

1 CORINTHIANS 10:6–13

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July 14-16, 2018

Smith

GOD IS FAITHFUL (EVEN WHEN WE ARE TEMPTED)

6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.”^a 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! 13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And 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 endure it.

Children’s Devotion: Family Bible Night begins this week.

In the book of Job there is an interesting phenomenon which helps the reader to understand the book and to understand where God appears in our lives. At the beginning of the book, Job wonders where God is and why he, Job, doesn’t seem to be getting answers to his questions. At the end of the book, God finally speaks to Job out of a storm. But all through the book, in almost every single chapter, there are subtle hints about that storm that’s coming, as if Job and his friends were watching that storm the whole time—the very storm which is the Glory of the Lord, the presence God among men. He was always there.

Here in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul makes a similar point. God is faithful. God is always there. Even when we are tempted, God is not far away, but he is with us to help us, and as we will see, he is even there to provide a way out of temptation.

Twice in our passage Paul says, “These things happened.” What things? Well, earlier in the chapter Paul walked the Corinthians through a thumbnail sketch of the Exodus, and especially a couple of things: Crossing the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud, the manna God sent them, the water God provided for them in the desert, and even the rock out of which that water came, which Paul explains was a way of talking about Christ, who is the true Well of Living Water, the source of every blessing, both physical and spiritual.

Now Paul brings in more history to teach the Corinthians and us that the Old Testament is not to be ignored—it is the history of God’s saving work among his people, and we are his people. The examples Paul brings out are given “to keep us from setting our hearts on evil, as

^a 10:7 Exodus 32:6

they did.” Those words, “As they did,” ring out like a warning bell five time in these examples.

(I) First, Paul warns us away from “**setting our hearts of evil.**” Now, this is really a general way of describing everything that follows, but to commit a sin willfully is more than simply setting God aside for a moment, as if he can be easily picked up once again, like a stretch of highway where you think you can safely do 80, but then return to 55 or so when you approach the next town, because someone there might be watching. But the speed limit is the speed limit, and God’s view of sin does not change in certain circumstances.

(II) Next, Paul reminds us of God’s people falling into **idolatry**. This happened while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments from the Lord. The people wanted to worship their own way, and Aaron allowed them and even joined in with them—but their worship of the Golden Calf had a direct comparison to certain Corinthian behavior and in some things that people are doing today. They felt they were worshipping God, but they were contradicting things God had said, and they were violating God’s commands about what was allowed and what was forbidden. The same thing happens now when people imagine that their sinful lifestyle will have to be embraced by God, who in fact condemns it. This is idolatry of the image in the mirror, when someone believes that he or she should dictate what is God’s will rather than listen to God’s holy word.

(III) In addition to this, Paul especially points out **sexual immorality**. This was a particular problem in Corinth—open promiscuity, so-called open marriages, homosexuality, lesbianism, and other sexual abominations were rampant then and there as they are here and now. There are many passages in and out of 1 Corinthians about homosexuality, but I would like to focus on the sin of fornication a moment. There are several categories of sexual sins in the Bible that are all addressed as various places, only one of which was ever modified by God, and it was changed forever. Marrying one’s close relative was at one time inevitable because after the Creation and again after the Flood, men and women only had close relations from which to find a spouse. Cain and Abel could only have married their sisters. Abraham himself married his half-sister, Sarah. But shortly after the time of the Patriarchs, God imposed a ban on marrying a close relative, a ban which remains in place to this day. Other forbidden acts were **homosexuality** and its various perversions, **multiple-marriages**, which God never condoned even though many of his people indulged in them, **adultery**, which in general is sex outside of a marriage and therefore can stand for any sexual sin, but especially involves the betrayal of the marriage vow, **rape**, which is forced adultery on a victim, and **fornication**, which is still sex outside of marriage but involves two people who are both unmarried—this, too, is forbidden by God and is a grave sin. Paul reminds us that when the Israelites began to indulge in this sin with the Moabites at the end of the time of the Exodus, more than 23,000 Israelites died.

(IV, V) Paul also warns about **testing** the Lord Jesus Christ—which led to the people being bitten by snakes, and Moses finally raising up the Bronze Snake, and Paul also warns against **grumbling**, in which the Israelites excelled. And yet then, too, many of the grumblers and testers of God were put to death for their sins.

Here we stand, from our point of view at the very end of the ages, and yet we, too, are still tempted. We, too, still fall into these very sins and more. If you think that you are so pious or if you think that you know your Bible so well that sin can never jump out from behind the door and get you, then you don't really know your Bible or yourself very well, do you? Paul warns: **Be careful that you don't fall!** And his warning goes even further: **No temptation**, Paul says, **has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.** Don't be so proud of what you've stood up to so far. Remember Job! Things could get a lot worse! If you think you've done well so far, how will you do when the Lord allows you to be struck down with something really severe!

But God is faithful. And here is where our comfort comes from. **First)** there is forgiveness from Jesus for those times when we slipped into sin, and even when we charged headlong into sin, misguided the world, misdirected by the devil, or just plain messed up by our own sinful nature. One of the great blessings of living now in New Testament times, at the end of the ages, is that we know the name of Jesus Christ, and we know precisely what he accomplished for us on the cross—the payment for our sins, bearing in his own body the fury and eternal wrath of God for our sins. If you ever wonder how much God hates your sins, look at Jesus on the cross. If you ever wonder what payment still might be required of you, look at who's on the cross now, now that Jesus' body has been taken down. There is no punishment left, at all.

And God is faithful. When you and I are tempted, our faithful, forgiving God, promises to send us a way out of that temptation—you will not be tempted beyond what you can bear. The way out that Paul mentions might be terribly obvious. If you are in the habit of cursing and swearing and have been for your whole life, pray that God would help you, and begin with the way that you think about things. If you are tempted by images of unbelievably attractive people who appear on the screens of your life, God has given you eyelids to close, a neck that turns away, an “off” button that can end that kind of madness.

If you are in a lifestyle that embraces a sin, call on the name of Jesus to make a change for the better. You have the tools of confession and repentance, to look away, turn away, walk away, and even run away. Run, walk, turn and look to Christ, not only for forgiveness, but even to help say “no” to sin. God is faithful—even when we are tempted. Amen.