

STAY ALERT**1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

INTRO: I hunted with Wayne Hefner on Monday. If you remember the day it was in the low 30s temperature wise, with a raw and steady breeze and frequent snow showers. It would have been a bone chilling day, except I was in one of Wayne's portable blinds. Now a portable blind helps with concealment and certainly cuts the wind and keeps a hunter dry. But it's still COLD. Unless, of course, it is one of Wayne's blinds. I spent ten hours in that blind on a comfortable leather desk chair with, not one, but two propane heaters at my feet. It wasn't exactly toasty, but I was comfortable.

Sometimes I got too comfortable. Sometimes I dozed off. Sometimes I even had the beginnings of dreams occurring when I'd jump awake and scan my shooting lanes. And then I'd sink back into slumber. At about 10:30 AM Wayne's rifle shot blasted me awake and two deer soon came past me and it made me wonder how many had sneaked past me as I sat there in a state of comfortable semi-consciousness? Wayne, who was 15 or 20 feet up in a tree stand and several hundred yards away and open to all the elements, harvested an awesome buck while I napped. Success for a hunter, certainly requires staying alert.

Success for a Christ Follower similarly requires that we stay alert and that is Paul's word for the people of Corinth in our text for today from 1 Corinthians. We began this study entitled BEING THE CHURCH IS CHALLENGING TIMES on the first Sunday in July and by Thanksgiving week, we had made it to 1 Corinthians 9. With an Advent and Christmas hiatus, we are back to Paul's letter today. Listen as I read **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**.

Paul had just given an example in the previous chapter of doing everything for the purpose of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:23), which is very unselfish, and now he is giving the example of the people of Israel in the Exodus from Egypt as the personification of selfishness.

We need to learn from the story of the Exodus

- Kenneth Foreman in his commentary, referring to the Israelites says “. . . *they were so selfish, greedy, and comfort loving that not even a prophet of God could make heroes out of them.*” The result of their selfishness was that they all died in the wilderness. Paul is warning the Corinthians that their thinking only of themselves could have equally fatal results.
- A review of the past several chapters shows that this selfishness was exhibiting itself in their abuse of the freedom they had in Christ. Like the Children of Israel, they were, and we are, by the way, God's Chosen. But the warning here in these verses is that being free in Christ does not allow us to take advantage of our favored position. The Israelites had all of the advantages from a Cloud to guide by day and a pillar of fire to protect at night, and water from the rock and manna a quail for nourishment. They had EVERYTHING and yet they fell into idolatry – by worshipping a golden calf. And Paul's warning to the people of Corinth AND to us is “Who are you need to think you are too high and mighty to do anything so silly or sinful?”
- Temptation can come and our will to resist fails. A Christian author and apologist, a man I really appreciated and respected, died in May. In the months since his death, accusations of moral failure that had been swirling around him for a number of years came into a more accurate light and they were revealed to be true. Once again, I was grieved. Is there no one righteous and holy anymore? Does everyone, once they get some fame and power, have to fall? It made me feel vulnerable to the extent that I told my Mighty Men, “But for the grace of God, there go I.” And it's true. We do not plan to fail, but if we are not alert and/or we slip into arrogance, we are in great danger of falling. We are susceptible to failure when we fail to be alert.
- It's like this . . .

Self-confidence, which saps wholehearted devotion to the Lord, easily leads to a fall.

- We need to maintain that wholehearted devotion to God. Paul's point and what we must latch onto is, anything that pulls us away from our devotion to God, is idolatry. He includes an interesting point here showing that the Corinthians' shallow view of Christian freedom (which he addressed extensively in Chapter 8), comes from their taking idolatry lightly and from an interesting source: they misunderstood the nature of Christian baptism and Communion. He points out that they are not good-luck charms. Getting baptized will not save you nor will it keep you saved. Taking communion will not save you or keep you

saved. You are saved by submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and walking with him in the resulting obedience and holiness.

- In other words, you cannot let your guard down because you have participated in the ordinances of the church (Explain ordinances in the BIC understanding as opposed to sacraments). Norman Hillyer puts it bluntly, “*Paul tells the Corinthians that they have the advantage of learning from the Israelites. We do well to not ignore what happens when people defy God's requirements.*” And we have the advantage of learning from the Israelites AND the Corinthians. Stay alert!

So how do we stay alert?

- Here are some things to watch for:
 - The temptation to fall into idolatry. In Corinth there were temple gods, goddesses, and images of them everywhere. It was a culture steeped in idolatry. For the Israelites it was the Golden Calf and, in the centuries that followed, many others. We, on the other hand, don't have trouble with graven images, but we do struggle with that which takes our eyes off of God. William Barclay describes idolatry as any time we make a god of anything to which we give more, or even all, of our time, thought, and energy, than we give to God. And then he says . . . *men still worship the works of their own hands more than they worship God.*
 - Let me interject something timely and which needs to be said. The fiasco in Washington D. C. this past week is a picture of idolatry. I don't know if there were any Christians in that mob that overran the Capital building on Wednesday, but if there were, they were idolizing the wrong thing. Our political party is not our God. Our God is our God.
 - In Joshua 5 the Israelites were finally in the Land of Canaan. All their parents and aunts and uncles who had been unfaithful in the desert – the very ones Paul referred to in our text for today – had died off because they did not believe God's promise that he would give them the land. Now Joshua and his people were ready to begin conquering that land. As Joshua pondered the task ahead we find this account at the end of the chapter. Listen:

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

The commander of the Lord's army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so. Joshua 5:13-15
 - America has been infected with the “Us-Them” disease of its hateful politics. And we Christ Followers cannot succumb to it. We can ask God as Joshua did “*Are you for us or for our enemies?*” and his answer will still be “*Neither,*” God does not care whether we are US or THEM. What God cares about is if the space we take up in this world is holy or not. So, ask yourself this, “Is the place where I am standing holy enough for me to take off my shoes, or do I need to keep them on so as not to step into the filth of the anger and hate of a world stuck in the idolatry of power and divisiveness?”
 - Far too many Christians have fallen into such idolatry. Be alert that we do not.
 - Next there is the temptation to sexual sin. Paul has been addressing this issue for several chapters here and since it's been two months since I left off this series, let me remind us again. That person I referred to earlier, the author and apologist: his sin was sexual sin. As long as we are breathing there is a temptation to this, not matter who you are or how old you are. Don't let your guard down, be alert. And remember what Barclay says, “*Only a passionate love of purity can save us from impurity.*”
 - Don't put God to the test. When we slip in our vigilance we can consciously and unconsciously test the mercy of God. Don't ever think “*It'll be all right; God will forgive.*” or “*I can confess later.*” or “*It's just a little sin.*” This, and other thinking like it, is a slippery slope to hell. God is loving and patient, but he's holy most of all.

- Finally, the Israelites, the Corinthians, and God’s people through the ages have been very quick to grumble. The joy of the Lord is our strength. And griping heart drains the joy away. Be alert that you do not fall into negativity.
- But even though those temptations come along and a gajillion others, Paul points out that no temptation is unprecedented.
 - Listen to verse 13 again, *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it.* 1 Corinthians 10:13. This is a very, very, frequently misquoted and misused verse. Time after time it has been quoted as “*God will not give me more than I can take.*” Or something like that. I’ve often been asked “If that’s true, why is this happening to me?” The truth is Paul is saying, others have been this way before, and they did it, so you can too. One of those is Jesus. The writer of Hebrews tells us, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.* Hebrews 4:15. F. B. Meyer tells us, “The pressure of temptation is always accompanied by a corresponding store of grace, if only our eyes were open to perceive it.” Once again, BE ALERT!
 - Barclay puts it this way, Paul “*is quite sure that temptation will come. That is part of life, but the Greek word which we translate as “temptation” means far more than a test. It is something designed, not to make us fall, but to test us, so that we emerge from it stronger than ever.*” Sometimes, what we are experiencing is not a temptation but a test from God that is a spiritual barbell designed to build our spiritual muscles so we’re ready for all the world might throw at us.
- Be alert so you know which is which. That’s how we can be the Church in this crazy and challenging world. Amen.