

DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

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Let's Begin

Oscar Wilde once wrote, "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself." Wilde may be a legendary writer but he hardly makes sense concerning a believer's bout with temptation. Paul makes this clear in today's lesson.

Unfortunately, however, while some Christians do not take Wilde seriously, they simply imagine Christians are immune to temptation, a mistaken notion every bit as harmful to the Christian life. Thus, as we make our way through 1 Corinthians 10, let's follow the outline below:

- I. The Favor that Blesses the Christian Life (vv. 1-4)**
- II. The Failure that Blights the Christian Life (vv. 5-13)**
- III. The Foe that Batters the Christian Life (vv. 14-33)**

I. The Favor that Blesses the Christian Life (vv. 1-4)

Paul begins the chapter, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." (1 Cor. 10:1-4). God did some wonderful things for His people. The term "all" is used 5 times. God is no respecter of persons and therefore He blesses "all" His people.

First, God blesses His people with *guidance*. Note that "all our fathers were under the cloud" (cp. Ex. 13:21). The cloud was a symbol of God's presence. He was there to guide them through the new territory. The cloud was their physical guide in the day time. At nightfall, the cloud turned to a pillar of fire.

Believers have the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide them (cp. Rom. 8:14). Living in a confused, chaotic world demands a sure direction. The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee we will move toward Him instead of away from Him.

Israel could easily have been lost as they left Egypt. The wilderness was like a maze. God's guide, however, was sure. The psalmist wrote, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel..." (Ps. 73:24). The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and guides the child of God. Isaiah informed us of God's path, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (30:21). No promise is more soothing to the Christian than "He leadeth me" (Ps. 23).

Next, God blesses His people with *deliverance*. They passed "through the sea." Paul is quoting from the

Reflection Connection

When you find yourself facing temptation, do you always recall Christ is with you? Explain. Why do we still fail even when Christ is with us?

Reflection Connection

Christians also experience deliverance through miracles. Like Israel, the waters of death are held back. Jesus said, "he who believes in me shall never die" (John 11:26). In fact, we have already passed from death to life (John 5:24). Jesus took our death upon Himself. We should have died at Calvary. The wrath of God should have been poured out upon us. Instead, we stand where the flood of wrath has already been! Christ bore our punishment.



Reflection Connection

Third, God blesses His people with *assurance*. Israel experienced a dry baptism which identified them with Moses. Going into the Red Sea, they were expressing their commitment to Moses as a leader. And, as they stepped ashore on the other side, they were a unified people under Moses' charge.

Exodus narrative: "And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry *ground*: and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." (Ex 14:22). By means of a miracle, God carried the Hebrew people safely through the waters on dry ground.

Similarly, as they identified with Moses, we identify with Christ through a dry baptism (cp. 1 Cor. 12:13). We belong to Christ as Christians. We are members of His body. Water baptism is a testimony to this spiritual unity with the Lord Jesus. In Christ, therefore, we have glorious assurance we can go through the Red Sea. Christ will accompany us as Moses accompanied them.

God blesses His people with assurance.

Fourth, God blesses His people with *sustenance*. Recall Paul's affirmation concerning "spiritual meat" and "drink" (vv. 3-4). God miraculously provided for them. So too He provides for us!

The food He provided was "manna." The psalmist called it the food of angels (Ps. 78:25). Making for a balanced diet, manna was tasty and very nutritious. Every vitamin needed was contained in it. In addition, God provided water from a rock. Once smitten, the rock gushed an abundant supply of refreshing springs for the people (Ex. 17:6).

The same provisions are given to Christians. Christ said, not only, "I am the bread of life," but also, "I am the water of life" (John 4:14; 6:33). The Rock went with the Hebrew people. Christ was with them wherever they were. It is the same with us, even in our moments of strongest temptation.

II. The Failure that Blights the Christian Life (vv. 5-13)

Even though Christ is with us, Paul can still write: "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (v. 5). Of how many do Paul's words speak? All but two people! God was not pleased with over 2.5 million people.

Paul describes the people as being "overthrown." The term is a picture of devastation after a violent storm. Their bodies were strewn over the entire wilderness. Indeed there must have been the longest funeral march in history on that occasion. In spite of all God had done for them, they miserably failed to follow Him. They were "disqualified." And, their disqualification should serve as a caution to all of us.

Paul lists the *failures* they committed. He writes, "...we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted...Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them... Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed...Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted...Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured..." (vv. 6-9). The first failure was *lust*. They craved onions and garlic from Egypt instead of being content with God's provision of manna (cp. Num. 11:4-6). Lust is any desire outside the will of Christ for us. Persisting in lust sometimes brings the thing for which one lusts. However, judgment accompanies it (Ps. 106:15).



The second failure was *idolatry* (cp. Ex. 32). The Hebrew desired a god they could see, a god like other nations. Hence, they constructed a golden calf (Ex. 32:24). Putting anything or anyone in the place of God may be referred to as idolatry. Hence, it is possible to worship one's job, property, automobile, hobby, recreation, or even spouse! A lot of people want a god cut down to their size. They desire a religion where life is comfortable and commitment is minimum. Christianity cannot fit this profile! Belonging to Christ costs one everything! We belong entirely to Him.

The third failure Paul lists is *fornication* (cp. Num. 25). Interestingly, fornication often is connected with idolatry. For Corinth, fornication was a part of their worship. How strange this seems at first to us. However, today there is uncleanness everywhere. Novels, magazines, television, radio, and the entire media culture in general glorifies marital unfaithfulness routinely. Is there any nation that can survive the complete moral breakdown such as ours is experiencing?

Fifth, their failure in *tempting Christ* is listed (cp. Num. 21). Testing the Lord's patience is a habit no one should develop (Matt. 4:7). God's grace possesses a limit to be sure. His Spirit will not "always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3). A caution exists toward those seeking to see how far they may push the borders of God's mercy.

Finally, Paul lists their failure of *murmuring*. The Hebrew people were plagued by a grumbling, complaining spirit. They too often gave audible expressions to unwarranted dissatisfactions. In short, they griped about everything, and Moses had to endure their gripe-session for 40 years!

Some people live life with a whine, a bothersome spirit which allows no one around them a moment's peace. If they get roses, they complain about thorns! From a purely Biblical perspective, a whining life is a failed life. Unfortunately, the church appears to house more whiners than one would expect in a community of Christ's people. Indeed whining may be the most popular sin of the contemporary church. Nevertheless, whining is indicative of serious spiritual disaster. If you or your church is known for its unusual case of whining, God gives a special caution today: the whiners in Moses' day all died!

There is a *lesson* we learn from the lists of failures Paul gives. Paul explains, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:11-12). The Old Testament is not just for Jewish people. Instead, the Old Testament is thoroughly Christian. The things happening to the people of God then are examples for the Church of God now. They are object lessons for our benefit (cp. Rom. 15:4).

Putting anything or anyone in the place of God may be referred to as idolatry.



Reflection Connection

How often do you think of Satan's presence during a time of temptation? Do you pray for God's strength to overcome the evil one?

Sadly, sometimes we think we are spiritually stronger than we really are. The Corinthians unfortunately held a false security believing they could not fall into sin. In essence, they said, "It may happen to others but it won't happen to me." Paul calls such an overly-confident attitude, the attitude of a fool. The Christians at Corinth were, therefore, counseled to "take heed lest [they] fall!" The same counsel is applicable for us.

Only a false security would thrust a Christian into temptation, believing he or she faces no moral danger of falling. When one least expects it, temptation comes as a mighty torrent, sweeping the unsuspecting off his or her feet. Sardis believers thought they were secure from falling into sin. Hear the counsel of the Holy Spirit, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. 3:3).

Every believer must consider Satan's awareness of the path to his/her soul's citadel. Satan is an informed enemy. His resume as tempter goes back to the Garden (Gen. 3). Hence, since he has brought down better men and women than are we, how can we take his strikes so lightly, his subtly so naively? Like lightning, he will strike the shepherd's sheep!

When one least expects it, temptation comes as a mighty torrent, sweeping the unsuspecting off his or her feet.

III. The Foe that Batters the Christian Life (vv. 14-33)

The apostle now takes us on a journey studying the Christian's eternal foe as we consider temptation. In a real sense, he dubs this as dining with devils (cp. vv. 20-21). Overall, there are two principles at play here.

The first principle deals with *spiritual implications*. God is a jealous God and therefore we must love Him with all our being (vv. 14, 22). Idolatry is to be avoided at all costs. To illustrate this, Paul contrasts the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Christians participate in the table of the Lord. Paul writes, "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 *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:16-18).

The Lord's Supper is a ceremony with deep spiritual implications. Observing it proclaims the fundamental claims of the Christian faith. One enacts what takes

Reflection Connection

Reflect on your last time to partake at the Lord's Supper. Did you sense you were eating at the Lord's table? Why or why not? By contrast, did you sense you were separating from the devil's table while eating at the Lord's?



place in our daily lives. All is sacrificed for Christ in our identification with Him. In addition, all is sacrificed by our unity with other believers. To sit at the Lord's table we glorify our Lord until He returns for us.

By contrast, when we sit at the Lord's table, we separate from the devil's. Again, Paul writes, "What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" (1 Cor. 10:19-22).

To live for God's glory is to separate from pagan living. Attachment to Christ is detachment from the world. To live a worldly life is to dine with the devil. His food offers pleasure, prestige, popularity, and profit. However, the table's luxuries are poisonous to the soul. Dining with the devil can, in the end, only bring destruction.

The second principle has *social implications*. Things we do affect our relationship with others. If we succumb to temptation, our failure has repercussions for others, not just ourselves (v. 23).

In addition, we are cautioned not to be overly jealous concerning moral scruples. He writes: "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, *that* eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (v. 25). If the Corinthians bought meat in the marketplace, eat it if sanitary. Do not overly examine it since no curse can affect God's people. In other words, Paul is saying one need not become radical in order to be Biblically separate. One can get picky, petty, and cantankerous about some things not worth one's time. The devil can cause much needless division in God's church over worthless issues.

Two *precautions* are necessary. First, one's actions must not *hinder* others. Note the Apostle's words, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (v. 32). In short, we should not cause others to stumble. Christians are watching. Therefore, we are an example to someone else. Always! Second, my actions must attempt to *help* others. Paul sums it up like this, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's *wealth*" (v. 24). We do not look to people to see what we can get from them. Rather we see what we may give to them, how we may contribute to their spiritual success.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse 13, Paul insists temptation never comes to believers except "such as is common to man." The long phrase in the English version is but one word in the Greek: *anthrōpinos*. It comes from two words meaning "belonging to man." Hence, temptation is a trait belonging to the human realm. James says, God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Therefore, no human can expect exemption from temptation. Even Jesus was tempted in every point as we are. The stark difference is, He never gave in to temptation (Heb. 4:15). Every believer is "marked off" by clear boundaries when he or she surrenders their heart to Jesus Christ.

Wrap Up

How do Christians keep from falling? Paul gives a summary in verse 13, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Temptations are everyday events for Christians. We must remember that. Also, God is faithful during temptation. He never excuses Himself when things get rough. Finally, He gives a way to escape temptation. No believer can ever plead he or she had to sin because there was no way from preventing it. God always gives us direction on following his will.

