

A COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLE PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

According to the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church

by
BARBARA PAPPAS



Chapter Ten

©Barbara Pappas. "These Bible Study Guides may be used with our blessings for personal and/or group study only, not for publication by any person or entity without written permission. We also request that those who use this work for the purposes stated let us know who they are and how they are using them. It does our hearts good to hear from you! Email us at info@orthodoxareyousaved.org"

CHAPTER TEN

Obedience: An Indicator of Love

BACKGROUND: Paul's recurring theme, mimicking that throughout the Bible from the Old Testament to the New, is that of the salvation of mankind through faith in Christ as Savior. Further, this faith is subject to times of testing during one's lifetime and to Judgment as to its validity. In this chapter, Paul gives examples of this truth.

10:1-5. Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. The Book of Exodus tells the story of the Hebrew people, God's chosen, who were led by Moses out of the Land of Egypt after 430 years of slavery (12:40). God's Hand delivered them from captivity (Chap 3-14), and guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night (13:21). When they reached the sea with Pharaoh's army behind them, Moses lifted his hand and God divided the waters so they could reach the other side unharmed (14:21). When the Egyptians followed into the dry seabed, Moses again lifted his hand and the waters returned to their normal level, drowning Pharaoh's army (14:27). When they were hungry, God provided quail and manna from heaven (16:11-15), and when they were thirsty, Moses struck a rock with his rod as God directed, and water poured forth (17:6). God asked in return only that they obey Him, as a sign of their love for Him (19:3-6), which would also serve to shape them spiritually into what He wanted them to be: His people—for their own benefit, not His. But in spite of the many miracles surrounding them, they continually complained (Num 11:1 & 14:11) and rebelled, so God refused to allow most of them to reach the promised land (Num 14:22-23,29,43).

10:6-10. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. This story is told to remind us that God showers us with blessings because He loves us, but He expects our love (demonstrated by obedience) in return, because His Kingdom consists of love. Those who, like the Hebrews of old, are indifferent or rebellious will suffer the consequences as they did. Those who allow God to continually mold them in holiness will be blessed, in this life and the next.

In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but that He might have (someone) upon whom to confer His benefits....Nor did He stand in need of our service when He ordered us to follow Him; but He thus bestowed salvation upon us. For to follow the Savior

is to be a partaker of salvation, and to follow light is to receive light. But those who are in light do not themselves illumine the light, but are illumined and revealed by it: they do certainly contribute nothing to it, but, receiving the benefit, they are illumined by the light. Thus, also, service (rendered) to God does indeed profit God nothing, nor has God need of human obedience; but He grants to those who follow and serve Him life and incorruption and eternal glory, bestowing benefit upon those who serve (Him), because they do serve Him, and on His followers, because they do follow Him but does not receive any benefit from them: for He is rich, perfect, and in need of nothing. But for this reason does God demand service from men, in order that, since He is good and merciful, He may benefit those who continue in His service. For, as much as God is in want of nothing, so much does man stand in need of fellowship with God. For this is the glory of man, to continue and remain permanently in God's service. IRENAEUS¹

These verses also dramatically illustrate the fact that Old Testament events prefigured New Testament truths:

For as the gifts are figures, even so are the punishments figures: and as Baptism and the Table were sketched out prophetically, so also by what ensued, the certainty of punishment coming on those who are unworthy of this gift was proclaimed beforehand for our sake that we by these examples might learn soberness. CHRYSOSTOM²

<u>Old Testament Event</u>	<u>Prefigured New Testament Truth</u>
Moses & the Hebrew people (God's Chosen)	Christ and His people (the Church)
guided by pillar of cloud by day, fire by night	Jesus, the good Shepherd leads His sheep (Jn 10:2-4,9,11)
passed through sea (which opened for them opportunity for new life)	Baptism (in water): cleansing & entrance into new Life-in-Christ.
freedom from slavery in Egypt	freedom from slavery to sin
ate spiritual food/manna provided by God	The Lord's Body (Jn 6:48-58)
drank spiritual drink water from Rock (Ex 17:6)	The Lord's Blood
spiritual Rock followed them (Christ's presence)	Christ with us always through the Church
with most of them God was not well pleased (Num 14:19-24)	Judgment

their bodies scattered
in the wilderness
(Num 14:29)

reward or punishment
(inclusion or exclusion)
(Mt 25:34, 41)

they lusted after
forbidden things
(Num 11:4-34)

{certainly
{
{

they became idolaters
(Ex 32:4, 6)

{analogous
{
{

they committed
sexual immorality ...
23,000 fell
(idol worship was
accompanied by or led to
sexual immorality
(Num 25:1-9).

{
{to our times
{
{
{

they spoke against God
and were destroyed
(Ex 16:2; Num 21:4-6)

Verses 1-10 illustrate dramatically the fact that the Exodus story of the Hebrew people was a prefiguration of the struggle required to enter fully into the Kingdom of God (Mt 11:12). They also outline the four steps in the process of salvation.³ *Step One:* we are called to BELIEVE in God and His Son Jesus Christ, our Savior, through the blessings God bestows upon us. *Step Two:* we must PROVE BELIEF by trying to become Christ-like throughout our lives through obedience, because it is not enough to just say we believe. Faith is tested continually throughout our daily lives, as we respond to difficulties and temptations. When the going gets rough, and it does, we must not complain, just keep going, keeping our focus on the goal. *Step Three:* we must FACE JUDGMENT. God will judge, through His Son, whether our lives showed faith (Rev 20:11-12). *Step Four:* we will RECEIVE (our) REWARD, that for which we have prepared: eternity with God for those whose lives demonstrated true faith (Mt 25:34), and for those who did not, eternity in the agony of knowing they forever denied themselves His blessings (Mt. 25:41).

God searches the intention of everything that we do, whether we do it for Him or for any other motive....He will reward good works but not those done apart from a right intention even if they appear good.... For God's judgment looks not on what is done but to the intention behind it.

MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR⁴

No matter how much struggle our life in Christ entails, however, we do not despair because we have the hope of salvation (Rom 8:18-25). We know that God keeps His

promises, so if we truly love Him, the Holy Spirit will dwell in us, sanctify us, and help us grow in His image; thus we “shall be saved” (Mk 13:13, Mt 24:13). This is what fills us with deep, inner joy, no matter what ups and downs our earthly life brings.

...in man's nature pleasure is of two kinds: one has place in the soul through calm, and one in the body through passion. Whichever of the two the will may choose, this has dominion over the other. For if one turns towards the senses, choosing the pleasure that has its root in the body itself, such a one will pass through life without tasting of the divine delights: for the more perfect joys will have been shut out by the baser. But to those in whom the desire for God is strong, from these the True God does not remain hidden, provided that they shun whatever is wont to bewitch the senses.

GREGORY OF NYSSA⁵

10:11. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. These events took place in the Old Testament to serve as examples to mankind through the centuries. Paul calls attention to them:

...to point out that as they were not profited by the enjoyment of so great a gift, so neither (we) by obtaining Baptism and partaking of spiritual Mysteries, except (we) go on and show forth a life worthy of this grace.

CHRYSOSTOM⁶

10:12. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. We of the New Blood Covenant are saved, by our Messiah, from having to be completely perfect to earn salvation. But we must remember the need to continually try to follow in His footsteps to prove our faith in what He did for us and in love for Him because of it (Jude 5, 14-15). Those who have an aversion to the idea that we are required to “prove” our faith should read 2 Cor 13:5 and Jas 1:12.

For our standing here is not secure until we are delivered out of the waves of this present life and have sailed into the tranquil haven. Be not therefore high-minded at thy standing, but guard against thy falling; for if Paul feared who was firmer than all, much more ought we to fear.

CHRYSOSTOM⁷

We have no right to judge our own salvation or that of others. Orthodox theology remains true to the teachings of the Apostles and the early Church: we are saved by grace, through faith which is demonstrated by works, the genuineness of which will be revealed at the Second Coming of Christ. This is in stark contrast to the teachings of various other groups which advocate either salvation based on “works,” on “faith alone,” or on “grace alone.” It is very important to understand this theological distinction, because it shapes our relationship with Christ.

10:13. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. A Christian is not exempt from temptations. S/he is subject to the same difficulties in life that all human beings have faced through the ages.

God does allow the Devil to tempt us. He does not, however, allow him to tempt us beyond our capacity to endure, and He will help us through any difficulty, if we turn to Him for strength and direction.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (a). This is a good verse to remember. However, if God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can endure, and if He always gives us a way out of our difficulties, why are some people embittered or destroyed by the hardships in their lives?

10:14-20. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. Paul has already told the Corinthian Christians that by eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols they might mislead others (1 Cor 8). Now he warns them not to participate in pagan festivities in general. Just as we, through partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ through Eucharist become one with Christ and with each other, so too, those who participate in the worship of idols have fellowship with demons. An idol has no spiritual reality, but demons do. Worship of an idol is inspired by demons, who use any means to try to steal our worship away from God.

10: 21-22. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? Those who have fellowship with demons are utterly incompatible with those who have fellowship with the Lord. If we think we can keep company with both without negative effects, we are sadly mistaken (see Deut 32:21-22). God is omnipotent. No-one can pit himself against God and win, as Lucifer found out (Isa 14:12-17). God is jealous (Ex 20:5) in that He wants our total allegiance (for our own good). He does not want to lose us to Satan.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (b). What is a contemporary equivalent of a demonic activity?

10:23-28. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful; all things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience sake. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake, for "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." Paul's advice is that meat bought in the marketplace should be eaten with thanksgiving to God, from Whom it came,

with no questions asked. But if a Christian were told that the meat s/he is being offered for dinner had first been offered in sacrifice to the pagan gods, it should not be partaken of because of the spiritual danger involved to others.

Although it is not unlawful for a knowledgeable Christian to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols, because he knows that idols have no reality, to do so can be confusing and therefore harmful to others in their struggle to follow Christ (see this study for 1 Cor 8:7-10).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (c). How might this concept apply to a modern situation?

10:29-33. "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. This advice is not designed to inhibit our personal freedom as Christians but as an example of the fact that we must do nothing to hinder, and all in our power to spread, the truth about salvation through Jesus Christ. The goal is that everyone has an opportunity to learn about Christ, to make the choice for which they have been given life: whether they are with or against Him (Acts 17:26-27; Mt 12:30).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

(a). If God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can endure, and if He always gives us a way out of our difficulties, why are some people embittered or destroyed by the hardships in their lives? The negative events of life can adversely affect those:

- (1) who have not developed an understanding of God's divine plan for His people, including why suffering is a part of it (see 1 Cor 1, Food for Thought Comment (d)).
- (2) who do not turn to God for help (Mt 7:7-8; Jas 4:2-3).
- (3) who want to continue to follow their own will instead of His (Num 14:43).

When we face tribulation, it is very important to resist the temptation to blame God. Evil is in the world because of rebelliousness, the source of which is Satan—not God. God allows rebelliousness as a by-product of the gift of free will and as part of the testing process. As the Hebrew people, in order to enter the promised land, had to endure the difficult years in the desert without turning against God, we must endure the suffering of this life with faith and hope in order to enter God's eternal Kingdom.

...what is required is not only to suffer for Christ but also to nobly bear the things that come on us, and with all gladness: since this is the nature of every crown. And unless this be so, punishment will instead attend those who take calamity with a bad grace. The Apostles, when they were beaten, rejoiced, and Paul gloried in his sufferings. CHRYSOSTOM⁸

(b). What is a contemporary equivalent of a demonic activity? Astrology, which is popular among some in our society, is a good example. Though many look upon astrology as harmless fun, it is actually “a denial of the Christ-like way of living; something to be rejected as unchristian.”⁹ It is dangerous because of the fact that it looks for guidance to the sun, moon and stars: to creations rather than to the Creator. Followers of astrology surrender their God-given gift of free will to supposed powers created by the alignment of the planets at the time of their birth. To open oneself to this nonsense is to invite Satan to control our lives through his workers, who have the ability to use such tools to mislead us. God does not want us to be overly concerned about what might happen in the future (Mt 6:28-34) but rather to keep our focus on our daily walk with Him.

(c). Activities that are not unlawful for Christians might still be misleading to others, and should thus be avoided. How might this concept apply to a modern situation? Using the example of astrology, almost every local and national newspaper publishes horoscopes or astrological predictions daily. Christians buy and read those newspapers regularly with no danger, typically ignoring that section. They might glance at it occasionally, knowing that it is nonsense, perhaps just to keep apprised of ways in which the unenlightened can be misled. However, with any such activity, it is important to steer clear of any actions or conversations that onlookers could interpret as giving credence to astrology.

On the other hand, a Christian who is asked a question like: “What sign are you?” is presented with an opportunity to share the Christian message.

¹ Roberts & Donaldson, “Against Heresies,” Book IV, p.478.

² Schaff, “Homily XXIII,” Vol. XII, p.134.

³ Barbara Pappas, *Are You Saved?: The Orthodox Christian Process of Salvation*, p.33-9.

⁴ George C. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, p.52.

⁵ Toal, Vol. Three, p.126.

⁶ Schaff, p.133.

⁷ *ibid*, p.135.

⁸ Schaff, p.133.

⁹ Stanley S. Harakas, *Contemporary Moral Issues Facing the Orthodox Christian*, p.26.