

Presumption: a Deadly Sin

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[0 : 0 0] There's a few years ago, there was a man who came to the church seeking ordination, seeking a church where he could train for ordination. And he told me that he was an evangelical and he knew that I'm an evangelical. I'm one of those bad guys, if you haven't figured that out. That he said, you know, George, I've been going to this other church and I'm convinced I have a calling to be a minister. And the problem is, George, that the minister in that church is very, very liberal and he's prejudiced against me and doesn't like me. And so I said, well, you know, come to St. Albans, I'll give you a shot, you know, like get involved in the church, we'll meet regularly and I'll see if I'm able to give you some type of a recommendation on towards ordained ministry. And what ended up happening is that he presumed upon the fact that he claimed to be an evangelical. And he thought, oh, I was an evangelical. I mean, I am an evangelical.

And he thought that that sort of connection would allow him to coast, he presumed. And so he never did any of the things I said he should do. When he occasionally would take on a task, he'd drop it and he'd go weeks and weeks without even coming to church. And so finally one day, after this had been going on, you know, I'd given him some warnings and stuff like this and encouragements and, you know, tried to listen and all that. And then finally one day he came and said, you know, George, I need you to write me a good letter of recommendation so I can begin this program.

I said to him, I'm sorry, I can't write you a good letter of, actually a letter of recommendation. This is what I'll write. And he was furious with me. Now, by the way, folks, if you ask somebody, if you need a letter of recommendation from someone and they're not going to give it to you, don't get furious with them because you've just proved to the person why you shouldn't, why they shouldn't have given you a letter of recommendation.

Like if they had any doubts, you just removed it by getting angry at them, you know. And so he gets angry at me. And at first I'm a little bit taken aback at all this anger coming at me. And I'm a Canadian. I start to feel guilty that, you know, maybe it's justified.

And then I said to myself, it was like the Holy Spirit said, one moment, George. He needs a recommendation, not you. He's the one who didn't come to church. He's the one who didn't do anything you said.

[2 : 2 4] And he's the one who screwed up every time you asked him to do something. And so I said to him, you know, listen, this is what's gone on. And he had literally just presumed that because he's an evangelical and he could have glowing descriptions of how God had worked in his life and all of these wonderful things that he'd accomplished, and he knew all the right lingo and he just presumed that that would mean that I would give him a free pass.

And I wouldn't and I didn't. And he couldn't get into seminary or anywhere or go towards ordination without his pastor giving him a letter of recommendation. The sin of presumption is a deadly spiritual disease.

And it's a sin that can befall anybody. Just because you're an Anglican or because you're a minister or you're a bishop or you're a theologian or an evangelical or a charismatic or an Anglo-Catholic or a prayer book Anglican or from Sydney diocese or not from Sydney diocese.

None of these things ultimately matter. And there's lots of people that we might begin thinking that we have this faith and assurance in Christ. But really what it is, it's the sin of presumption.

And Paul, those of you who've been here over the last few weeks, you know we've been going through 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10. And looming over all of these chapters is Paul dealing with the church in Corinth and a group of super spiritual people who want to be able to go to idol temples and eat.

[3 : 54] They want to be able to go in and either they themselves or their friends will have the animals sacrificed, offered to a god, some prayers said, and they can sit there and have a nice relaxing meal because idol temples in the ancient world were the five-star restaurants of the ancient world.

And they were also the four-star, three-star, two-star, and one-star restaurants of the ancient world. They were the restaurants of the ancient world. And they wanted to be able to go and hang out with their friends and have a nice meal. And it's causing problems.

And they've written Paul a letter. And Paul, in 8, 9, and 10 of 1 Corinthians, has been dealing with this. And Paul could have just began by saying, no, next question.

But as we know over the last few weeks that Paul searches and just the word of God moves into the lives of the church of Corinth and us if we listen and pries out the deeper spiritual issues that would be behind such questions.

And such slogans. And today, before Paul finally gives his unqualified no, he first deals with presumption. And he deals with the faithfulness of God, the possibility of repentance, and the nature of true faith.

[5 : 08] So we're going to use our Bibles. I invite you to turn in them to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. And the first four verses, the word all happens time and time again.

And what Paul is doing here, what the scripture is doing here, is it's recording the story of these mighty acts that God did to create the nation of Israel. And you go back and read the book of Exodus.

And it describes how when the people of Israel were led out in Egypt, there was a cloud that led them by day and a pillar of fire by night. And it led them to the Red Sea.

And the Red Sea parted before them. And they walked through the Red Sea, got to the other side. The Pharaoh's army followed into the Red Sea. And the waves collapsed. And Pharaoh's army was destroyed.

And the people of Israel were able to head towards the promised land. But if you go on and read the book of Exodus, they come to the very edge of the promised land. And Moses thinks to himself, I have this fantastic idea.

[6 : 10] I'm going to send 12 people in to scout the land. And they're going to come back with glowing reports. And all of the people of Israel, they're not going to sort of trust, you know, in the pillar of fire and all of that other stuff.

But the 12 reports will really help them to feel enabled to go into the promised land. And the 12 men come back and 10 of them say, don't go into the promised land.

The promised land, the people are rich, they're smart, they're powerful, they're well-armed. And there's even giants amongst them. They're going to whoop us if we go there.

Let's not go there. And there are only two men who said, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Our God is faithful. He can do it. People of Israel listened to the 10 rather than the 2.

And so Paul begins by looking at Israel's history and saying, you know, think about it, like, just think about it for a second. Could you imagine what it must have felt to actually have God send a pillar of fire ahead of you at night and a cloud by day to literally guide you?

[7 : 16] Just imagine what it would have been like to have stood by the Red Sea and see it part, walk through. I think it's in the Disney cartoon version or the DreamWorks cartoon version, seeing the fishes in the walls and get to the other side and see it collapse.

Like, it would have been just a spectacular miracle. And Paul said that these things, in a sense, they were signs that God's hand was upon Israel. In a sense, they're like the Israelite equivalent to baptism in Holy Communion.

And yet, after all of these powerful things that happened to all of them, listen to what he says in verse 5. But with most of them, God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

And it's supposed to be a shock. You read this summary, you think of all the wonderful things that happened, you think of the manna, you think of all those spectacular things that God had done.

And yet, with most of them, God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. In fact, if you remember from the book of Exodus, only two of the adults who were led out of Egypt from bondage, only two of them, the two men who trusted God in their report, were the only two who were to make it into the promised land.

[8 : 33] The type of presumption that Paul was dealing with was that there was a group of people in Corinth who said, Listen, this is a fantastic deal, this Christian faith.

You get baptized. You go to have communion every Sunday. And then everything is permissible. Like, it's a fantastic deal. Get baptized? That's not too much bother.

You know, a little bit of preparation. Get baptized. You know, but then it's like the seal of God upon your life. You just have communion every week. And then, in fact, Paul, later on in chapter 10, he repeats the big slogan of the church in Corinth, which is, Everything is permissible.

And Paul is saying, you take presumption in communion and in baptism. You take presumption. You combine it with a really wrong idea.

Everything is possible. Everything is permissible. And what you have is you are on your way to destruction. That's what he says. You take presumption.

[9 : 33] I speak in tongues. I'm an evangelical. I memorize 853 passages in the Bible. I am an Anglican. I am a priest.

I am a bishop. I am a theologian. You know, I am a victim. I am a nice guy. I am rich. I am success. It doesn't matter what the presumption is. In their case, it was baptism and Holy Communion.

In our case, it can be whatever. But you combine presumption with false belief, and it leads you to destruction. It leads me to destruction. And that's what Paul is warning them about.

And so then he continues on with a series of warnings, all from Israel's history, and it culminates in verse 11, where he says this.

Now, these things, all these things happened to them as examples. Actually, the word in Greek is as types. And they were written for our admonition.

[10 : 33] They were both historically true in the past, but they were more than just historically true. They were also things which are examples to us. They were written for our admonition on whom the ends of the ages have come.

Christ changed everything. Here's the warning. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man and woman.

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.

Some of you get the diocesan newspaper, the Anglican diocesan newspaper. For some reason, they thought that a good way to spend almost a whole page was to publish smear letters about St. Albans.

It's the second time in a row, two months in a row, that they've devoted a significant amount of the diocesan newspaper to smear us. I don't quite know why they think that's a good use of our letters.

[11 : 42] Of course, when I first read it, I'm wounded in my spirit because I'm a Canadian. And so I want to be nice, and I like people who think I'm nice. And most of the time, I think I am pretty nice, and it hurts me to see that.

But, you know, then I realized, you know, there's people, obviously, who have 18 reasons why they don't like me, or they have 18 reasons why they don't like St. Albans. And if they read those articles, well, now they have 19 reasons, okay?

But they already, they began with 18 reasons why they didn't like us. And, you know, the people who know the church and know what we try to stand for and our desire to follow Christ, they also will just be wounded and grieved in their spirit to see this, and they'll pray for us.

The reason I'm mentioning this is this. Paul here is saying that because God is unfailingly faithful towards us, repentance is always possible.

God does not look at you and me and have 18 reasons why he dislikes us, and he's just sitting up there in heaven thinking, okay, 19's going to come any moment. You know, 20's going to come any moment.

[12 : 48] And, you know, we can have enemies who have all sorts of reasons they don't like us, and as more things, they get more and more evidence as to why we're not likable types of people. And then there's people who sort of try to maintain a cool distance, and they're sort of always weighing things in the balance.

And then there are people who love us and know us, and they're always, in a sense, rooting for us, and they grieve when we fall, and they pray that we will stand, and they will pray that we will prosper.

And you know what? God is like those people, not like the people who have all sorts of reasons they don't like us. And Paul is saying in verse 13, because God is unfailingly faithful, it means that his faithfulness will never come to an end.

It will never tire. It will never peter out. It will never be overcome by something else. God is unfailing and unstopping, and he is unstopping in being faithful and loving and desiring the best for us, always desiring that we will repent.

And because God is so rock-solid, faithful, friends, there is always a possibility in your life, and that possibility is always repentance.

[13 : 59] It doesn't matter how far you have fallen, how deep you have sunk, how many times you have rebelled, how many times you have failed. It doesn't matter the mess that you have made of your life, because God is faithful, repentance is always a possibility.

Amen. I know it's not very Anglican, but isn't that something you should say amen to? Amen. God is always completely faithful, and because of that, no matter what happens to Sinclair, no matter what happens to you, I can repent.

That is such good news. And you see, Calvin has this wonderful line, John Calvin, not Calvin and Hobbes, John Calvin. I have to confess that when Calvin and Hobbes was in the papers, I read far more Calvin and Hobbes than John Calvin.

But John Calvin, the theologian, he has this wonderful line that, you know, there's a lot of people, and what they have is nonchalance.

And nonchalance is a form of presumption. And what they do is, they just go around with this unbelievable, inflated, they're a legend in their own mind, they think they're unstoppable, they think that nothing will touch them, they completely and utterly ignore dangers, and they mistake that that is a profound sense of faith.

[15 : 25] And all it is, is nonchalance and presumption. And this text is helping us to enter into this profound mystery that God does not want us to be always uncertain about how we stand with him.

Because remember, Paul doesn't say, because there's something fantastic about me or you, therefore repentance is always a possibility. He says, no, it's because God is so faithful that repentance is always a possibility.

And so, the assurance that God wants to have us is that as we grow in faith, as we have faith in Christ, as we grow in faith, we learn every, we have this possibility of learning more and more and more that his word and his promises are absolutely sure.

And because his word and promises are sure, because the Holy Spirit is real and moves in our lives, we can step out and accomplish things beyond our imagining.

And so on one level, the assurance of faith is a looking to his word, trusting Christ, being open to the Holy Spirit, stepping out and accomplishing impossible things.

[16 : 35] But at the same time that that's happening, true faith teaches Sinclair that in my flesh, I can accomplish nothing. And that's why you have this profound mystery in the scriptures that Paul could stand before emperors, stand before the Sanhedrin, stand before crowds who were going to stone him.

He could bring the gospel to Europe. He could accomplish all of these things. And at the end of his life, he could say that he is the chief of sinners. Because he had the assurance of faith that on one level, he's trusting in Christ, trusting in his word, trusting in the upward call of God, trusting in the Holy Spirit.

And as he trusts in this, God allows him to see himself and he allows us to see ourselves. And we say, gosh, I am so weak in my flesh. And this combination of trusting in the word and this true knowledge of ourselves does not lead us to despair, but leads us to say, thank you, Father, for sending a savior.

Thank you, Jesus. That is not presumption. It is assurance. God does not want you to be in doubt. He wants you to know his son, know his faithfulness, and grow in him and do great things to bring God glory.

Not out of presumption, but out of assurance. And verse 13 is a verse well worth memorizing. That's the one that, it's sort of in a sense, the whole first 22 verses of chapter 10 are, the linchpin of it is this declaration of whom God is and the possibility of repentance and the promise of God's presence in even the hardest times.

[18 : 18] And just as Paul has gone from warning us to reminding us, now he gives us the fundamental message to the end of all of this discussion about idolatry and he says, flee.

Flee idolatry. Listen to verse 15. Therefore, my beloved, flee idolatry. Now, you know, what he's saying here is this, and Paul says the same thing about sexual immorality in chapter 6.

He said, don't be like a lot of kids in the spring or in the early stages of winter where they see a big, big, big puddle and it looks like it, it's, not looked, it's covered with ice.

I mean, I did this. You sort of say, how many times will the ice crack before I go through? You know? And he's saying, you know, when it comes to idolatry, when it comes in chapter 6 to sexual immorality, don't say to yourself, how much can I get involved in this stuff and how many cracks can I listen to before I jump off?

You know? I don't know how many, I have to confess, I watched 24, that television show, CTU, Jack Bauer, The Worst Day in My Life. Those of you who watch that show know what I'm talking about.

[19 : 35] And in this year's 24 TV series, it's about a secret agent, anti-terrorist guy who, anyway, the bad guys have nerve gas, deadly nerve gas, and they get it into the CTU headquarters.

And when they realize that the tear gas has been released, they say, flee. Drop everything you're doing, just get up from where you are and run out of the building as fast as you can.

And nobody says, I wonder how long I can hold my breath while the deadly nerve gas is there. Like, I wonder, you know, how long I can stay there. There's deadly nerve gas. Flee. And that's exactly what Paul is saying when it comes to idolatry.

Flee. And then he goes on and says these really, really hard words that, you know, it's not that, it's not that an idol is nothing.

It's not just that an idol is nothing, that, you know, there really is no Zeus or Apollos or Hermes or Aphrodite to correspond to that hunk of rock or that sacred grove. It's not just that.

[20 : 40] It just is this. In a sense, he's saying this. When you turn away from the living God and you turn your back on the living God, Satan will always appear to make himself look useful without any doubt.

You see, that's one of the reasons, folks, no church, no Anglican church should have a labyrinth. No Anglican church should have, should be teaching yoga. No Anglican church should be having groves with Buddhas and totem poles and all of that type of stuff.

Why? Flee idolatry. Don't say, well, we can have, you know, eight statues of Buddha in the garden and we can have the yoga and we can have the labyrinth and, you know, we'll just sort of listen to when the cracks are coming on the ice and then we'll know we've got, no, no, no.

Paul says flee because to turn your back on the living God, Satan always makes himself appear useful and desirable. And so Paul says that in fact there is this real possibility, he echoes the Old Testament message of a participation with the demonic and Paul says flee anything which even remotely appears demonic, flee anything even remotely appearing like idolatry, flee, flee.

Paul ends his discussion by in a sense outlining for us, this is really a good thing to see just very, very briefly, four really, really godly attitudes.

[22 : 09] If you turn to page 994, verse 31, 32, 33 of chapter 10 and verse 1 of chapter 11, just bang, bang, bang, bang, four godly principles that if we listen to them and heed them and memorize them, it will help us navigate so many of the things in life, especially if we're mindful of all of these things, warned against presumption, trusting in the faithfulness of God, growing in faith and just bang, bang, bang as he brings this to a close and then he's going to go into other topics.

Verse 31, therefore whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. What should St. Albans want to do? We just want to bring glory to God.

What do we want to do in our budget? We should just want to bring glory to God. What do we want to do if we have a youth group? We want to bring glory to God. What should we want to do in our life? We want to bring glory to God.

Is what we're going to do bring glory to God? If there's any type of debate about it, you know what? You just don't do it. Just don't do it. What a great principle. Do all to the glory of God.

The second thing, give no offense and what really they're saying is don't lead no one to stumble. It's actually more correct. Not offense. It's poorly translated. Lead no one to stumble, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the Church of God.

[23 : 31] Remember, some of you might remember a couple of weeks ago I described what that means. That's why giving offense is just a terrible translation here. Stumble means that if somebody imitates you, it's going to lead them away from Christ.

That's what it means. You're going to say, ask yourself everything you do. If they imitate my action, is this going to lead them away from Christ? Well, you know what? Don't do it. Don't do it.

The second principle. Just as I also please all men and women in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

In other words, in all things that you do, keep in mind that your goal is that people will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Is what you're doing, is that going to help that or hinder that? You know, the most wonderful thing in the world, I just, I so love this when I, you know, I'm talking to somebody about maybe somebody in the, you know, I have somebody coming for baptism or for a wedding or a funeral and they mention maybe that they go to this place or that and then I say, oh, by the way, do you know this person?

And they say, oh, yeah, I know that person. I say, well, he's a Christian. He goes to my church. They say, really? He goes to your church? He's such a nice guy. And isn't that just a wonderful thing to hear?

[24 : 45] Like, to hear that he's a Christian and a nice guy? I had this other person who came to this church. She caused me so much trouble. I was at a party and they said, where do they work?

And I knew this person went to that work. I said, you know this person and you could just see this guarded look in their eye. And I said, yeah, they go to my church and I think they were just, and I said, yeah, she really causes me lots of trouble.

And the person said, oh, yeah, wow, does she ever cause trouble at work? Nobody likes her, you know? And, but you know what? The goal in life should be that we live and we ask ourselves, we ask God to help us so that we live our lives.

We're keeping in mind, and what am I, what am I doing? Is it going to help people come to Christ or lead people away from Christ? Will people hear that I'm a Christian and say, wow, he's a nice guy.

Like, maybe there's something in this Christian stuff, you know? Or will they say, gosh, is that person ever repressed, anger driven, you know, debauched, degenerate, bossy, autocratic?

[25 : 42] Okay, don't do those things, folks. And then finally, the fourth thing, imitate me here just as I also imitate Christ. What would Jesus do?

What would Jesus do? Search the scriptures, try to be like Jesus. Let's pray. Father, deliver us from presumption, deliver us from arrogance, deliver us from, from just taking, you know, Bible memorizing or going to church or being an evangelical or speaking in tongues or giving money or being successful.

Father, help us not to put our confidence and trust in even these things, some of them, Father, even godly things. Help us, Father, to put our confidence always in you and in your word and your faithfulness, your unfailing faithfulness.

Father, lead us to you, not about you, not anything, but lead us to you and a greater confidence and trust in your word and in your son and the power of your Holy Spirit.

Father, deliver us from presumption and help us to have greater faith. Help us, Father, as we see ourselves as we truly are to not despair but to turn to you with a thankful and grateful heart.

[27 : 05] and Father, help us to be more like your son. Help us to follow him. Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us that we might be enabled to seek and to live these things.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.