

“VIEWER DISCRETION ADVISED”

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

I was confirmed on May 14, 1967, at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida. Despite the five decades since, I still have vivid memories of that day: wearing a new suit, new shirt, new tie, new shoes; standing nervously in front of the congregation and answering Bible questions; taking communion for the first time with my parents; and later, after the service, squinting in the bright Florida sunshine, while friends and families snapped photograph after photograph of the confirmands of 1967: Vicki Carter, Marvin Hodges, David Shaffer, and Mark Weis.

On that day, my parents gave me a new King James Version Bible with my name printed on the cover in gold letters. I still have that Bible. And on that day, the Women of Immanuel Lutheran Church presented me with a new red Lutheran hymnal, which contained my chosen confirmation verse written in elegant script: **“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be wiser still,”** Proverbs 9:9. I still have that hymnal.

I also vividly remember how the very next Sunday I informed my dad that I was not going to church. When he demanded to know why—this was approximately one minute before dad said, “Go to your room; change your clothes; you are going to church”—I replied: “I don’t need church any more, dad. I’m confirmed now. I know everything I need to know about God and the Bible.”

Foolish. Wrong. Laughable. A childish attitude. Yet, also an attitude which, if not addressed and corrected, can become dangerous to faith. The belief that we are not fully dependent on Almighty God for everything; or that we no longer need God for anything; or that we know every teaching, every verse, every word in Scripture and can learn no more; or that on our own we are invulnerable to sin or temptation; or that we can ignore the Word of God without weakening our faith—these are dangerous misconceptions. And their source is human pride. “No thanks, God. I’ll take things from here.”

It was this form of prideful indifference that Paul warned against in today’s text; particularly with the words, **“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall,”** 1 Corinthians 10:12. We may think it strange, if not unnecessary, that Christians should be warned against indifference toward God and His Word. Yet, the Bible contains many such warnings.

Of the seven letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, five letters

address the matter of spiritual indifference; more specifically, indifference toward love and service, indifference toward false teaching and false teachers, indifference toward sexual immorality and idolatry, and indifference toward spiritual sleepiness. **“Wake up,”** Jesus told the Christians in Sardis, Revelation 3:2. And He gave this stark warning to the indifferent Christians in Laodicea: **“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of My mouth,”** Revelation 3:15-16. Is Jesus indifferent toward indifference? No.

The Christians in Corinth were also exhibiting spiritual indifference. In one instance, a member of the congregation was sleeping with his stepmother. And the Corinthian congregation was proud of its tolerance and worldly sophistication—the way many of the elite today view the acceptance of homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, and even abortion as the height of tolerance and sophistication. Never mind what God says. All that matters is what polls and politicians say.

Yet, this is what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, **“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans. A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud. Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?”**

What caused this Corinthian indifference? Again, pride. A we-know-better-than-God attitude. “Yes, we know that God says immorality is wrong. But a little sexual immorality, a little infidelity, a little pornography, won’t hurt anyone. God won’t mind. And if we sin, so what? Isn’t that why we have forgiveness?”

Of course, everyone prefers happy words from God. Warnings make us shift uneasily in the pulpit and in the pews. Yet, from time to time, Christians need to shift uneasily. Christians need to be reminded that God means what He says and says what He means about sin and salvation and godly behavior.

God wants us to be absolutely certain of our salvation in Jesus Christ; and this is why He speaks so often about it in Scripture. John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** Or Romans 5:1, **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Or Romans 8:1, **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Or Romans 10:9, **“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be**

saved.” Or Ephesians 1:7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Or 1 John 1:7, “And the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.”

And not only does God tell us the certain outcome of our faith, He also shows us the outcome in the real-life examples of believers. When we face impossible circumstances, He directs us to the example of Abraham, who **“against all hope, in hope believed and so became the father of many nations,”** Romans 4:18.

When we are confronted by gigantic problems—marital problems, health problems, spiritual problems, financial problems, congregational problems—God directs us to the example of David; a young shepherd boy who triumphed over nine-foot-tall Goliath with a slingshot and a pebble; not because David was stronger or more intelligent or better equipped, but because he knew Almighty God would win him the victory.

Scripture is brimming with such examples; and each example is meant to encourage us and convince us that God says what He means and means what He says. Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, **“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”** However, Scripture also contains sobering examples proving that God is not only serious about salvation but serious about sin.

In 2013, the History Channel aired a miniseries titled “The Bible.” Over all, I was disappointed with certain interpretations and actual misrepresentations of biblical facts. Yet, I was intrigued by one aspect of the miniseries. Between segments, after the commercials, the History Channel repeatedly played the warning “VIEWER DISCRETION ADVISED.” I expected to see such warnings on CNN or FOX News when these networks displayed graphic images of real-life events: battlefield deaths, the aftermath of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, mass graves, or ethnic cleansings. But a “VIEWER DISCRETION” advisory during a miniseries on the Bible?

But then I realized that if certain biblical events had been filmed in detail and broadcast unedited, the graphic images would warrant a “VIEWER DISCRETION ADVISED.” Consider the worldwide flood in which all humanity perished, with the exception of Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives. Eight people saved out of what may have been millions or even billions of people. A world literally ‘flooded’ with corpses.

Or consider the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; and how every inhabitant of these two cities was killed by fire and brimstone. Or consider the town of Jericho, of

which we read in Joshua 6:21, **“When the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.”** Imagine those images on the evening news.

Perhaps biblical events like these do warrant the warning: “The following program contains graphic images, which some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.” Not VIEWER DISCRETION only in the TV sense of ‘be warned before viewing;’ but also in the biblical sense of ‘view and be warned.’

When the apostle Paul wrote, **“Now these things occurred as examples,”** 1 Corinthians 10:6; and **“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come,”** 1 Corinthians 10:11; he was in essence issuing a VIEWER DISCRETION advisory. View and be warned.

Doesn’t a similar inner warning occur when we view a tragic auto accident? Isn’t that the reason we drive so slowly past the scene of an accident, craning our necks to see every detail? And somewhere deep inside don’t we whisper the realization: “That could have been me”? And if we come to that realization, shouldn’t it lead us to drive more carefully? Should we thank God for protecting us and giving us another day of grace?

Without question, today’s text is stark and sobering. But it is also a text we need to hear. For when God warns us, when He says **“VIEWER DISCRETION IS ADVISED,”** it is only because He loves us and wants us to possess all the blessings ours in Christ; and to never risk losing such blessings by carelessly throwing them away. Sin is serious. Salvation is serious. And being serious is the exact opposite of being apathetic or indifferent.

In the verses immediately preceding today’s text, Paul emphasized the seriousness of the Christian life by comparing it to an Olympic race: **“Do you not know that in any race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize,”** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

Even in 2019, you and I understand Paul's analogy very well. No Olympic athlete can expect to win a gold medal without rigorous, ongoing training; without a stringent diet; without relentless practice, practice, practice—as explained in the following quote from Forbes Magazine: “It’s not just that most Olympians are born with a certain set of physiological gifts, although that’s a big part of it. It’s also their commitment to their sports, and perhaps most important, the way they train.”

Using the example of ancient Israel, Paul confronted indifference by dispelling certain of its myths. What myths? The myth, for example, that once saved we no longer need to concern ourselves with God and His Word—or to quote a 14-year-old boy I once knew very well: “I don’t need to go to church, dad. I’m confirmed now. I know everything I need to know about God and the Bible.”

But this is never true, is it? Because as Paul said, ‘The Christian life is like a race.’ And as Yogi Berra, the former manager of the New York Yankees, once said, ‘It ain’t over till it’s over.’ The difference is this: In the Christian race we don’t run to win the crown. God has already given us the crown in Jesus Christ. Instead, in the Christian race we run in such a way as to not lose the crown. As certain as we should be about our salvation, we should never presume that we cannot throw God’s blessings away. We can; and what happened to ancient Israel is the proof. “**God is faithful,**” Paul wrote. His faithfulness to us is never in question. No, the question often lies in our faithfulness to Him.

Don’t miss the sharp contrast between verses 1-4 and then verse 5 of today’s text: “**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. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.**” At least two million Israelites came out of Egypt. Only two of that generation entered the Promised Land, namely, Joshua and Caleb.

Did the Israelites have God to blame for their disqualification or themselves? Notice everything God did for them. God made the Israelites His people. God delivered them from four hundred years of Egyptian bondage. God saved them from pharaoh’s army by parting the waters of the Red Sea. God gave them bread from heaven and water from rocks. God led them by day in a cloud and by night in a pillar of fire. God gave them His laws on Mount Sinai.

God did everything for them in the same way in which God has given everything

for us—as Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 1:4-5, **“I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way.”** God has made us His people too. God has saved us through His Son, Jesus Christ. God has rescued us from bondage to sin and is even now, as I speak to you, leading us to the true Promised Land.

You and I have been saved. You and I should be completely certain of our salvation. But that certainty never comes from overestimating ourselves but rather from trusting in God. As Paul writes in verse 13: **“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.”** And that way out is Christ.

Several months ago I ordered a magazine from Publishers Clearing House. Since that time I’ve received daily emails from PCH about upcoming sweepstakes; emails with titles like “Mark, Join the Winner’s Circle” and “Mark, We Need to Hear from You” and “Mark, You Have an Elite Communication from the Prize Patrol.” The most recent email was titled: “Mark, Avoid Disqualification. Act Now.”

I took the email seriously. I acted. I read through yet another boring PCH email advertising magazines I will never read and merchandize I will never buy; just so I could reach the final SUBMIT ENTRY button. I followed all the directions and meticulously checked all the appropriate boxes, despite the knowledge that the odds of winning the PCH grand prize are 1 in 215,500,000; despite knowing that I’m three times more likely to be struck by lightning.

If I’m willing to be that meticulous to avoid disqualification for a prize I have no chance of winning; what should I be willing to do to avoid disqualification from the Christian race, the incalculable riches of God’s inheritance, and the eternal crown of life that God has already won for me in Jesus Christ?

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