

This Week at the Creek

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Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

1 Corinthians 10:6-13

April 27, 2008

This notice appeared in the window of a coat store in Nottingham, England: 'We have been established for over a hundred years and have been pleasing and displeasing customers ever since. We have made money and lost money, suffered the effects of coat nationalization, coat rationing, government control, and bad payers. We have been cursed and discussed, messed about, lied to, held up, robbed, and swindled. The only reason we stay in business is to see what happens next.' This might be even how you feel about your work!

Everyone has a history. Elements of every history are good, and other elements are bad. But whether good or bad – and whether the history is our own or someone else's – we'd be wise to learn from the good and bad examples of the past. Remember all the times I've said that the Philippian church was a pastor's dream – how that church was persistent and loving and worked together? Remember also all the times I've said that the Corinthian church was a pastor's nightmare – how that church whined and bickered and had relational problems? In chapter nine of this letter to the church at Corinth, Paul used himself as an example of a mature Christian who disciplines himself to better serve God. When he gets to chapter ten, he uses the ancient Israelites as an example of spiritual immaturity, shown in their overconfidence and lack of self-discipline.

He describes both God's miraculous dealings with His chosen people and their failure to live lives of trusting obedience. The cloud and the sea Paul wrote about refer to Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt when God led them by a cloud and brought them through the Red Sea. The food and water are the provisions God gave as they traveled through the wilderness. Being baptized in the cloud and sea probably means that just as we are united in Christ by baptism, so the Israelites were united under Moses' leadership and through the events of the Exodus.

In spite of having God and everything else going for them, they grew discontented with the Lord and so made a gold calf and worshiped it in the wilderness. After having been punished for that, they later worshiped Baal of Peor and engaged in sexual immorality with Moabite women. Plus they seemed constantly to complain about their food source, constantly put the Lord to the test by seeing just how far they could go, and constantly complained against their leaders, Moses and Aaron. They trusted their own judgment more than God's, and they longed for the bad but known old life more than the promise of the new, unknown one. They saw God's work but were unable to receive all the blessings God had for them because of their lack of faith. In short, though they were God's chosen people, they were a whole lot like us.

Today's pressures – just like yesterday's pressures – make it easy for us to ignore or forget the lessons of the past. But Paul warned the Corinthians – and us – to remember the lessons the Israelites learned about God so we can avoid repeating their errors. This is only one of many reasons for us to study our Bibles! Bible stories and teaching ought to become well-ingrained lessons in our hearts and minds that remind us of how God wants us to live. We need not repeat the same mistakes!

That's precisely why Paul draws a line from the experience of the Israelites to the experience of the Corinthian believers – and of us. Christians have been rescued from sin – delivered as the Israelites were. Christians have been baptized into Christ Jesus – chosen as the Israelites were. Christians take communion celebrating the body and blood of Christ – brought into community just as the Israelites were by water from a rock and a daily supply of manna. Disobedience and not trusting in the Lord led the Israelites into a miserable existence in the wilderness, and if we grow disobedient and trustless, we can expect to experience a dry, miserable existence in a wilderness of our own.

So why does Paul bring all this up? He wants us to learn from their mistakes. We like to think that this won't happen to us. But it can and it does. And so the apostle puts together four categories of sinful errors as he makes his point: First, there's idolatry. Idolatry is anything that gets in the way of your relationship with God. Second is sexual immorality. Let me make this plain for all of you who still don't get it: The Bible calls sexual immorality any form of sexual relations outside the context of marriage. It can be homosexuality or sex before marriage or living together or adultery. Whatever you call it – and whatever excuse you make for it – you're being unfaithful to God and to your God-given mate (or future mate), and it is sin. Period. (By the way, you have no cause for condemning the practices of homosexuals if you're practicing any form of sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage! To you, specifically, Jesus says, 'Judge not that ye be not judged.')

Third, there's testing the Lord. Like idolatry, this is trusting someone else – or yourself – to work for your own best self-interests. It's not trusting God to work out His best for you; it's impugning God's motives. And fourth is

grumbling. **Grumbling** is complaining about God's plan for your life. What's worse, it arises from a deep-seated, heartfelt rebellion against God's authority in your life.

Of course, no one is exempt from the temptation to do these four things. And perhaps even another warning is in order: For the Christian, the more we think we're strong in an area, the more we should watch out. We shouldn't take anything for granted. We may feel we've gained control over some sin in our lives and are now beyond temptation. But just like an alcoholic remains an alcoholic, a **sinaholic** remains a **sinaholic** – and it's easy to slip back into the old familiar sins. It's only by the grace of God and the strength of the Holy Spirit that we don't constantly falter.

In a culture filled with moral depravity and sin-inducing pressures – both the Corinthians' and ours – Paul encouraged us about how to deal with temptation. He taught first that temptation happens to everyone, so don't feel you've been singled out. He taught second that others have resisted temptation, and so can you. And he taught third that any temptation can be resisted because God will show you a way out. Remember too that God is always there helping us resist temptation in at least five ways: He reveals to us those people and situations that give us trouble; He tells us to run from anything we know is wrong; He helps us choose to do only what is right; He reminds us to pray for His help; and He moves us to seek friends who love Him and can offer help when we're tempted.

Let's center in on just one of these means of escape from temptation. Second Timothy 2:22 says this: 'Run from anything that stimulates your youthful lust. Follow anything that makes you want to do right. Pursue faith and love and peace, and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.' **Running away is sometimes considered cowardly, but wise people know that removing themselves physically from temptation often can be the most courageous action to take.** Run from anything that produces evil thoughts. Do you have a recurring temptation that's difficult to resist? Remove yourself physically from any situation that stimulates your desire to sin. Knowing when to run is as important in spiritual battle as knowing when and how to fight. And by the way: When you move away from temptation, don't leave a forwarding address! Live and learn! Look at history so you don't repeat the same mistakes.

All people fall into temptation; but a lot of people make plans for finding it ahead of time. A father told his son, 'Will, I don't want you swimming in the river behind the house. You could get into some dangerous rapids.' 'OK, Dad,' he answered. But that evening, he came home carrying a wet bathing suit.

'Where have you been?' demanded the father. 'Swimming in the river,' Will answered. 'Didn't I tell you not to swim there?' asked the Dad. 'Yes, sir,' answered the boy. 'Well then, why did you?' the father asked. 'Well, Dad,' went the explanation, 'I had my bathing suit with me and I couldn't resist the

temptation.' 'Why did you take your bathing suit with you?' the father demanded. 'So I'd be prepared to swim in case I was tempted,' he replied.

Too many of us are like that boy. We expect to sin – even go out looking to excite the temptation. The remedy for this is found in Romans 13:14 – 'Clothe yourselves in Christ Jesus, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.' Live and learn from both good examples and bad. It's like our ferrier says, 'The first time a horse kicks you, it's the horse's fault; the next time he kicks you, it's your fault.' Learn the lessons God gives you from your past. Learn, too, the lessons He gives you from others' past.

Solomon wrote repetitively in the Book of Ecclesiastes that there was nothing new under the sun. But all that's happened in the past can aid us in our Christian living. Remember Israel's history as a warning to us today. Remember the Corinthian church's history as a warning to us today. Remember your own history as a warning to you today. **Beware of standing firm in yourself, and be watchful toward the Lord to get you out of temptation.** In fact, when temptation comes your way, decide now that you'll run to the Rock of ages; decide now that you'll pray, 'Let me hide myself in Thee.' And live and learn, and live and learn.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray again that You lead us not into temptation and that You deliver us from evil. But when temptations do come, show us a way out. Reveal to us those people and situations that give us trouble, and help us to run from all that we know is wrong. As always, we look to You for help. In Jesus' name.

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