

Take Heed When You Think You Stand, Lest You Fall



David Wilkerson November 23, 2015

“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12, KJV). What does Paul mean when he warns his Christian brethren, “Take heed, lest you fall”? Was he concerned that these believers were in danger of falling back into grievous sins of flesh? Corinth was indeed a great trade city full of gross sin. And many Christians there had indulged in fleshly sins before they were saved.

Yet Jesus had delivered these people from their habits of lust, fornication and immorality. So what was the fall that Paul is referring to here? Three verses earlier, Paul likens the Christian life to a foot race: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (9:24). The apostle is saying, “I have to run this faith-race with determination. I can’t allow anything to disqualify me. So if I want to finish this run to glory, I have to bring my flesh under subjection. I have to gain mastery over it.”

Was Paul talking about fleshly sins here? Was he saying he had to avoid falling into a pit of lust? No, not at all. The book of Hebrews holds the key to the type of sin Paul is referring to. Once again, the context is a foot race: “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). The one sin that has the power to disqualify us from the race, to keep us from finishing, is the sin of unbelief.

Paul was speaking of faith in God. He taught that we are saved by faith, justified by faith, sanctified by faith, kept by faith. And we’re to live by faith, claim faith, overcome by faith, fight the good fight of faith. Paul was saying, in essence, “In light of all my preaching on faith, I have to bring every doubt under subjection. If I don’t – if I allow this one sin to go unbeaten in my life – I’ll be disqualified. Think about it, brothers. If God disqualified Israel, his chosen people, because of their unbelief, why would he spare you or me? This same sin can disqualify anyone from the race. We can’t allow it to go unchallenged in our lives. We’re to deal it a final, knockout blow.” Paul shows us how even enlightened believers can fall into a state of unbelief.

Paul takes us back to “our fathers” to show us how this state of unbelief can befall us. “Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant (of what happened to) our fathers” (1 Corinthians 10:1). Paul was saying, “Our spiritual fathers were the Israelites whom God delivered out of Egypt. It’s important for you to know what happened to them.”

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In this same chapter, Paul details how Israel was led supernaturally by a cloud that provided guidance day and night. They were led out of impossible situations by God’s delivering power, as when they passed through the separated waters of the Red Sea. They were fed with manna from heaven, enjoying meat God sent them from the skies. And they drank water from a rock, a spring of life that represented Jesus. Paul is telling us, “Look at how privileged our fathers were. No one ever lived under the benefits of the covenant as they did.” Indeed, God gave Israel everything they needed to lay hold of an unshakable faith.

“But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (10:5). Israel wasn’t brought down by adultery, fornication, homosexuality or alcohol. Their great sin was unbelief. And there is no sin that God hates more. “With whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:17-19). “I was grieved with that generation... So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest” (3:10-11). Finally, this warning comes, echoing Paul’s words to the Corinthians: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (3:12).

God was saying, “I’ve given my people every privilege. I’ve provided miracle after miracle, to deliver them from every crisis they’ve faced. Yet, whenever the next trial comes, they complain, ‘God, where are you? Why have you abandoned us?’” Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “You have even greater privileges than that generation did. You’ve been given a Savior, Jesus Christ. You’ve been given the Cross, the Resurrection, the gift of the Holy Spirit, all the promises of the New Covenant. God has provided much more even than the miracles he gave our ancient fathers.”

The Corinthians were at the very peak of their blessings. They were enjoying the height of revelation. Yet, just as they thought they were grounded in God’s Word, mature in his grace and all spiritual understanding, Paul warned, “Take heed! You’re in danger of falling. Watch out, lest you fall as Israel did, in spite of all your enlightenment.”

Hebrews says, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Hebrews 4:9,11). The writer here calls unbelief a fall. Now Paul says in no uncertain terms: “What about you? You’ve enjoyed even greater blessings that lead to faith. If you refuse to believe God’s Word to you, how much more will you provoke him? Take heed, lest you fall into the same example of unbelief as those who’ve gone before you.”

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No other generation has been so blessed by God’s faithfulness. The church in these last days enjoys ever-increasing light. We have the example not only of ancient Israel, but of the entire New Testament church. We have a full, complete canon of Scripture. And we’re seeing an overwhelming media-saturation of the gospel, such as the world has never seen. Media of all kinds spread the good news at any given hour throughout the earth. We are

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What does it mean to fall into unbelief? It means to doubt that God is faithful to his Word. It's the disbelief that God will keep his promise to deliver us when we're in impossible situations. It's doubting that he'll enforce his warnings with judgment. Unbelief means succumbing to a growing fear that says, "I've seen God do this for me before. But will he do it again now? Can I trust him to come through for me?"

Paul says Israel tempted God by having a provisional faith. "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents" (1 Corinthians 10:9). Israel tempted the Lord with their provisional faith. This was a faith that says, "Lord, I'll believe you, if you'll just do one more miracle for me."

God would deliver Israel. And for a season they would worship him, saying, "Glory to God! I believe." But whenever they faced another crisis, they were again filled with doubt, fear and murmuring. They questioned God, demanding, "Just deliver me once more, Lord. Then I'll never disbelieve you again. Yes, I know what you've done for me in the past. I can count all the miracles, all the times you've delivered me. But I have to see you do it one more time for me, now, in this situation." Yet their unbelief never ended. Instead, they kept raising the bar for God with their demands.

Simply put, they were tempting God's mercy. I consider this to be the most tragic, dangerous fruit of unbelief. If you don't accept that God will judge your sin—if you don't believe he's faithful to judge your transgressions—you'll try to see how far you can go. You'll keep pushing the edge to see how long you can indulge your lust.

That's just what Israel did. The original text says they "tempted beyond [God's] endurance." We see an example of this when Israel's men were seduced into sexual sin with the women of Moab. "The people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab" (Numbers 25:1). This seduction began with an invitation to dinner. "(Moab) called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat" (25:2). Then, during the dinner, the Moabites slowly introduced their idols: "And [the Israelites] bowed down to their gods" (25:2).

When the Israelite men awoke the next day, after a night of indulging in sin, nothing happened. They saw no sign of God's judgment. So they kept going to Moab. Yet still no judgment came. And their lust continued to grow. Step by step, these men were falling into the gravity-pull of unbelief. Finally, their unbelief robbed them of all fear of God. They no longer thought the Lord would judge them for their sin. So they kept fornicating with the Moabite women. And they became completely numb to God.

What happened to them? "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one of his men that were joined unto Baalpeor" (25:3-5).

Even while this terrible judgment was taking place, an Israelite man brazenly took a Moabite woman into his tent "in the sight of Moses" (25:6). When a godly man named Phinehas saw this, he was outraged. He took a javelin and followed the couple into the tent, where he slew them both. I tell you, this is where unbelief ends. There is no longer any fear of God, even when judgment stares you in the face. Instead, there is only indulgence, as if daring God to bring his judgment.

It wasn't Paul's desire to put God's people under fear or condemnation.

Paul didn't wish to yoke the Corinthians with a constant fear of falling. So he gave them an encouraging word, beginning with this verse: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). What is the temptation Paul is talking about here? In the context of this passage, it's a temptation to disbelieve. Three verses earlier, we read, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (10:10).

I'm convinced that Christians today take this matter of murmuring and complaining too lightly. We don't imagine that our daily, habitual complaints could be so sinful in God's ears. But then we read this convicting promise: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (10:13). What a glorious promise. Israel's temptation to murmur and complain brought them down. Today God's people are no longer the house of Moses but the house of Christ. And Jesus was sent to bring a last-days remnant into God's promised rest.

Right now, we're hearing God's last call to enter his rest. It's his final call to a people who would fully trust in his faithfulness. In this last-days house, Christ won't permit Satan to ruin his people with a spirit of murmuring or complaining. Instead, our Lord will faithfully make a way of escape for us. He promises that we'll be able to endure any temptation, at any time. He tells us, "I'm going to deliver you from unbelief. All you have to do is resist doubt, and seek me with all your heart. I've given you the power to do this through my Holy Spirit."

I say, let every demon in hell be released on the earth. Let nature spew forth its fury, let persecution come, let fear envelop the whole world. Through it all, God is going to have a people who have entered his rest. He has provided an escape for his children from unbelief and its awful fruit. He's saying, "Take heed to my Word. Believe my promises to you. And accept that I'll carry out my judgments."

I urge you: Fear God. Ask the Holy Spirit to mortify every doubt in you. You were created as a free moral agent. That means you have the power to believe. So choose to believe the Lord. Trust him in the face of all your circumstances. You have a God who will see you through everything in these last days. ?

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