

The Faithfulness of God in Temptation

1 Corinthians 10:12-14

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world full of temptation. Everywhere you turn, temptation abounds, both outside of you and within you. Because temptation is everywhere, sin reigns in the lives of most people to the point that giving in to such things is considered part and parcel of any unbelieving culture. Because the checks and balances that were previously in our culture to minimize temptation have been removed, and what was once considered wicked is now considered mainstream; caving into temptation is always a potential problem for the believer.

Thus, those believers that are immersed in such a desensitized and hardened culture can become desensitized themselves to the things that trigger temptation in their own lives. What's worse is that many believers do not use the means that God has designed to help them overcome temptation, and so they feel overwhelmed in their battle to stand firm against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. We are going to learn how to avoid both problems and consider how to exhort one another in overcoming sin and temptation. We are going to do this by considering (1) the danger of overconfidence, (2) the fact that temptation of all types are common to all types of people, (3) remind ourselves that God is faithful in temptation, (4) and in light of His faithfulness in temptation, we must flee idolatry.

I. The Danger of Overconfidence

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall." (v. 12)

This verse warns against overconfidence; especially to those who think that their freedom in Christ allows them to go anywhere or do anything. The Bible is full of examples of pride-generated overconfidence (Est. 3-7 - Haman; Isa. 10:5-7, 12-16; 37:36-38 – King of Assyria; Lk. 22:33-34, 54-62 - Peter; Rev. 3:1-3 - Sardis, 14-17 - Laodicea). Church history is full of examples of overconfident men that made great boasts and ended up as nothing. In the context of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is telling them to take heed to the example of Israel, a nation that made great boasts of being in covenant with God through their ancestor Abraham – a *unilateral* covenant that God promised to keep forever (Gen. 17:7). Even though God Himself promised to keep this covenant with Abraham and his descendants, huge numbers of Jews were destroyed because of sin and boasting. Take for instance Jesus' confrontation of the Jews in John 8:31-59. They were dangerously overconfident about their spiritual condition because they thought that their spiritual standing was based upon who their physical ancestor was, but Jesus tells them, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin"* (John 8:34). He tells them that they are slaves to their sin and sons of the Devil regardless of the fact that they were physical descendants of Abraham. Woe to us if we think that we can rest on our spiritual laurels because of our socioeconomic status, our ancestry, or because of our religious background. Take heed that you not fall brethren!

II. Temptations are Common to All

Verse 13 – *"No temptation has overtaken you . . ."*

The word "temptation" (*peirasmos*) means to test, try, or prove. Whether any temptation becomes a proof of our faithfulness to Christ or whether it shows itself to be an inducement to sin depends upon our response. If we resist by the power of the Spirit, then it is a test that proves our faithfulness. If

we don't resist then it becomes an opportunity to sin. Thus, our response is crucial; crucial because continual caving in to opportunities for sin tells us who our real master is.

Job - Both God and Satan were involved in Job's testing (Job 1:7-12; 1:21-22; 2:3-10). God permitted Job's testing to prove that he was an "upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." (Job 1:8) Satan's purpose was the opposite: to prove that Job was faithful only because of the blessings and prosperity the Lord had given him and that, if those things were taken away, Job would surely curse God to His face (v. 11). Job's response proved Him to be exactly who God said he was, an upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. God guaranteed Job's success because God was the One who caused him to persevere (Job 23:10). Pay special attention to what Job said in 1:21-22, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."²² Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."

Jesus – When we look at Matthew 4:1 we see that just like Job, both God and Satan were involved in testing Jesus, albeit for different purposes. God intended it for good, to prove the righteousness of Christ whereas Satan meant it for evil, to entice Jesus to bow down to Him in allegiance. Christ's response proved Him to be exactly who God said He was, His beloved Son! (Matt. 3:17) This is because of Who Christ was *by nature*; namely, God in the flesh, One who was able to be tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

God's testing is never a solicitation to sin, but an opportunity to prove the true character of an individual. God will use evil agents to carry out His testing and what God means for good, the evil agent means for evil. So, you have one event with two agents and two different agendas, one for the proving of good and the other for the promotion of evil. Thus, it's always important to remember that Satan's temptations always have one goal in mind: sin that leads to ruin and failure. For those who would say that God *Himself* tempts men to sin, James corrects those who would suggest such, "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone." (James 1:13) The words "by evil" are the key to understanding the difference between testing and temptation. When Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit; God tested him with a righteous intention, but Satan desired to entice Him to idolatry. A temptation becomes an inducement to evil only when a person "is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin" (James 1:14-15).

Verse 13 goes on to say ". . . but such as is common to man". [C]ommon to man" means that which is "human, characteristic of or belonging to mankind"¹, i.e., that which is familiar to all people. God will often bring circumstances into our lives to test us and the circumstances of that temptation are common to all. To deny such is to call God a liar (Rom. 3:4). This is God's method of "standardized testing"! We usually do not like to view these "standardized" tests as coming from God, but our response to them proves whether we are faithful or unfaithful to Him. How we react to financial hardship, school problems, health problems, or business setbacks will always test our faith to see whether we are truly relying on our heavenly Father to supply all our needs. In times of testing, what usually serves as an opportunity for sanctification for one serves as an occasion for anger, bitterness, and resentment for the other. Rather than thanking God for a test (as James 1:2 advises), we may even try to blame Him for it. An opportunity to cheat on our income tax or take unfair advantage in a business deal will either prove our righteousness or our weakness. The circumstance or opportunity for temptation is only a test, in and of itself; it is neither good nor evil. Whether its end is spiritual growth or a spiritual meltdown depends on our response. Therefore, when trying to understand the

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, Ill: Moody, 1984), 228.

relationship between a temptation and a test, it is important to note that the same event is both a temptation and a test for the believer. How can this be so?

God is the first cause of all things, even evil (Ps. 135:6; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6; Acts 4:27-28; Rom. 11:36). Yet when evil is done, only those who commit the evil acts are to be blamed for the evil. God can never be blamed for the evil because He is a holy God and everything that He does is holy, just, and good (1 John 1:5). When a believer encounters a temptation, the source of this temptation comes either from the remaining evil within the believer, from evil outside of the believer, or both. So, from the point of view of responsibility, God cannot be blamed for the temptation since temptation is only concerned with the *enticement*² to do evil. But, from the point of view of God being the first cause of all things, the same event that is described as an evil temptation is also a test brought into the life of a believer by a loving Father who would never bring anything into the life of the believer that was not motivated by His love for them and designed for their good (Romans 8:28). The test is brought into the life of the believer in order to build them up and not tear them down. Job understood this and that is why he said, *"But He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."* (Job 23:10). David also knew this and this explains why he said, *"It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."* (Psalm 119:71)

So, a temptation is also a test and a test is also a temptation. It all depends on your point of view. When we are tempted to do evil, we must resist this temptation for we are being enticed to do something that dishonors the God we love (Hebrews 12:4). But, from another point of view the temptation can be also viewed as a test that our Father in heaven has brought into our lives in order to cause us to become more Christ-like and to increase our love for Him (Romans 8:28). This is also why David said, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word."* (Psalm 119:67)

III. God is Faithful in Temptation

v. 13b, *". . . and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."*

God is true to His own. He is always faithful, even if we are faithless. Because He cannot deny Himself, He cannot give up on you (2 Tim. 2:13). Isn't that encouraging! When our faithfulness is tested, we should call on His faithfulness as our divine supply of goods needed to fight against sin. This is why He says that we will not be tempted beyond what we are able to tolerate. It also explains why Jesus said that we are to pray, *"do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil [one]"* (Matt. 6:13).

God wants us to endure not to cave in. Notice that verse 13 says that there is not merely "a way" of escape, but "the way". The use of the definite article means that there is only one way of escape from every temptation: we must *endure* it before we are delivered from it. We don't like to think that to escape temptation, we must bear up under its load for a time. We don't like to think that to avoid a fight we must be in the thick of it, but there it is in the text. Never forget that it is through many tribulations that we must enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). We do not escape temptation by bypassing it, but by going through it. God doesn't take us out of it, but sees us through it by making us *"able to endure it"*. So what kind of people successfully endure and overcome temptation? Answer: The kind that draw near to God and His people in time of trouble.

IV. Don't Flirt, Flee!

² To entice to evil is to allure or attract one to evil.

v. 14, *“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”*

So how does the Bible instruct us to endure temptation? Simply put: Take the God-provided way out by enlisting the help of the Lord and His people! It is important to think about a few things:

1. Satan's strategy is to isolate, confuse, and then devastate. He does this by making us think we're the only one in the world that has this particular problem. Then we are drawn away from sound teaching and loving accountability through embarrassment or apathy and this isolation leads to depression and if this pattern of sin is not broken it will lead to devastation. These types of Christians always appear defeated, fatigued, frustrated, and unsettled. This is because when we don't lean on God's faithfulness through prayer, the word, and the church, we turn in on ourselves and like a city without walls, we are open to every kind of evil (Proverbs 25:28). Dealing with temptation by turning away from everything and everybody is not a recipe for success. Avoiding dealing with the problem is the first step towards failure and is a sure recipe for eventual disaster.
2. God's strategy is to encourage, equip, endure, and escape. God wants us to function as any part of the body will function when it is injured - to cry for help and healing from the other parts.

Can you imagine what would happen if I cut my finger and my immune system and blood clotting mechanisms didn't work? I would eventually die! However, if my body is working normally, when I cut my finger my entire body is mobilized to help and bring healing. Likewise, our help should come from the body of Christ. James 5:16 says *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”*

What does this look like?

Confession, Repentance, and Accountability: First to God, then to another godly accountability partner. You need to come clean on your temptation and sin before God and get help from some godly people who can hold your situation in confidence, pray for you, and encourage you regularly. It is necessary for a godly person to understand, care, listen, and intelligently pray for you lest you become overburdened and eat up with despair. If you are stuck in sin, then its high time to go to someone else and let them bear your burden (Gal. 6:2).

What to look for in an accountability partner:

1. Does this person love Jesus above all things and does this show itself in their sacrificial actions on behalf of others? Is Christian love toward others abundantly evident in their life? (cf. 2 Cor. 6:11-13)
2. Can I trust the person to keep our conversation confidential unless I am in critical danger?

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter. (Proverbs 11:13)

He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip. (Proverbs 20:19)

3. Is this person able to teach you the Biblical wisdom they learned when they faced similar circumstances? Try to find someone who is honest about the struggles they have faced and is

able to share God's solutions to sin. Paul does this in 2 Cor. 1:8-11; 11:29-33. You are looking for a person who will tell you the truth about God, sin, and Scripture.

4. Is this person leading a disciplined life that demonstrates Christian stability? *"He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray."* (Proverbs 10:17) If they are not heeding discipline in their own life, then their advice will be questionable at best.
5. Will this person lovingly confront you? Will they care enough to let you know when they think you are snoring and will they call you to repentance regardless of your reaction? *"Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* (Proverbs 27:17) *"He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue."* (Proverbs 28:23)
6. Is this believer a righteous, holy, and prayerful person? James 5:16b, *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."*
7. Is this person a good listener? Proverbs 18:13, *"He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him."*

The above seven questions describe the kind of believer who will help you overcome sin and temptation and will lovingly bear your burdens (Gal. 6:2). There is a great need for people like that. Mature, wise, godly Christians that will restore one who is caught in a trespass through a loving, but steady encouragement to stay the course, finish the race, and gain the crown are the kind of people I want to see Shepherd's Fellowship full of. Avail yourself of these people and hold on to them, for they are truly a treasure from the Lord!

CONCLUSION

Paul comforts them like any good pastor by telling them that (1) it is God Himself that sets the limits to temptation since the degree and extent of any temptation is what is common to everyone, and (2) that He *always* provides you the ability to bear up under any load that He has custom crafted for your sanctification! Don't forget that our Savior sympathizes with our weaknesses, since He was tempted in the same way as we are yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Also, you must view life realistically. You will never be tempted beyond what you can bear before you start sinning because you will have a guaranteed, God-provided escape. God demonstrates his faithfulness to you by coming to your rescue (2 Peter 2:7). So it is with believers today. Just as a faithful shepherd rescues his wandering sheep, so Jesus looks after His people and delivers them from the situations they are faced with and He does such through godly counselors (Pro. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6).

This means that Christians can't blame God for their temptation or say that God didn't give them a way out (cf. James 1:13-15). This also means that they must come to grips with the daily problems of life that are caused by temptation and sin and look diligently for the escape hatch. They must condition themselves to avoid temptation by first recognizing it from afar and staying as far away from it as possible. This can only be done by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). Sometimes the God provided way out may mean death for the persecuted Christian. Other times it may mean the end of a relationship, a job, or the selling of idols that tempt you to forsake God and love stuff.

If you avail yourself of all measures against sin and temptation and you still do not have the ability to overcome sin and temptation, then you are not a Christian. Jesus always provides what He expects from His people. He provided it for the people of Israel and He more abundantly provides it for us now by the Holy Spirit. The key is to access the Divine tools needed to carry out the task of sanctification. That amounts to prayer, the word, and godly accountability. Anything else is not-God

ordained. Beware of temptation, for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Be encouraged that God sets the limits to your temptation and He Himself comes to the aid of His people in their temptation and provides the way of escape. However, you must cry out to Him for help in prayer and look to His word rather than looking to your feelings. He encourages you to persist, to overcome, and to walk with Him in white by the power of His Spirit (Rev. 3:4). God's abiding faithfulness will be present in your trial; draw near to Him, look to Him, and run to Him like a humble little child that knows nowhere else to go for comfort and protection other than their Father.