

Lent 3
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
March 7, 2010

We don't take the holiness of God as seriously as we should. God is absolutely holy. Sin is entirely contrary to the very nature and being of God. True, this fact makes the mercy, grace, and love of God for us sinners all the more astounding, but the grace of our Lord does not remove His holiness or cancel it out.

It is the holiness of our Lord that especially stirs up guilt and fear from our consciences. And this is also why we feel uncomfortable, even disturbed, when we read things like God's reaction to those who participated in Korah's rebellion against God's selected servants Moses and Aaron. The holiness of God rightly terrorizes our minds and hearts. But the Gospel was created by God to free our hearts and minds of terror and to replace it with peace and joy and love and confidence in the Lord, Jesus.

But what is the correct way for us to make use of the reality of God's holiness? What is the right way to apply the Savior's loving favor and kindness?

Let's Use All of God's Word to Keep the Faith.

The Apostle Paul, with these words, applies warnings and promises to the Christians of Corinth. We could say the Apostle applied Law and Gospel to them. He used both direct warnings and warnings from events in Israel's history as recorded in God's Word.

Paul writes, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." That is a direct warning.

We say, "Pride goes before the fall."

Especially in spiritual things, in matters of the soul, we easily go the way of self-confidence. Self-confidence is a term that is used for so many different things and is generally thought of so highly, that it jars us to hear it said that self-confidence is a very dangerous and destructive thing when it comes to our relationship with God, when it comes to matters of eternal life.

If self-confidence means to have confidence in self, then when it comes to receiving eternal life or any other blessing of God, clearly confidence in self is nothing other than idolatry, worshipping a false god, an idol. And there is no idol nearer and dearer to ourselves than ourselves.

It is very easy for each one of us to suppose that "we are standing firm in Christ," emphasizing the wrong word in that sentence. Instead of emphasizing Christ, we stress the word 'we'.

We can be dangerously unaware of our sinfulness. Often, it seems, we are ignorant of how thoroughly sin has ruined us. Sin is a dreadful and deadly spiritual condition, sickness, infection. In view of this, we should never feel safe in ourselves. We all tend to be like Peter that night when he said, "Though all fall away from you, I never will!" Peter was sure he was standing firm, but before daybreak, Peter had tumbled terribly.

Do we also take Satan too lightly? He is an awful enemy. He's strong and he's terribly experienced. After Jesus' wilderness temptation, do you get the impression that Jesus said to Himself, "Well, that was easy"? And remember, sin did not live within Jesus. It does in us! Sin is an ally of Satan's.

Peer pressure is not a strong force only for young people. We live in a world of sinners. It's easy to go along, easy to follow anybody and everybody instead of Jesus.

Paul says instead, "Be careful, always careful, alert on the lookout for temptation, for every activity of sin." If God says something is wrong, it is always wrong. Every sin seems always to have its good reasons. Such reasons are never good!

Israel was a very blessed people. The LORD, with awesome power, led them out of Egypt, away from physical slavery and death. God assured Israel of His constant presence by means of His veiled glory in the cloud. Jesus Himself, as eternal God the Son, went with them in that cloud. God their Savior with the amazing miracle of bringing His people across the Red Sea on dry ground while wiping out their enemy's army in the same Red Sea rescued them a second time from slavery and death. Paul purposely used the word 'baptized.' In the cloud and the sea, God baptized them into Moses.

In all their wilderness wanderings, God was their provider of spiritual food, the manna, and spiritual drink, the water from the rock. Paul calls it spiritual food and drink because God gave both by His miraculous power. What great blessings!

But God was not pleased with many, even most, of them. They never made it to the Promised Land. They fell for idols, like the golden calf and Baal whose worship included sexual immorality. They forgot all that God did for them all the time. They complained; they rebelled. You heard this morning what happened because of the Korah rebellion. Well, the very next day, the people accused Moses of murdering all those rebels against God. An instant plague killed over 14,000 that day and the plague stopped only by God's grace in heeding the intervention of Moses and Aaron on their behalf.

We are more blessed. Jesus freed us from slavery to sin, Satan and eternal death. God has baptized us into Jesus Christ. He has fed us with His Holy Supper. Jesus has promised to be with us always. The fulfillment of the ages has come to us.

Let's use what happened to Israel as a law-warning to use against the sin in us and against every temptation. Use the warnings and threats of God's holiness against our

sinfulness of thinking, speaking and doing. Resist the temptation of sexual immorality by staying away from its temptation. Don't even give a suggestion of marriageless sex. Every time something does not go as you would like, don't question and attack the goodness and wisdom of God. Do not forget daily thanksgiving to our Lord for His countless every day blessings, for body and for soul, for time and for eternity.

God is faithful. His law is always up-to-date, always applicable to us. God's Gospel is always true, always offering forgiveness, new life and victory over sin and satan to us.

God will never let any temptation go beyond a believer in Jesus' ability to say 'No' to it.

Our Savior has given us what we need to stand up under any temptation. He gives His strength, His victory, to us through His Good News of forgiveness and grace in His Word, His Baptism, and His Holy Supper.

If we do not hear His Word, will not listen to the Holy Scripture, then we won't use the power of Baptism nor will we avail ourselves of His Holy Communion. If we cut ourselves off like this from His Word, we are done for. We will fall! Our prayer life will also cease.

Use God's holy, just commandments against our sinful nature and against every sinful attitude, thought, word or deed. Humbly grieve over sin. Then use His holy, saving Gospel to keep the faith, to get stronger in the faith of Jesus our Savior and His forgiveness. Trust in Jesus until finally He brings us to our eternal home, our everlasting promised land of perfect peace. Amen.