

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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 they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them—and that rock was Christ! ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them. He had them die in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things took place as examples to warn us not to desire evil things the way they did. ⁷ Do not become idolaters like some of them—as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to celebrate wildly.”^[a] ⁸ And let us not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell. ⁹ Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and so were being destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ All^[b] these things that were happening to them had meaning as examples, and they were written down to warn us, to whom the end of the ages has come.

¹² So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall. ¹³ No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If you’re not careful, history will repeat itself. A saying that is so very true. People tend to ignore history and then are surprised when the same actions yield the same results. It doesn’t make any difference if we are talking about secular history or church history – even people who think they are more enlightened, tend to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors. That is why Paul, in this portion of scripture, is **encouraging us to pay attention to history**. He warns us to **make sure we don’t end up like one of those bodies scattered in the desert**, but rather that **we take heart in the faithfulness of our God**.

I. “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. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The cloud, passing through the sea, and Moses. Paul’s got to be talking about the Children of Israel and their exodus from Egypt. Most Jews knew the facts but did they understand the significance?

“They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” They had God’s Word because God was with them in the form of a cloud. When they crossed through the Red Sea, the cloud stood between them and the Egyptians. God protected them and then for the next 40 years God was always with them – leading them in the form of a cloud or residing in the Holy place at the center of the tabernacle. And all this time God provided for them in a supernatural way by bringing manna in the morning and quail at night and a rock that continued to provide water for them wherever they went.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians he was making the comparison between the Old Testament Children of Israel and them by pointing out that God came to them in a special way too – through the waters of Holy Baptism and through the special spiritual food of his body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. That Christ – the rock of our salvation, accompanied them through life just as he accompanies us. But there was a problem.

“Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.” God wasn’t pleased with them because they weren’t faithful. They turned away from God numerous times and didn’t even think about repentance for their sins. Paul gives us just a few examples of their wickedness: **“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.”**

You know about some of these examples. How the people worshiped the Golden Calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai only 40 days after they had vowed to remain faithful to God. How the men of Israel gave into the seductive efforts of the Moabite women and 23,000 were put to death for ignoring God’s commands about sex.

And even though God was with them they couldn’t seem to stop grumbling about their situation. They complained that Moses had brought them out into the desert to die and so God brought a plague of poisonous snakes and many of them tasted death.

You might be thinking, “Well, that was them and I’m living a much better life than they.” But we all have our “Golden Calves” too. Things that tend to take the #1 spot in our hearts and lives. It’s very easy to get caught up in sports or hobbies or having the best car or truck or house – so much so, that we worship these things more than God.

And sexual temptations are all around us. Just turn on the TV or go to the movies or get on the internet and it’s almost as if we are bombarded with all kinds of temptations and we don’t think twice about it. Or how many people do you know living together outside of marriage? The influence of society is so great that some of you have probably fallen into that sin or at least not said anything when your children or grandchildren take that path.

And we grumble too. Grumble about how hot or cold it is in church or the preacher isn’t as dynamic as the one down the street or the music is too slow or too fast or too loud or too soft. The temptations of today may come in different formats but the sins are the same and we, like our ancestors, are all too anxious to prove we are sinners.

But sometimes we think our faith is so strong that we don’t have to worry about temptation. Paul said, **“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”** Flee from temptation. Stay away from the edge of the cliff of temptation or you may find yourself sliding down that slippery slope of sin. That doesn’t mean that you won’t ever sin but when you do, take the path of repentance.

Confess your sin and look to God for forgiveness. That is what can set you apart from your ancestors – that is what you can learn from history. The Children of Israel were persistent in their sins and lacking in their repentance and without repentance they were missing out on forgiveness and thus their bodies were scattered throughout the desert. They never saw the blessings of the promised land or appreciated the blessings of a faithful God. God is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins. Even when you are not faithful – God is faithful and so we want to take to heart the faithfulness of our God.

II. As Paul tries to encourage us he writes, **“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.”** There is nothing new under the sun. Our temptations aren’t any greater or any different than the ones that have been coming at mankind throughout history. And God is faithful. He won’t let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. So why let us be tempted in the first place?

Faithfulness. God is faithful to us and he wants us to be faithful to him. Whenever we are tempted, it is an opportunity to praise God through our obedience. Whenever we are tempted, it is an opportunity to say, “I love you Lord more than anything else,” through our obedience.

That sounds so easy but it’s not. Some of the temptations that come our way are pretty alluring. Or maybe we have already fallen into the ditch and it is easier to give into the temptation than to be faithful to God.

But Paul reminds us that God always gives us a way out so that we can stand up under the temptation. The problem is that we don’t always want to take that way out. But if you look to God for strength – if you look to God for help – he will provide it and he will help you back onto the path of righteousness.

The Apostle Paul found great joy in pointing people to the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins that is ours through faith in Christ. He loved to talk about God’s love for us as seen in the suffering of his Son on the cross so that we don’t have to suffer. It might seem that this portion of scripture is harsh as it warns us against unfaithfulness, but once again we see God’s love.

God doesn’t want us to be like one of those bodies scattered in the desert – missing the joys of eternal life in heaven. Don’t let history repeat itself. Look to God to help you.

As one of our hymns puts it: Fight the Good Fight with all your might; Christ is your strength and Christ your light. Lay hold on life and it shall be, your joy and crown eternally. Amen.