

**+ 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, 11-13 + Do You Need an Attitude Adjustment? +  
+ Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost + 16 August 2009 +**

When I was growing up, there were times that I or my siblings needed an “attitude adjustment”. We wouldn’t listen to mom or dad. We would fight with each other or pick on each other. We would pass the blame or say, “I don’t know”, when something was broken or ruined or a dessert eaten before mealtime. So often the sinner inside each of us won out and we needed an “attitude adjustment”. Maybe it was a time-out in the naughty chair or the loss of a privilege or some other form of discipline to set us straight.

We chuckle about the “attitude adjustments” needed back when we were kids, but the smiles fade when we realize how often we’ve needed “attitude adjustments” even as adults. Maybe it has to do with how you use your time, talents, or treasures—the visible blessings that God so graciously gives you. Maybe it has to do with your priorities as an individual, as a family, or as a congregation. Maybe it has to do with your attitude about your ability to stand the tests and temptations of this life. Whatever the case, the question has to be asked, **DO YOU NEED AN ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT?** If each of us honestly looks at our hearts and lives, we realize we do need an “attitude adjustment”, not a time-out, but one provided by our Lord Jesus as he does this morning through St. Paul.

Writer George Santayana once wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” That was true of Paul’s readers. He had spent considerable time teaching God’s truth in Corinth. He used the Old Testament to show how all had fallen into sin and how God had promised a Savior who came in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul also used the example of God’s Old Testament people to teach lessons to a new generation.

In our text, we find Paul doing that once again. You see, the Corinthians were very gifted believers. The Lord had blessed them richly, but they were spiritually immature. Instability, divisions, envy, lawsuits, marital problems, sexual sin, and overconfidence marked these believers in Christ. They needed an attitude adjustment so Paul provided it with God’s Word.

The Corinthians had to **learn from the past**. Paul wrote, ***“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. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them and that rock was Christ.”*** Paul wanted his readers to remember their spiritual past. Most had come from a pagan background, but as Christians, their spiritual **“fathers”** were God’s people of the past. Paul didn’t want his readers to be ignorant of that past, so he used the example of the Israelites who followed Moses out of Egypt, a group also richly blessed by God like the Corinthians.

God had performed miraculous signs of his gracious power and his saving will for Israel. They had passed from a life of slavery to a life of freedom as God led them with a pillar of cloud and when he miraculously parted the great waters of the Red Sea for them to pass through on dry ground. The Israelites ate manna God miraculously provided and drank water God miraculously provided from a rock. Above all, they had the saving presence of Christ. ***“Nevertheless, God was not well-pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desolate wilderness.”***

Paul’s warning strikes home when you look closer at the text. ***“God was not well-pleased with most of them...”*** At Jesus’ Baptism, God announced from heaven that he was **“well-pleased”** with his Son and what Jesus was about to accomplish. Christ received God’s personal approval. That was not the case for many Israelites, who constantly complained about God’s ability to provide and save. They worshiped golden calves and fertility gods and defied God’s promise to be with them if they entered Canaan. ***“Their bodies were scattered over the desolate wilderness”***. The word for **“scattered”** is actually the root for our word “catastrophe”. That is what befell so many Israelites who had God’s gifts, yet rejected him.

Paul didn’t want that to happen to the Corinthians. He explained, ***“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, to whom the Fulfillment of the Ages has come.”*** The Corinthians had it even better than the Israelites because they had the rest of the story while enjoying similar blessings—the life-giving Word of God, the saving waters of Holy Baptism, the forgiving food and drink of Holy Communion, the saving presence of Christ—the Fulfillment of the ages. Still the Corinthians acted and lived as if that really didn’t matter, as if they had license to do whatever they wanted because they were “Christian”. For this reason, Paul had to warn them so the past would not be repeated.

So what does all this matter for you and me right now? **Learn from the past.** The Israelites were scattered throughout the wilderness because many defied God and took his blessings for granted. The Corinthian congregation eventually disappeared because many rejected God and took his blessings for granted. You and I have the privilege of receiving not only God's countless physical blessings, but also his greater spiritual blessings. We have the Word taught in its truth and purity and his Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Communion administered faithfully. Through those means Christ grants us his saving presence. The Lord has blessed us richly and continues to do so, but do you ever take it for granted? It's easy to assume it's always going to be this way, but if you forget the past, you're bound to repeat it. That's scary, because condemnation awaits those who do.

...But it's not too late! In fact, the very blessings you now enjoy provide you with the healing and forgiveness and attitude adjustment you need. Above all, you have Christ. Through his Word, you learn from the past! Christ miraculously rescued and provided for Israel and he saved the Corinthians from their unbelief. Jesus is the Savior, who in your place never took his Father's grace for granted as he lived a life of perfect obedience to God's holy will. Then he gave his life on the cross that you might live, that you might have forgiveness, that you might finally realize how high and deep and broad and wide the love of God is for you. In Christ every visible blessing reminds you of his eternal blessings. Jesus provides his blessed means of grace in Word and water and meal to give you those eternal blessings.

Out of love, Christ Jesus did all that for you to give you all those tremendous blessings, but Paul warns about getting overconfident with those blessings. **Learn from the past**, but also **watch in the present**. Paul puts it simply, ***"...If you think you are standing firm, watch out that you don't fall!"***

The Corinthians had grown overconfident in their own character. They put themselves in positions of temptation joining in at the local pagan fertility festivals, even though they were Christians. They needed Paul's warning.

We need it too. Do you ever mentally pat yourself on the back because you attend worship and Bible Study or because you happened to do something good that God has to notice? Does your ego ever get stroked because you're faithful to the Lord or because you made it through a trial or temptation so well? Could you fall into sin? Easy sin is even easier for 21st Century New York Christians than it was for 1st Century Corinthian Christians because there is so much temptation around us. It's hard enough trying to avoid temptation, let alone intentionally putting ourselves in its path. Nowadays all it takes is a couple clicks on your computer, a little change in the figures on your tax return, a couple more drinks at the party, or a couple more pointed comments when before you know it, you've fallen into sin.

Unbelief is just as easy as countless activities and demands on your time pull you away from God, his Word and his Sacraments. It's sadly easy to fall out of the habit of weekly worship when work or play demands your time. It's easy to fall away when your faith is tested, when the finances are really hurting, when your schooling threatens to shake your foundation, when love in a marriage grows cold and families break up. "Don't ever think you're standing so firm that you can't fall," Paul warns us. "Look at all the carnage on the road of life. See how many people have fallen when tempted or tested because they were proud or overconfident in their own character."

Paul's warning cuts to the heart. It can leave you feeling uncertain of God's grace. "How can I really be certain that I'll even make it through today, let alone to heaven, without falling? I could fall anytime!" That warning is humbling, because you realize you can't do it all. You can't provide your own attitude adjustment, so how will you walk that dark road of life ahead?

***"...But God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will provide a way of escape also so that you can stand up under it."*** There's that word we've heard so often recently—***"...But God is faithful..."*** How amazing is that! God is faithful to his people and his promises as he proved in the sending of his own Son Jesus. That means he's never going to give out on them or back down from them. He's more faithful than you could ever be and more generous than you can imagine, because he's never going to let you be completely crushed by temptation or trial. He won't allow you to be tested beyond what you can bear. He will provide a way out, even if that means simply giving you the strength to bear those trials and difficulties in this life and those times when you are faced with temptation.

When we **learn from the past** and **watch in the present**, then the Lord helps us to **trust for the future**. ***"God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear...He will also provide a way out..."*** Those promises of preservation are guaranteed in the blood of Christ.

With that guarantee, you realize your need to watch and your need to trust in Christ. With that guarantee, you see life differently. You realize that behind every visible, perishable blessing is something more important that is invisible and imperishable. With that guarantee, you reorder your priorities—to see your time as a precious gift from God to be used for more than just work and school and play, but also for his service in your life's callings; to see your talents as precious gifts from God to be used for more than getting yourself ahead in life, but also for humble service to your gracious Lord; to see your treasures not as "yours", but as God's gifts to you to be used in his service and in ways that are "well-pleasing" to him, whether in how you spend daily or in your offerings to the Lord here.

Did you need an attitude adjustment? With Christ's guarantee on the cross and the knowledge that God is faithful to you and his promises, God does adjust your attitude and will continue to do so day after day. Amen.