

**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.<sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.<sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food<sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.**

**<sup>6</sup> Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.<sup>9</sup> We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.<sup>10</sup> And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.**

**<sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.<sup>12</sup> So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! <sup>13</sup> 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. (NIV84)**

Theme: Don’t Fool Yourself

1. You are a sinner like everyone else.
2. You can fall away like others.

“Don’t fool yourself.” When we say this to someone we are telling him to know and understand himself—his gifts and abilities; and realize what his limitations are—what he can and cannot accomplish. For instance on some of those reality shows, some people come on thinking they can sing or dance or have some other special talent. But they end up making fools out of themselves. “Don’t fool yourself.” In a different way God says this to all people no matter what gifts and abilities they have: “Don’t fool yourself.” You are a sinner like everyone else and you can fall away like others.

God gave many blessings to the people of Israel. Not the least of which was saving them from slavery—from the hand of the Egyptians. But soon after the first Passover Pharaoh and his army came charging after the Israelites. They were caught between the world’s most powerful army and the Red Sea. So God caused the waters of the Red Sea to part. The people walked through on dry ground. The Egyptians came in after them. But then when all the Israelites made it through the walls of water came crashing down, killing Pharaoh and his whole army. When the Israelites passed through the water they were essentially made new people—now they were free from slavery. Paul makes the connection to our baptisms. When we are baptized by water we are made a new creation—our sin-stained garments were removed for the righteous robes of Christ. We were no longer God’s enemies, but his own dear children.

The people of Israel wandered for years in the wilderness. So God provided manna for them to eat. This was bread from heaven—a miracle by God that showed up every morning—except the Sabbath. It was a food like nothing else on the face of the earth. God also provided water for all the people as they wandered through the wilderness. Once God provided water out of a rock. Another miracle by God on behalf of his people. Paul compares the manna they ate and the water they drank to the body and blood of Christ we receive in, with, and under the bread and the wine in the Lord’s Supper. **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.** Although their food and drink was for their physical well-being, it also provided spiritual nourishment. For when God gave them the manna and water he was giving them his love—and it caused them to remember that love as well. And it indicated that Christ was with them throughout their years in the wilderness, just as he is truly present in his sacrament.

They received many blessings from God just like you do. And the Israelites rebelled against God. They constantly failed to obey him. Time and time again we see the Israelites complaining about the situation God placed them in. They said it would have been better to die in Egypt than in the wilderness. They wished that God would have

never saved them from the Egyptians. They went after false gods. They were prevalent in sexual immorality.

A few weeks ago we saw the story of Achan. When God gave the Israelites the city of Jericho he told the people not to take anything for themselves. But Achan stole some valuable items and hid them under his tent. Today we have the story of Korah. He led many prominent Jewish leaders to revolt against Moses and Aaron. They wanted to be in charge and were upset that God picked Moses as their leader. The history of the people of Israel is one of sin and rebellion. Even though they were given many blessings from God, they still sinned constantly.

The same can be said of you. You may look down upon the Israelites for their sins, but don't fool yourself—you aren't any better. Even though God has given you many blessings you still rebel against him. You fail to obey his commands numerous times a day. You may complain about God. No matter how many blessings he gives you, you still find something to complain about. You act as if God doesn't give us enough. So we may take matters into your own hands and steal like Achan. How many times have you complained about our leaders? It doesn't matter who it is: presidents, governors, mayors, church leaders, and so on—you may complain that God has placed them in positions of authority over you.

So don't fool yourself. You are a sinner just like everyone else. God is not pleased with you and your actions. He isn't impressed with your life. Because you are a sinner you deserve eternal damnation. And God isn't going to give you a break. Don't fool yourself—you may have the tendency to look down upon those who commit the same sins as you, but it's ok for you to do that sin, because you're you. As if won't forgive others, but he will forgive you. But in reality it doesn't matter who you are, God does not and cannot forgive any unrepentant sin.

So don't fool yourself into thinking that you are somehow better. Don't fool yourself into thinking that you won't fall into the sins that others have fallen into. That's what Paul warns us about here. **Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.** He wants you to use the Israelites as examples of what not to do. He doesn't want you to fall into the same sins that they fell into. Realize that you are weak and do sin

numerous times a day. So you strive to avoid situations where you might fall into sin.

And when you do fall, know that you are forgiven. For God sent his son to pay for your sins. Jesus lived a perfect life for you. So that when he was put to death on the cross he could give that perfect life to you. For he took your sins upon himself. He paid the price for your sins that you couldn't pay yourself. So God doesn't hold your sins against you. They no longer can condemn you. For you have been set from the slavery of sin. You no longer fool yourself. You know you are a sinner, yet forgiven through Christ.

Not only do you not want to fool yourself into thinking you do not sin, but you also don't want to fool yourself into thinking you can never fall away from the faith.

Again, the history of the people of Israel serves as a warning. When Moses was on the top of Mount Sinai receiving the 10 commandments from the Lord, the Israelites were busy bowing down to a golden calf. The first commandment is, "you shall have no other gods;" yet that is exactly what the Israelites were doing. Even with the visible presence of God right above them, they still fell away. Often they also fell into Baal worship. Part of worshiping Baal was joining in ritual orgies with religious prostitutes. They also practiced child sacrifice from time to time. Again and again the Israelites rebelled and sinned against the Lord. But they didn't just sin against him; they lost their faith and went after false gods. And at other times, they didn't even go after false gods. They simply lost their faith.

And look what happened to them as a result. When they worshiped the golden calf God had the Levites cut down over 3000 people. When they worshiped Baal with sexual immorality God had over 23,000 of them killed. Korah, his family, and all his followers, were swallowed by the earth. When they complained about God he sent poisonous snakes who killed many of them. When they reached the Promised Land for the first time, 10 of the spies who checked out the land led the people to believe that the Canaanites were too powerful to defeat. So as a result everyone 20 and older, except Caleb and Joshua, died in the wilderness over the next 40 years.

These examples serve as a warning. **These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.** And what is that warning? Don't fool yourself. You can fall from the one true faith. It doesn't matter how strong of footing you have now, you can still fall away. "Not me," you may tell yourself. "I've been a Lutheran all my life—I attended a Lutheran Grade School, or even MLS. I go to worship almost every week. I know my Bible well. I will never fall away." Peter said the same thing. Judas may as well. You could add the Israelites to that list. "We are God's chosen children. He saved us from the hands of the Egyptians. I will never turn away from him."

Don't fool yourself. The Israelites had God's grace just like you, yet they rejected him. If they fell, you can too. Paul concludes, **So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!** Being a Christian now doesn't guarantee you will be one the future. If you rebel against God's Word you put your faith in jeopardy. If you turn toward the things of the world away from the Lord you may end up like many of the Israelites. Those who reject the Lord will be destroyed by the Lord. And they will suffer forever.

You are tempted every day just like the people of Israel. Everything you face many others have as well. And many have fallen into that temptation. It's a good thing you have God on your side. **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.** God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows what you can handle. And what you can't handle.

And he won't allow you to be tempted by more than you can handle. God knows your breaking point. He isn't going to allow so much temptation that you have to sin. Think of Job. God allowed Satan to tempt Job, but he gave him limitations—first it was his everything but he health. And eventually God allowed Satan to take his health too. And yet Job never fell away. God knew his limits. Does this mean we will never sin when we are tempted? No. But it does mean that we can handle every temptation that we face.

God also does another thing for us when we are tempted to sin. **When you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.** God knows exactly what he is doing. Even when

you are tempted, God provides a way out. He gives you other options. You don't have to sin. You always have the option to do what is right—to obey God. And God promises to watch over you and protect you. He promises to be with you and guard you against the attacks of Satan. The devil will not be able to snatch you from the arms of God. For whoever wants God's protection, is protected.

There are times when you sin. And you realize those sins puts your faith in jeopardy. So you go to God in deep-felt sorrow and angst over your sins. And you know that God alone forgives you. Through the work of Christ your sins have been paid for. That is how faithful God is. He only allows as much temptation as you can handle, and even with that he always gives you a way out of temptation. And when you are unfaithful to him and his word, he is still faithful to you. For sent his son to pay for those sins.

Here is God's warning—don't fool yourself. You are a sinner, just like everyone else—just take a look at the example of the Israelites. And don't fool yourself—you may be a Christian now, but that doesn't guarantee that you will be one when you die; just look at the Israelites. But also, don't worry. God is faithful. So we confess our sins. And we know that when we are unfaithful God forgives us and he remembers our sins no more. Amen.