

Wise Up – Uncompromising Wisdom
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
March 12, 2017

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did – and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did – and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Today is the second sermon in our Lenten series calling us to “wise up.” Last week we spoke about unconventional wisdom. Today we will look at uncompromising wisdom. Although most people don’t realize it, moral compromising is a problem which is unique to Christians. The unbelieving world isn’t bothered by moral compromising because the unbelieving world is subject to the control of Satan. They simply do what Satan wants.

Christians, on the other hand, are pledged to follow Christ. That promise is counter to our sinful nature, it’s an affront to the sinful world, and it opposes the wishes of Satan. Therefore, in every Christian, there is a constant war between what God wants from us and what our sinful nature, the world, and Satan would have us do. That tension keeps Christians in constant danger of moral compromise.

In today’s text, Paul compares the Corinthian Christians to the Israelites of old. In both of his letters to the Corinthian churches, Paul warns about adultery, drunkenness, lawsuits, favorites among their pastors, and a host of other foolishness masquerading as freedom.

The sins of the Israelites were the sins of the Corinthians and the sins of today. So, let’s compare the Israelites, the Corinthians, and ourselves in the hope of learning some things about avoiding compromise.

The Israelites were a privileged group of people. They saw amazing miracles. They watched the Red Sea part and they walked across it on dry land. They saw God’s protecting hand destroy the entire army of Pharaoh. They witnessed God’s presence with them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The people of Israel had every reason to think, “We must be God’s people. Look at what great things he is doing

for us.”

Like those Israelites, all of us Christians are a privileged people. We have been touched by the grace of God. We have received a baptism that brought us forgiveness. We have been adopted into the family of God. Just as the Israelites were bound to Moses, whom God sent to lead them to safety, we have been bound to Christ as our Savior.

Paul explains how the Israelites were provided spiritual food. Quite literally, they were given food from heaven. What a wonderful display of God’s grace. For 40 years, God provided for his people. The Israelites also drank from a spiritual rock. That was more than just the rock that God brought water from, Paul says that rock was also Christ. Who else could have said, “We have the Son of God walking with us.”

All of their needs for time and eternity were supplied by the grace of God. It was the same for the Corinthian Christians. It is the same for us. Like those Israelites, we, too, have the privilege of eating and drinking spiritual food – the very body and blood that Jesus offered up for us. We, too, are people whose needs for time and eternity have been supplied by a merciful God.

Verse 5 speaks about the Israelites response to God’s grace: *Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert* (1 Co 10:5 NIV). Of the over 600,000 men, twenty years and older, who left Egypt, only two of those men entered the Promised Land. Why? Because the Israelites took God’s grace too lightly. They compromised.

They found their security in their own history, not in the God behind that history. They developed an unfaithfulness toward God which took for granted all that God had done for them. That unfaithfulness was very evident in the sins that were committed before they entered the Promised Land.

As we look at just three of these sins, keep in mind that Paul is giving these warnings not only to the Corinthian Christians, but also to Christians of today.

The first warning comes from the lesson of the golden calf. Paul speaks about the people having a good time. He calls it pagan revelry. The Israelites grew tired of waiting for Moses to come down from his meeting with God on Mount Sinai. They made a golden calf and invented their own variety of worship.

Their worship consisted of partying, dancing, and overindulgence. It also included idolatry. They worshiped the golden calf. People today worship a golden calf. They invite us into moral compromise. They invite us to come and worship their god.

How easy it is for us to tire of waiting for Jesus to return. How easy it is for us to live as though Jesus is never coming back. How easy it is for us to compromise true Godly worship with the worship of the world and bow down to the golden calf when we develop an attraction for and a love of the things of this world.

The second warning comes from Israel's history of sexual immorality. As payment for their unrestrained lust, God ordered Moses to kill the offenders and 23,000 men died in one day. The worst part of this warning is that history repeats itself.

Think about today's sexual moral climate. People live together before they get married, if they ever do get married. Couples divorce at the drop of a hat. Pornography, that used to come in brown paper wrappers, is now sold openly in our stores and graphically displayed in our movie theaters, on television, and on the internet. Public schools teach our children how to have "save sex." The line between male and female is being made more and more fuzzy.

These sins are warnings for today's Christian to take God's commandment about not committing adultery very seriously. These sins are warnings to avoid moral compromise. Remember God's view of the Christian's body: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body* (1 Co 6:19-20 NIV).

The third warning comes from Israel's complaining against God. The Israelites were never satisfied. No matter what God did for them it was never enough. They put God's patience to the test and they paid the price for doing that. God responded to their ingratitude first with poisonous snakes and then with an earthquake that swallowed some of the people.

In this world of materialistic values, it's tempting to compromise our thankfulness. It is easy to ask why God is giving all the "good" things to other people and not to us. It is easy for us to grumble and complain.

Verses 11 and 12 bear repeating: *These things happened to [the Israelites] as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!* (1 Co 10:11-12 NIV).

God had Moses write down the sins of the Israelites as a warning for those who would follow. Not to learn from the generations who have preceded us, to ignore what former ages have to teach about the wages of sin, is pure foolishness.

Paul warns us that pride goes before the fall. Even though Paul doesn't give us any examples here, Scripture is full of people who tripped over their own pride. King Saul was rejected by God and eventually killed himself because he thought he could worship God as he pleased.

King Solomon suffered greatly because he fell victim to too much money, too much power, and too much sex. His faithfulness was shaken by too much worldly wisdom. Judas was lost because he thought he knew a better way, even though he spent several years in the company of God our Savior.

To look at these warnings and say, “That couldn’t happen to me,” is eternally dangerous – no, it’s just plain stupid. If you think you don’t have these weaknesses, you’re in complete denial. When we take pride in and elevate ourselves above others because we haven’t murdered or stolen or committed adultery, when we think we don’t need church as much as anyone else, or we don’t need to learn any more about God, then we are ready to be punished like Israel. If we think we can stand before God with what we are on our own, we will fall from faith.

In the last verse of the text, Paul says: *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it* (1 Co 10:13 NIV).

Despite the severe sound of these warnings, there is Gospel – there is Good News. Jesus lived on this earth as one of us. He knows, firsthand, how tempting it is to compromise the life God wants us to lead with the life the world lives around us. The book of Hebrews tells us: *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin* (Heb 4:15 NIV).

That’s why God had Paul give us this verse of reassurance. When the world, our sinful nature, or Satan offers to compromise with our faithfulness to God, God promises to give us all the strength we need to stand our ground. The full force of the Holy Spirit is ours just for the asking. We have nothing to fear and we need never compromise with sin because: *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Ro 8:31 NIV).