



There is nothing in the Bible more precious to us than the promises of God. God promises us many things in his word but if I were to come up with a Top Ten, 1 Corinthians 10:13 would most certainly be on the list. *“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; 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.”*

Last year, Indiana congressman Mark Souder resigned his position after confessing to an affair with a part-time staffer. In more than a dozen e-mails to *World* magazine, Souder reflected on his downfall. In one e-mail, he reveals the agony he feels over his failure. He writes: “My sin, while forgiven, is greater in that God put me in a position of public trust, so I deserve whatever criticism I receive.” He goes on to write about what he did and how he felt in the midst of it: “I prayed multiple times a day, sang hymns with emotions and tears, felt each time that it wouldn’t happen again, read the Bible every morning So how in the world did I have a torrid—which is an accurate word—many-year affair? How could I compartmentalize it so much?”

When we hear that story part of us probably feels “How could he?” but another part of us knows it could happen to any of us. I doubt there is a person in this room who deep down doesn’t feel like they’re capable of doing the same thing. All of us know temptation.

Temptation is common.

That’s part of what Paul is getting at in this verse: *“no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.”* It’s part of the human condition. We all struggle with temptation. It’s worth noting that the word used here for “temptation” has two shades of meaning. It can mean either “to test” or “to tempt.” God tests us but he doesn’t tempt us. He tests us with a positive purpose in mind. He wants to strengthen us. But temptation is different. Satan tempts us to sin in order to ruin us. Sometimes the same situation can be both a test and a temptation.

Keep in mind temptation isn’t a sin. We sin when we yield to temptation. Jesus himself was tempted at the start of his ministry. The book of Hebrews 4:15 says of Him, *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*

Knowing we’re not alone in this is encouraging. It gives us a measure of hope. I guess the old saying is true that “misery loves company” because this rescues us from the despair that says, “I’m alone in this. No one else knows what this is like but me.”

One of the reasons temptation is common is we’re all made of the same stuff. We all have to do battle with the same enemies. The Bible talks about the world, the flesh and the devil. The world is the whole system of thinking and of values around us that’s antithetical to God. It is society apart from God. The flesh is the inborn bent we all have toward sin; it’s something we’re born with; we inherited it from Adam. The devil is God’s ancient foe; a fallen angel who Jesus called a liar and a murderer. No one is exempt from any of these.

Because of that there is no way you can be a normal human being in the society we live in and not experience temptation. And yet it’s also true that we all struggle with different things. A survey of 3,000 U.S. adults identifies the differences between what men and women say tempts them the most:

Sex	Men – 50%	Women – 22%
Food	Men – 29%	Women – 56%
Money	Men – 14%	Women – 15%
Alcohol	Men – 7%	Women – 2%
Power	Men – 2%	Women – 7%

Whatever you struggle with, understand Satan isn’t just a liar and a murderer; he’s an accuser. He loves to whisper in your ear, “You’re the only one who struggles with this. How can you even call yourself a Christian?”

Against that, God’s word says, “Listen, child, what you’re going through is nothing different than what millions of believers have gone through for centuries.” You can take comfort in that.

Temptation is dangerous.

But that’s not to say temptation isn’t dangerous. It is! Don’t underestimate the danger of temptation. As a matter of fact, that’s the very point Paul’s been making in this chapter. At the end of chapter 9 Paul used the compelling image of a race. He said he runs in such a way to win. He closed out the chapter with some haunting words: *“lest possibly...I myself should be disqualified.”*

Then starting in chapter 10 he goes back to a page of Israelite history and uses them as an example of those who who did not run to win and were disqualified. In verses 1-4 he recalls how

God blessed them in various ways and all the spiritual privileges they had.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

He goes back to the time when God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt; we call it the Exodus. Paul says remember how God led them by the pillar of cloud safely through the waters of the Red Sea? He says they were "baptized into Moses." It's interesting he speaks of baptism because it's not found in the story itself. But he uses this word because baptism was something the Corinthians knew all about. They'd been baptized, not into Moses but into Christ. This was a spiritual privilege they, too, enjoyed. So he's drawing a parallel between Israel's experience and a believers' experience of baptism.

But that's not all. He also mentions how the Israelites all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. He's talking about the food and water miraculously provided by God in the wilderness. God sent manna from heaven and supplied water from a rock. What a privilege; what a blessing! This, too, parallels the Christian experience of eating and drinking in what we call the Lord's Supper or Communion. Paul is saying, just like them you have all these spiritual privileges and blessings, but then he adds in v. 5,

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

Only two of the original generation who came out of Egypt made it to the promised land—Joshua and Caleb. So this is a warning to the Corinthians: don't presume on God's kindness. Don't take what God has done in your life for granted.

Paul goes on and gives several examples of how the Israelites succumbed to temptation in verses 6–11.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

We can't go into each incident Paul refers back to here, but it's important to see these were the same temptations the Corinthians

were dealing with. Idolatry heads the list. We've seen how they were dealing with whether or not to participate in the idol worship around them by going to the temples and eating the meat sacrificed to idols. Then he mentions immorality, which often went along with idolatry. Paul talked to them about that in chapter 6. And then he finishes it off by recalling how they tried the Lord and grumbled. They actually wanted to go back to the flesh pots of Egypt, much like the Corinthians were tempted to go back to their old lifestyle.

Finally in v. 12 he goes for the jugular.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Do you see what he's doing? He's warning them. He's warning us. He's warning against the spiritual pride that thinks just because we're baptized and take the Lord's Supper we can't fall. They were flirting with idolatry and immorality. They were so proud they didn't think they could really fall. But Paul says even people with great spiritual privilege fall prey to the power of temptation. You can sit in Bible studies. You can lead people to Christ. You can go on mission trips. You can be caught up in worship. You can have all these spiritual privileges and somehow think because of that you're immune to the danger of temptation. Don't underestimate it!

When I was in college I had three close friends. We were all believers who took our faith seriously. We worshipped together. We served together. We all wanted God to use us. We spent time studying God's word and reaching out to friends who didn't know Christ. God blessed us in many ways. One of them went to seminary and became a pastor. But today, 35 years later, not one of those three guys is walking with the Lord. They've all left the faith—"they were laid low in the wilderness." I've had to wrestle with that. These guys had known something of the grace and power of God in their lives. How could they fall prey to temptation? Because temptation is powerful and temptation is dangerous. As soon as you and I think we're immune from sin's allure; as soon as we think we are standing tall, we're set up to fall.

Temptation is endurable.

But here is the good news of v. 13. Even though temptation is dangerous, you don't **have** to fall prey to it. I've heard people say, "I'm only human. No one is perfect." It's like they're justifying it; they're using this as an excuse for sin. You can't do that.

Paul wants us to know we can fight temptation and we can win. He says in the midst of temptation "God is faithful." He's trustworthy. Do you believe that? That's not just something you read about in theology books. That's like an iron lung. That's what keeps you going in the midst of testing. You can count on him. And since God is faithful he'll not allow you to be put in a position where you're unable to stand against it. That's what he says:

“he will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able.” That’s a promise. He says you *“will be able to endure it.”* We might feel we can’t endure it but we can. It’s like teaching your child to swim. No child learns how to swim without being put into a situation they feel they can’t handle, right? As a parent you almost have to let them think they’re going to sink if they’re going to learn to swim. There are times when we’re in the deep end of testing and temptation and we feel we’re in way over our heads. But we can endure it. Some people say God won’t ever give you more than you can handle. One thing I know: God **will** give you more than you **think** you can handle. So I’d prefer to say God won’t give you more than you can’t handle with him at your side. If you’re depending on yourself, if you’re not walking in fellowship with him, you can’t handle it, but if you look to him, and depend on him, and call on him, you can endure it. Don’t underestimate the danger of temptation, but don’t underestimate the faithfulness of God either. He’ll give you the strength to endure.

Temptation is escapable.

He’ll also give you a way of escape. That’s what he says: *“with the temptation he will provide a way of escape.”* Again, you’re never alone when you’re going through it. God is always there, always calling you to come to him; always providing a way to safety.

Several years ago a couple gathered up their kids and made a trip to the St. Louis Zoo. A new attraction just opened called Big Cat Country, which took the lions and tigers out of their cages and allowed them to roam in large enclosures. Visitors observe the cats by walking on elevated skyways above. As the mom took the children up one of the skyway ramps, she got distracted when a stroller malfunctioned. When she looked up, her two boys had walked through a child-sized gap in the fence and climbed up on the rocks 20 or 25 feet above the lion pen. They’d been told they’d be able to look down on the lions, and they were doing just that. “Hey, Mom, we can see them!” They had no idea how much danger they were in. The mom saw immediately. But what could she do? The gap in the fence was too small for her to get through. If she screamed, she’d startle the boys perched precariously above the lions. So she knelt down, spread out her arms, and said, “Boys, come get a hug.” They scrambled down away from the danger into their moms’ arms.

That’s one of the ways the Lord provides a way of escape for us. In the midst of temptation, he calls us to himself, away from temptation that would devour us. He reminds us of his forgiveness and his grace and his love. Don’t underestimate the danger of temptation, but don’t underestimate the faithfulness of God either. He’ll give you both the strength to endure and a way to escape.

But that doesn’t mean we sit around and do nothing and just wait for God to swoop down and deliver us. Look what Paul says in the verse that comes right after this one.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry (v. 14).

God may provide a way of escape, but we have to be willing to flee when the way of escape presents itself. That’s part of how we overcome. There are things you don’t stand toe to toe with because if you do you’ll lose. You don’t stand, you run—in the other direction! Proverbs 4:14 says, *“Do not set your foot on the path of the wicked.”* You know the path he’s talking about. You might say, “Well, I know other Christians who can go on that path. It’s not a problem for them, why should it be for me?” But if it’s a struggle for you, stay away from it. Be brutally honest, look at your heart and ask, “Is this a temptation for me?” If it is, get out of there. Change the channel. Block the channel. Turn the computer off. Avoid that part of town. Stay away from that person. Do what’s necessary.

Succumbing to temptation starts with very small compromises. Deep down you know you’re crossing the line, but you convince yourself it’s not that big of a deal. So there is a slow erosion of your commitments and disciplines which sets you up for an even bigger fall. Temptation will rarely present itself to us in its true colors, saying, “I’m your deadly enemy, and I want to ruin you forever.” Sin rarely seems like sin at first beginnings. It’s like David. Taking a stroll on his palace roof seemed harmless, but it ended in adultery and murder. He wasn’t where he was supposed to be.

This morning we’re celebrating what we call the Lord’s Supper. There is something about the Lord’s Supper that can help us escape temptation. After Paul tells them to flee idolatry he gives them a powerful argument. Look at verses 15–22.

I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

What’s he saying? When you eat and drink as an expression of worship, you share in the life of that which you’re worshiping. It’s like in chapter 6 he said there is no such thing as casual sex; you become one with that person. Here he says there is no such thing as casual worship; you become one with what you worship. The Corinthians felt they could go eat at an idols’ temple on Friday night and then come to church on Sunday and take

the Lord's Supper. No big deal; nothing really happens in these things.

Paul says it's more than that. It's always been more than that. When the people of Israel ate the sacrifices at the altar they became one with the God they were worshipping. And that's true when you eat in an idol's temple. Idols may not exist in reality, but demons do exist, and demons love to keep people enslaved to idolatry. Do you want to be a sharer in demons?

But it's also true when we partake in the Lord's Supper—we share in the body and blood of Jesus. It's not that these elements become his body and blood, but they do convey something of his life to us. When we come to this altar and eat this meal there's a sacred connection made with God. It's a mystery. That's why

the church has called these sacraments. They're more than just a reminder of what he did; somehow God works through these very ordinary elements.

And because of that you can't do both. You can't share in the life of demons on Friday night and the life of God on Sunday morning. Boy, that's relevant today, isn't it? You may not be going to an idol's temple but we have our own ways of doing this. You can compartmentalize your life. You see, God is jealous. He wants you all to himself. That's another reason for you to resist temptation.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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