truly of the faith (as is confirmed in Jude 6). Korah's rebellion ought to remind us to examine ourselves whether we are truly of the faith (and if we are not, we would be wisest to choose repentance and reconciliation to God through His Son Jesus, immediately), that we might escape their permanent punishment.

But rather than Korah and his followers who were punished and eternally destroyed for their rebellion, most of us are like Israel, truly God's people. Like them, if we are not careful and fearful with a holy fear, 1st Corinthians 10 warns us that we could experience God's severe chastisement *even as believers*. For God disciplines the one He loves and chastens those He accepts as sons (Hebrews 12:6), and our hearts are like Israel's sometimes, while our God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

It is easy in fact to fall into idolatry in Australian churches. In fact it is epidemic in the churches. How many become sleepy and complacent in the faith, because their prosperity blinds and seduces them? How easy is it to forget the demands of faithfulness to Christ, and to be half-hearted in commitment to Him, because we are comfortable and well provided for? Sexual sin is also made easy and is rampant throughout the churches. Statistically, pornography is epidemic even amongst professing Christians (or at least churchgoers). Lurking resentment against God and a persistent internal accusation that God is not good and does not have our best interests at heart, is an extremely common handicap of Christian believers. And grumbling is a national sport. When we think about it, we are quite as given to sin as our Israelite forebears; if so, then we should equally fear lest God send severe chastisements on his modern church when we fail to live in His ways.

Now if that is so, we should not be surprised that during these last days before the return of Christ, the churches of the West are largely in a depressed state. Paul mentions that these things were given as examples for us, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (verse 11). Here then is God's remedy for us. We can take the examples and take the hint. We have a helpful history that ancient Israel never had. Now is in fact the time to examine the Old Testament closely, and learn the lesson from it that our Awesome God deserves a people bent on

holiness. If the churches will only be characterised by devoted holiness, we will yet rock the world before the return of Christ. And as Paul notes, our God has given us the means; He is sovereign, and will always give us a way out from temptation and sin (verse 13), that we might endure the temptation, and be victorious in His power over it.

3. Comfort

There is one last way in which, as Paul says, these things happened as examples for us, and if we can reflect and recognise what things are not yet right in our life and behaviour (and almost everyone will find something, if we are honest), this last way may be of great help to us. That is, that it is worth observing in each of the examples from Israel's history that Paul chose to mention, that there was a ready way for the people to repent and remove the need for chastisement from themselves, in holy fear and trust in the LORD. Moses intervenes, in a pre-figuring of Christ, to limit the chastisement meted out on the Israelites after their extreme idolatry and sexual immorality at the mountain. When the Israelites provoked God again by questioning His goodness, they could look to the serpent on the pole (which again prefigures Christ) in trust and repentance, to receive God's grace and the removal of his wrath (Numbers 21).

In summary, how then shall we apply this passage at DBC? We could easily reassure ourselves at DBC that because our doctrine is good, because our attendees are by and large well read and experienced and mature and stable Christians, because God has graciously blessed us in many ways, then the daily practices of our lives must be pleasing to God. This passage reminds us that these external blessings, though wonderful, may be deceptive. We would do well to review each aspect of our lives and consider whether some of our life might deserve God's chastisement, even of the saints that He loves.

We would do well to pay particular attention to the examples of the Old Testament, given to us for our own reflection, precisely as our natural bent is prone to so many of the subtle temptations that beset ancient Israel. We know that comfortable complacency is one of the greatest dangers for Australian evangelicals; so too sexual sin remains at an all time statistical high even in church communities. Lurking resentment is the natural default setting of our hearts when we do not fully trust God (and forget to praise Him as He deserves), while grumbling is a socially accepted vice, and easy to do. Let us therefore take heed to pursue holiness particularly against these various temptations, stirring ourselves up for building the kingdom by the reading of God's Word,

fleeing as Joseph fled from even a hint of sexual corruption, and replacing the resentment and grumbling of disappointed hopes with a reconsideration of all God's torrent of grace towards us.

If we do these things, not only will we avoid the worst of chastisements, we will rock the nation for godliness and the gospel, just as a City on a Hill.

All Glory to God in the Highest.

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4th July, 2021.