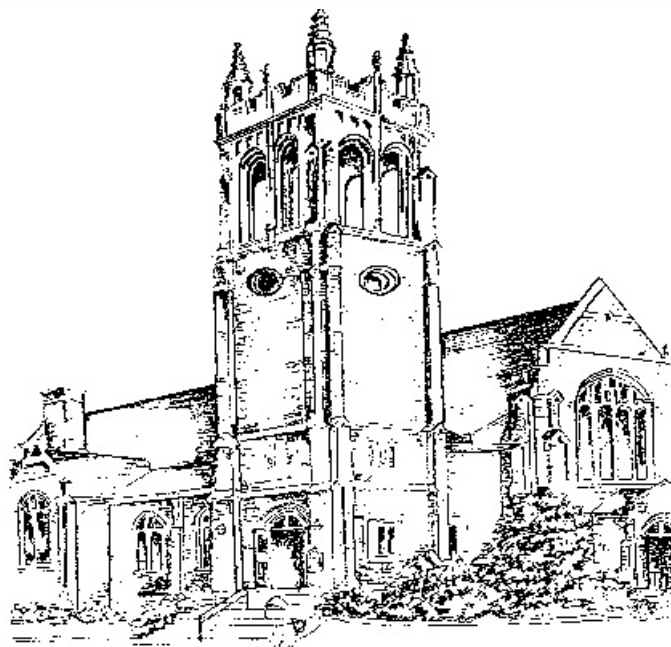


 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



1 Corinthians 10:1-13
“The Challenge Of Knowing God”

May 1, 2016
(6th Sunday After Easter)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551
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“Following Christ From City Center!”

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13
"THE CHALLENGE OF KNOWING GOD"

Exemplum: Review Of Exodus Experience

1) vv.1-4 God's Grace For All God's People: Baptism & Lord's Supper, 5 Alls. Physical/Spiritual

Benefits: History Inherited, Set Apart/Elect, Church As *New Israel*, Rom. 2:28-29, 11:17-24
 1a For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, 9:24-27 (Danger! No Complacency), Personal Ex. To Biblical Ex.
Deliverance BAPTISM ANALOGY, New Identity, All Had Benefits, Teaches Dependence
 b that *all* our fathers were under the cloud, Gentiles Included, Ex. 13-14. Ex. 13:21-22, Ps. 78:14, 105:39; Rom. 10:7
 and *all* passed through the sea, 2 Sacraments, Non-Magical, Ex. 14:21-29; Ps. 78:13, Secure In Divine Care
 2a and *all* were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, Spectacular Experiences! 12:13, Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27
Sustenance Left Egypt, Ex. 16-17, Num. 20-21, COMMUNION ANALOGY
 3 and *all* ate the same supernatural (spiritual/from the Spirit) food, *pneumaticos*, Ex. 16:4-35, Num. 11:6-9, Ps. 78:23-29
 4a and *all* drank the same supernatural (spiritual) drink. At Meribah, [Ex. 17:1-7, Num. 20:1-13], 21:16-18, Ps. 78:15-16
 b For they drank from the supernatural (spiritual) Rock which followed them, Gen. 49:24, Dt. 32:3-4, 15, 18...God As *Rock*
Presence and the Rock was Christ. Rabbinic Story, Ps.-Philo *Antiquities* 10:8, 11-15, t. Sukkah 3:1, Philo As *Wisdom*
 9:27, Sacraments, Not Magical Charms, Corinthians Shared Real Presence

2) v.5 God's Judgment On The Presumptuous And Disobedient: Overthrown.

All Were Graced! Deliverance/Sustenance/Presence Did Not Insulate From Judgment

5a Nevertheless, Surprise! To Know God Is To Live In Moral/Mortal Danger
 b with *most* of them God was not pleased; We Belong To God! Num. 14:6, 25:1-9, *Paradoxon*, Reversal
 c for they were **overthrown (scattered) in the wilderness.** Failure Is Possible, Died: 40 Years, Ps. 78:30-31
 Only Two Made The Promised Land, Desert Full Of Bones

3) v.6 Application: Warnings/Types/ Examples For Us. Sin Begins In Misdirected Desire

6 Now these things are *warnings (types)* for us, Type = Pattern/Example, Had Grace, Desired Evil
 not to desire (lust after) evil as they lusted. Craving For Food, Numbers 11:4-34, Prov. 21:6 LXX
 Not Satisfied, Not Wait To Sin! Issue Is Heart/Desire Level.

4) vv.7-10 Four Examples Of Israel's Corporate Sin. Grave Moral Failure

Deadly Sin Kills (4): "Shun the worship of idols" 10:14

7 a Do not be idolaters, as *some* of them were; as it is written, 8:1-10, 10:6, 14-22
Idolatry "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to (play) dance." Ex. 32:6b, 28; 3000
 Eat Idol Food=Support Idolatry, Pagan Revelry

8 b We must not indulge in sexual immorality, as *some* of them did, 5:1-5, 6:9, 12-20
Immorality and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. v.8, Num. 25:1-9, 31:16
 Corinth Was Comfortable With These Four

9 b' We must not put Christ to the test, as *some* of them did, Christ = More Difficult
Testing Christ and were **destroyed** by serpents; Ex. 17:7, Dt. 6:16, Num. 11, 21:4-9, Ps. 78:18
 Plague As Destroyer = Avenging Angel

10 a' nor grumble (i.e. against the Lord), as *some* of them did, //9:1-27, Ps. 105 (Litany Of Sins)
Grumbling and were **destroyed** by the Destroyer. 8:11, Ex. 12:23, 16:7-12, Num. 11:1, 14:26-35, 16:41-50
 v.7//v.10 = Present Imp. Pl., v.8//v.9 = Hortatory Subjunctives

3') v.11 Application: Warnings/Types/ Examples For Our Instruction.

God Is Not To Be Trifled With

11a Now these things happened to them as a *warning (type/model)*, Rom. 15:4, Type = Example
 b but they were written down for our instruction, Gift Of God = The Whole Of Scripture Is Purposeful
 c upon whom the ends of the ages has come. We Live In The End Times Since Christ
 Collision/Overlap: Present Evil Age, Coming Good Age

2') v.12 God's Judgment On The Presumptuous And Proud: Fall Or Stand.

12 Therefore, Common Proverb v. Presumption, Sophocles *Philoctetes* 502-506
 "let any one who thinks that he stands Dire Jeopardy, Corinthians Face The Same Challenges As Israel
 take heed lest he fall." 9:27. Self- Reliance, *Secure/ Puffed Up*, 8:1, 4:6, 18, 19, 5;2
 10:8b, Num. 14:3 (die), Above, Pride Can Kill As In The Wilderness Wanderings
 Devastating Loss, Paul Speaks Of His Potential *Disqualification* In 9:27

1') v.13 God's Faithfulness In Inevitable Temptations For All. Concludes With A Marvelous Promise

13a 1 No temptation (test/fiery trial) has overtaken *you* (pl.) that is not common to man. v. Despair, We Must Enter The Fight Armed With God's Grace!
 b 2 "God is faithful," 1:9, 2 Cor. 1:18, 1 Thess. 5:24, Dt. 7:9, God's Demonstrated Character
 c 2' and he will not let *you* (pl.) be tempted beyond *your* (pl.) strength, Lk. 4:1, James 1:13, 17, If Cooperate
 d 1' but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, An Exodus, If You Look For It Like Joseph Of Old
 that *you* (pl.) may be able to endure it. You Don't Have To Fall! Strengthens Character, Dependence Grows

THE CHALLENGE OF KNOWING GOD

“Therefore let any one who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.”

Spiritual overconfidence can lead to a painful tumble.

I CORINTHIANS 11:12

Roy Horn was in a great mood as he went to work Friday evening, October 3, 2003. It was his 59th birthday; more than a thousand friends had thrown him a party only hours before. An audience of fifteen hundred waited inside the Mirage Hotel. Siegfried Fischbach and Roy Horn's performances earned them such a reputation they were known by their first names, *Siegfried and Roy*.

Halfway into the act, Horn appeared in the spotlight with a six-year-old white male tiger. He'd done it hundreds of times. Then— for some unexplained reason— Roy slipped. His loss of footing startled the 600 pound cat, who then lunged. The audience gasped as the tiger grabbed Horn by the neck and dragged him offstage like a limp rag doll. The stage-crew used fire extinguishers to distract the animal and free Roy. Only quick transport and emergency surgery saved his life.

For thirty-five years Horn successfully evaded the dangers of his trade. But in an unexpected loss of balance, a career- and nearly a life— was lost. A few nights later, Larry King interviewed Siegfried who struggled to explain what went wrong. Two little words stood out as the primary cause: *Roy slipped*.¹

It was to warn his friends at Corinth against such deadly slips that Paul recalled an old Greek proverb in verse 12, “Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall.”² *Anyone*, and therefore *everyone*. Me and you!

Comfort is a danger; familiarity a threat. Thinking we can toy around with the idols of our culture and indulge without consequence is a lie. Our heavenly Father remains the God of holy love who hates sin and evil in all its forms because of what

¹ PreachingToday.com search under 1 Cor. 10:1-13.

² Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 80. Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

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it does to his people. It damages them and loosens their bonds of loyalty to Jesus Christ who is their only hope. Sin is a solvent that dissolves the ties that bind.

Back in the late 1940's my mother was a nurse at McLeod's in Florence. One of her patients was a bruised, banged up man with several broken bones. Traction, pullies, casts, all the paraphernalia. When she asked about his job, he said, "I'm a tree trimmer." And when she followed with the next obvious question, "How did you fall out of the tree?" he answered, "I cut off the limb on which I was sitting."³

God has a record of correcting his people with consequences, as Paul four times references in his bleak synopsis of the Hebrews' desert wanderings. The purpose of correction for the stubborn is learning through pain. God is sifting hearts every day, not just at the end.⁴ It's happening now as the culture is bullying an already compromised church to give up its creation theology of male and female and the ethics of marital commitment that accompany it, and the sad fact is that whole denominations are caving and claiming new sources of divine revelation and insight that trump Scripture and the way it's been read over the long haul of church history. The church has had several fundamental divides, the first in 1054 divided the Catholic west from the Orthodox east over a phrase in the Nicene Creed; the second early in the 16th century split Protestants and Catholics on the doctrines of grace and salvation; the current one is over the doctrine of creation and what it means to be male and female. It's a very basic issue. Some churches will follow the culture because modernity is their North Star; others of us will stay faithful to a minority position grounded in Scripture and the teaching of the church over time.

And while the Baptists and the Catholics have their own sets of problems, I admire their toughness in standing over against the culture and its illusions. The Baptists keep hammering away at, "The Bible says," and the Catholics keep hammering away at, "This is what the church teaches over time as confirmed by church councils and the witness of natural law," and both are right. The Baptists have the Bible in hand and the Catholics a cross with God the Son hanging on it as anchor

³ Family lore!

⁴ The U.M. Confession of Faith, Article XII: The Judgment and the Future State, "We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, *both now and in the last day*. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation" (*BOD 2012*: 74).

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points, but what do some of us have? We have weather vanes that spin and turn with the prevailing winds. *The Bible says* and *The Church teaches* have been replaced with a much weaker appeal to *It seems to me*, and how unstable is that?

God is after a loyal people through whom to display his goodness in Jesus the Son to a lost world, and the Lord will have such, the only question being, “Will we be among them?” It’s why the Methodists were raised up in 18th century England, and if we defect with the rest of what used to be mainline Protestantism, God has no problem in raising up multiple new groups out of the ashes of our compromise. Verse 5 is not just then but now, “Nevertheless, with most of them *God was not pleased*, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” There was a trail of sun-bleached bones all over the Sinai. Faithfulness is always good, but relevance has its limits. God and the world are two different audiences, and it matters whose applause you seek.

Two things are missing today. The first is a loss of the fear of God whose dealings are found in Scripture; by this I mean the deep respect and reverence God alone is due. And with this goes a loss of moral seriousness, the development of a casual *whatever* attitude. Each of us are on probation. We are born morally diseased into a deeply broken and rebellious world; none are exempt from the damages of original sin. None are unstained; we must be remade to be saved, because to stay as we are is death. What will you do with the offer of forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ? Is the momentum of life towards a life of love and holiness or away from it? Are you aiming at the heavenly Jerusalem, or are you slouching towards Sodom?

Life is not without joy, even fun, but life is a serious matter lived under the gaze of a God whose love refuses to leave us alone and whose holiness refuses to leave us we are. What you have become, either by welcoming or resisting God’s grace, will be fixed at death as God validates the trajectory of your life, either towards or away from Christ. Gregory Boyd writes:

“The more we chose something, the more we become that something. The more we chose something, the harder to chose otherwise, until we finally are solidified- eternalized- in our decisions... The difference between a Hitler and a Mother Teresa started somewhere with a small decision.”⁵

⁵ *Letters From A Skeptic* (Colorado Spring, CO: Cook Communications, 2003), 41-42.

I Corinthians 10:1-13. 6

I love our first baptismal vow because it echoes the multi-layered world view of the New Testament. In simple language it takes all three levels of struggle seriously: the invisible spiritual forces of wickedness, the visible battlefield of a hostile culture, and the inborn resistance to God hidden in every heart. The problem is unified, pervasive and consuming; it's *up there, out there, and in my heart and mind*. It's a sophisticated view with great explanatory power, and the vow is administered as a personal question, "Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness? reject the evil powers of this world? and repent of your sin?" **I do.**

To see people as naturally innocent, the corrupting culture as the culprit, and to dismiss the idea of supernatural personal evil is a modern editing; it's a very thin substitute and the origin of both the culture of blame and abdication of personal responsibility. Following Jesus is a multi-front conflict with live fire. It's not Disney; it's discipleship and a trek through the desert with a demanding God of holy love. Come wounded, but please do not come whining. We forget we're in an unending battle against sin and evil for which there is no respite till we die. Any other vision reduces the Christian life to trivia and religious entertainment and the next do-good project, which is where we are now. No wonder so many think God's job is to keep them prosperous and comfortable and inspired.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Several years ago I read an eye-opening book. I read it because of a hunch that all the old pagan gods were making a comeback in new disguises. Polytheism, paganism, magic and the occult are all around us.⁶ The author is Cambridge Professor Keith Hopkins, and the title is *A World Full of Gods: The Strange Triumph of Christianity*. He reminded me what I'd forgotten, that the world into which our faith first came was— outside its Jewish nest— a world of many gods. Every city was full of temples to its pantheon of gods and their girlfriends, and what we consider lewdness was part of everyday public life. Excavations at Pompeii, buried under the pyroclastic flow of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, confirm this picture. Hopkins writes:

“My initial impression of Pompeii was that there were temples and God, and humans praying to them, all over the place; at the entrance to the town, at the entrance to the Forum; there were altars at crossroads, Gods

⁶ See Christine Wicker, *Not In Kansas Anymore* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2005) for a fascinating trek through the underground world of magic and paganism in the U.S.

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in niches as your went along, a passerby casually blowing a kiss with their hands to the statue of a God set in a wall... there were temples, altars, Gods, heroes just about everywhere we looked...”⁷

And with polytheism went a moral *free for all*. In the Bible, religious idolatry and personal immorality go together, because when people either do not know the one God, or who— having once known him— conveniently forget him, their appetites are given free reign. Immorality is a clue people have missed God and thus misunderstood themselves profoundly. Our ethic is fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, and anything other than that will eventually morph into some kind of false worship of the self. People go looking for gods to bless their habits.

So it was in Corinth, the seaport crossroads of the eastern Mediterranean. Full of idols’ temples, a city where money could buy all you desired. This was the raucous town in which Paul established a small network of house churches that were loyal to the one God of the Jews who had further revealed himself as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the giver of the Spirit. Learning to live with an exclusive loyalty to this God and his moral demands was a challenge in that world, just as in ours. Getting Christians to abandon their old gods and habits is quite a challenge, then and now. I keep finding competing loyalties in the dark corners of my heart, and they have to be dethroned and killed, else they keep asking for more and more space, which is what false gods always do.

Several years ago I ran into a worshiper of an upstate team which shall remain unnamed. *Fan* is short for *fanatic* and from the Latin *fanum* for temple, so the idea of fan loyalty is religious in the sense of a binding group obligation that gives meaning. We are most loyal to what we most love, and this man’s life was all orange with a room in his home a shrine stuffed with memorabilia, some of it costly: signed balls, photos with coaches, shadow boxes of bowl game mementos.

His former church linkage was now severed. Tailgating took on all the ceremonial ritual of holy communion including the weekly sacrifice of a hog, a sacred meal on holy ground. Hours and hours absorbed in internet sports chat. Bowden was then the new high priest. Cheerleaders were the choir of the Saturday liturgy at Death Valley cathedral, with Howard and Ford saints in the pantheon of coaches. Oh, to touch the holy rock and drink the yeasted malt beverage wrapped in an orange kuzzi!

⁷ (New York: Free Press, 1999), 12-13.

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He was looking to this weekly fall event for a meaning it can never deliver, and the other nine months were spent rehashing the glories and agonies of the season past and anticipating the one to come. He was a modern sports idolater, one of the largest male denominations in America, and the momentum of life was away from the God who wanted his attention. He'd settled for something less and much less demanding as his object of devotion. A lesser loyalty—innocent and harmless for many—had become the central love of life. He forgot that *game* and *play* are attached to the word *football*. I am told there is a parallel phenomena in Columbia, though I know less about it, having been raised in an orange family. I say this tongue in cheek with serious intent. A diversion is never meant to be promoted to a source of meaning, but that is the deception of idolatry, isn't it? The Bible is full of this kind of mockery of idols, particularly Isaiah and Jeremiah who drip with satire.

In an essay titled *The Future of Sport* presented at the 2004 conference of the World Future Society, Robin Gunston examines how organized sports will look in years to come. He writes, and I think he's spot on:

“The loss of core values in society due to the waning influence of the church creates a spiritual vacuum into which sports may move. *Religio-sport* could develop as major sports replace conventional religion. *Religio-sport* will have its shrines (stadiums), costumes (uniforms), services (games and events), rituals (chants and songs), high priests (star athletes), and piety (fan loyalty).”⁸

I deal with all sorts of worshipers of false deities, of gods who cannot save: devotees of alcohol and drugs, of money, of a political party, a family name, a rock band, their branch of service, their looks or smarts, even a consuming video game. All sorts of false centers of loyalty consume people's time and money and energies. Human hearts are idol factories, as John Calvin said five hundred years ago. Poke around people lives like I do and you will soon find what is their center of energy and focus of loyalty, and if it is anything other than the Triune God whose proper name is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they are involved in idolatry. It is a perpetual temptation for us all, and being Christian does not insulate you from the disease but only sharpens the subtleties. Our world as presently organized is designed to numb our appetite for God and divert us to other things so that we miss the One for whom we were made. Clinton Arnold gives this definition:

⁸ Robin Gunston, "Play Ball! How Sports Will Change in the 21st Century," *The Futurist* (January/February 2005), 31-36.

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“The God of all creation loves us deeply and has made an enormous sacrifice so we can have a relationship with Him. We owe Him our entire allegiance, our complete devotion, all our trust. Whenever we give our heart’s deepest affection to someone other than Him, or endeavor to find our identity in something apart from Him, or seek to acquire security and protection in someone or something other than Him, it is an affront to all He has done for us. It is idolatry.”⁹

If you wanted to have a business or social or political life in Corinth, you had to go to the temples for the sacrifices and their associated meals. Temples of Aphrodite, Poseidon, Apollo and the like. It was the ancient equivalent of the country club and the fraternal organization and the business lunch. It’s where friends met and networking was done. And with the temples went opportunities for immorality of all sorts. Keeping the church out of those spaces and places consumed much of Paul’s energy. A wise man once said, “You can never be caught in places you don’t visit.” Building a people who would be loyal to Jesus Christ and uphold God’s moral law was an ongoing task for a committed minority, as it is today. The Corinthians had heard Paul preach, come to faith in Christ, been baptized, received the Lord’s Supper weekly, been filled with the Spirit, manifested the full array of spiritual gifts, had an apostle as their mentor for a year and a half, and yet, during his absence, lapsed back into visiting idols’ temples. They could not stand the social pressures and backslid!

The pull of social acceptance and pleasure of the old ways was too much for some. They don’t understand the deceptive forces they are up against, and they do not take up the battle for their own souls. Pleasant choices become ingrained habits, and habits soon hardened into the strong chains of necessity. The momentum of life is now away from God and disaster just around the corner. So when God lifts his restraints because of their stubbornness and they tumble into pain and self-destruction, they wonder, “Why did this happen to me?” “It’s not hard to understand,” I reply, “just look at the last hundred decisions you made; this is where they end.” They often accuse God in all sorts of things that do not match his character. They complain like ancient Israel unhappy with the menu.

Paul was not only thinking of the Corinthians but of himself when he wrote, “Therefore, let any one who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” Living a life of faith in Christ will take everything you have and stretch you to the limits. I find my conscience stung by the words of D.A. Carson:

⁹ “The One True God,” *Discipleship Journal*, Nov./Dec. 2005, 17.

I Corinthians 10:1-13. 10

“People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.”¹⁰

In order to stop the drift, Paul undertakes a creative reading of the Exodus, when God called a nation of slaves to be his people by rescuing them from Egypt and drowning Pharaoh’s army as a sign of divine power. They were guided by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. All passed through the sea on dry land. “The slaves who came out under Moses are our ancestors,” said Paul, “...all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” And just as you have holy communion, they also had spiritual food supplied by God, manna every morning and water from the rock Moses struck. Not only that, we know that the pre-existent Christ was their supplier, “...and all ate the same supernatural food, and all drank the same supernatural drink. For the drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”¹¹

You’d think all this blessing would have changed them? Once they were slaves; now they belonged to God. Once Pharaoh ruled them; now one of their own, Moses, went up Mt. Sinai to meet with God and bring down the Commandments. Once they worked without a break, now one out of seven was a holy rest. Once they had no land; now they were headed for the Promised Land. But there was a big problem. They were out of Egypt, but Egypt was not yet out of them. Better a god we can build and see and control than an invisible God. Build us a golden calf to worship and we will do what we saw in Egypt. We will have ourselves a sacrifice, eat in the presence of our new god, play music and let our hair down. We will go after pagan women and worship their gods in order to take them. We will complain against God’s provisions and grumble against the leader. We will be an idolatrous

¹⁰ PreachingToday.com search under 1 Cor. 10:1-13.

¹¹ Paul is here adapting a Jewish legend that since a rock from which water came appears both at the beginning and ending of the Exodus trek that the Rock followed them. Philo linked the Rock with the Jewish figure of Wisdom (*Sophia*) which was easily applied to Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 10:1-13. 11

and immoral and blasphemous and unfaithful people. We will not trust this God and his prophet. They were out of Egypt, but Egypt was not out of them.

These are the stories that lie behind Paul’s verdict in verse 5, “Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” The desert highways of Sinai were paved with bleached bones. Some God killed by serpents and plagues; others he just let die during forty years of wandering. Only two of the original generation, Joshua and Caleb, crossed the Jordan into the land.

Which all goes to prove Paul’s point, that access to the miracles of God’s deliverance and to the sacraments of God’s grace are not automatic protection against sin and judgment. You can be baptized and lost; you can take communion and miss God. What counts is the obedience the grace enables. A mafioso who comes to communion at the Roman Catholic church is still lost. A Klansman who takes the bread and wine while harboring hatred remains lost. A church member who receives the bread and cup and continues in immorality is in danger. The purpose of sacraments is to open us to the grace that energizes us to pursue a holy life of love of God and neighbor. To treat them as a magic charm of protection is wrong.

God’s character has not changed. The temptations of life have not changed. We live on a battlefield with multiple fronts: up there, out there, in here. The world, the flesh, and the devil are not our friends. They are organized as a comprehensive system to turn our hearts away from God, to numb our souls and blind our intellects. We live in the great overlap between the world as it is and the kingdom of God, which is the world as it is going to be. We are those, as Paul says, *upon whom the ends of the ages have come*. Every person is contested ground. And when we forget this fundamental truth we get sloppy and lazy and lethargic. We lose our fear of God and soon find ourselves compromised.

Thus far this has been a bleak passage. But sobriety is a good thing. Paul wants the Corinthians’ attention. They think their experience with the Spirit and access to sacraments give them a special status beyond the judgments of God, and they are wrong. But once he’s had gotten their attention, he gives a statement that offers hope and a practical strategy for how to endure and even triumph. Listen to verse 13:

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

I Corinthians 10:1-13. 12

Oddly enough, the truth of this verse is indicated by the fact that when we are in the midst of a fiery trial, we tend to deny everything it says. When the battle is hot and our weakness all too apparent we think, “No one has ever felt this way before.”

But Paul says, *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.* There is nothing you face people have not faced before. Thinking you are alone in the struggle is a strategy of the Evil One to keep you from seeking the protection you need in Christian fellowship and honest conversation. None of us are so good or accomplished as we try to appear. All are in a fight; all need help.

A second thought that comes in severe trials is that God has abandoned us. “Why has God left me now? I can’t take it any longer. I’m just going to give in to get it over with; there is no other way to find relief.” To which Paul replies, “No!, God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

God knows our limits. God is working to keep us from being hemmed in and having no way out and no way to bear up. God is not the source of our troubles but is using them to develop proven character and convictions within us. What Parris Island is to Marines, dealing with temptation is to the Christian. This is the fallen, morally infested world in which we live, a world deliberately organized to play on our weaknesses, to corrupt and divert us away from a pure devotion to Jesus Christ. Christians who do not have a warfare worldview and a battlefield mind set are an easy mark. Unless you see that the problem is *up there* and *out there* and *in here*, you will not be much of a soldier and likely a casualty. C.S. Lewis once made a wise observation about the battle:

“No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting it, not by giving in. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it.”¹²

¹² PreachingToday.com search under *temptation*.

I Corinthians 10:1-13. 13

Now what I've done thus far with verse 13 is give an individualist reading as if each of us was an army of one, and in a sense that's true. Unless you take up the battle for your own soul, you remain spiritually soft and easily pushed around. But Paul's purpose was not just to give a strategy for individual struggles, real as they are. All the *you's* in this verse are plural, which means Paul was speaking to the church as a whole. Individuals are targeted for temptation; so are churches and denominations. We see this is the public humiliation and judgment God brought on the Roman Catholic Church for sheltering abusive priests. We saw it several decades ago in the televangelist scandals. We see it our own battles within the United Methodist Church which come to a head in ten days at General Conference and which will determine our future as a Christian holiness movement or just one more chaplain to the fads of the culture. I expect we will win the votes, but it will be a blood bath of protests and ugly confrontations. Our divisions will be displayed before the world.

CONCLUSION

I have friends in Georgetown, SC who several years ago had a building housing two business on Hwy. 17 drop into a sink hole which opened under their property. The city was draining water to prepare for a huge storm drain project, and apparently the porous rock on which the building sat gave way.

Unfortunately, our interior lives can sometimes resemble the danger zone of a sinkhole. When we're too busy to spend time with God; or when we refuse to deal with past hurts, habitual sin, secret addictions, or character flaws, we're setting ourselves up for a collapse. The surface of life looks stable, but underneath we're sitting on a fragile base. The storms of life— or even just the normal process of living— can suddenly expose our hidden vulnerabilities, causing a spiritual and relational sinkhole to open up.¹³

As we come to the table again, remember that it's all about a relationship, not magic. Bring all you are and all you are not to Jesus Christ to received what he has to give, and that just more and more of himself. He is simply God's best.

¹³ Stephanie Pappas, "What Exactly Is a Sinkhole Anyway?" *The Christian Science Monitor* (6-1-10); Gordon McDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville, TN: Nelson: 1985), 11-15.
