

HOPE AND HELP IN TEMPTATION

1 Corinthians 10:6-13

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Introduction

"I am very sharp," said the Hook which was holding the struggling Fish.

"I know that only too well," answered the poor Fish; "but let me tell you, it was not owing so much to your sharpness that I am captured, as to the bit of bait by which I was tempted."

"It is the way all Hooks succeed," observed the Hook.; "there must be a trick in order to decoy. Had you seen my point and been aware of the danger, you would have wisely kept out of the way instead of so readily swallowing the worm."

Satan, like a fisherman, baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish.

Theme: Vigilance and Steadfastness under Temptation. Today we consider the words of St. Paul:

1 Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

The key words in that verse are: "Take heed." St. Paul is urging us to be vigilant in the face of the multitude of temptations that assail us every day. In our day to day lives we are like fish swimming near a favorite pier. There are many hooks with much succulent bait all around us. It has always been so, but it is more intensely so in our affluent and entertainment bombarded age. Everywhere we look, there are temptations to sin, and we have to admit that the bait looks delicious. Add to this the human capacity for rationalizing until we call evil good and good evil, and it is immediately apparent that a Christian must not be presumptuous or self-confident. St. Paul says: "Take heed." Be vigilant. Cleave to the Lord and His Word and don't be tricked by the allure of Satan's bait.

Take a warning from Israel's experience in the Wilderness.

Forewarned is forearmed. In our text St. Paul tells us of the experiences of Israel during their Wilderness Wanderings with Moses in order to show us that despite God's deliverance, presence, help, and provision, many fell through temptation into sin, died under the wrath of God, and never saw the Promised Land. In the five verses prior to our epistle text Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 10:1 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; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Here he lays before us the bounty of spiritual advantage at Israel's disposal. God's presence was physically manifested to them every day in the Pillar of Cloud. They had all seen the Red Sea part, had gone through on dry land, and had seen the Sea drown the pursuing Egyptians. They ate food that fell from heaven every day and drank water which flowed supernaturally from a Rock. Paul compares Israel's daily experience to that of Christian believers who in Baptism are united to the death and resurrection of Christ by which He atoned for our sins, and who in Holy Communion eat the Body and Blood of Christ which was given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. In other words, it was not the haplessly ignorant who fell under the wrath of God, but those with every advantage that God's salvation and grace in Christ affords. Therefore, Christians, who have Christ, His Word, forgiveness, life and salvation are urged:

1 Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

Next, St. Paul presents examples of Israel's sins as a warning to us not to trust in our own strength or flesh, but to cling to God and His Word.

1 Corinthians 10:6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

St. Paul here calls to mind the fact that despite God's feeding the Israelites with Manna from heaven and water from the Rock, many fell to lusting after the old days in Egypt when they ate fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic, etc. They despised God's deliverance and provision and pined for their old slavery. For their unbelief they were smitten with a great plague (Nu 11). We, who have eternal life through Christ's death and resurrection, should not be fooled by the allure of the world, but keep in mind that all bait hides a hook.

1 Corinthians 10:7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

The Israelites had, for centuries, watched the Egyptians and their other pagan neighbors in the ancient near east worship images and idols. What could be more natural but for them to fall into line with the world around them. While Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Word from the Lord, the people of Israel grew weary of waiting, took matters into their own hands, and in their fallen human wisdom, made a golden calf and worshipped it. They had seen the Lord visit Ten Plagues on Egypt, and had seen the great deliverance at the Red Sea. Yet they credit their newly made idol with their deliverance.

We commit idolatry whenever we mix our pure Christian religion with the ideologies and -isms of our day. Christians who dabble in the occult or the New Age movement are idolaters. So are Christians who join avowedly religious but non-Christian organizations like the Masons. So, too, are Christians who buy into anti-Christian ideologies like feminism, secular-humanism and the like. In all of these things, we are allowing something to occupy the place in our lives proper only to Christ. The Psychic Friends, the Masons, and the feminists haven't saved your souls; neither have your money, your family, your position, or your friends. Only Christ, sent in the Father's love, was given to cancel your damnation and grant you the free gift of everlasting life. Therefore, He alone deserves our ultimate loyalty.

1 Corinthians 10:8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

Fornication is the catch-all term in the Bible for all kinds of sexual immorality, including fantasies, masturbation, pre- and extra-marital sex, homosexuality, bestiality, use of pornography, etc. Fornication was not invented in the 60's. Now, if you can believe it, the sexual immorality that Israel was engaging in was tied to their idol worship. Baal worship, which was a snare to the Israelites for centuries, included ritual sex acts. Whenever we commit sexual sins, we are sinning against the Lord and turning away from Him. The Scriptures teach us that the Christian Church is the chosen and adorned Bride of Christ. If that is so, is it ever appropriate for members of the Bride of Christ to fornicate? Is it not rather for us to "lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, and each love and honor his spouse", in honor of Him who has embraced us in His love? 23,000 Israelites learned the hard way that illicit sex can kill you. Take heed!

1 Corinthians 10:9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. 10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

I have said many times the Christianity alone is a religion of grace and gift, while all other religions are religions of works and attainments. But there is another difference between Christianity and Paganism that is important for us to grasp. All of Paganism is an attempt to manipulate the deity, the spirits, the forces, etc., to serve our purposes. Christianity is a trusting of the self to the will of God. We pray to our gracious Father: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.", desiring that the good and gracious will of God be done among us also.

It is, therefore, a heathen impulse to tempt Christ, that is, when we demand that He accommodate Himself to our desires, or to murmur against God, as if to say that God was unjustly mistreating us by allowing certain adversities to try us. Rather than trusting the God who parted the Red Sea for them, the Israelites tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Ex 17:7) They complained bitterly saying, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt... for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger!" (Ex 16:3)

St. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

Unfortunately, even among Christians, who know the goodness and mercy of the Lord in the promises of the Gospel, there are instances of murmuring and tempting Christ. How easy it is to become faithless and impatient and to put our own will in place of God's. How quickly we complain when adversity arises. How quickly we forget that tribulations which God allows are for our ultimate good, serving to purify our faith and lock us on to the Gospel.

Paul concludes his rehearsal of the sins of Israel with these words:

1 Corinthians 10:11 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.

God saw to it that these events in the history of the people of Israel would serve as examples to future generations, and they were written down as a warning to us. We are living in the Last Days, which includes the time between the Ascension of Christ and His Second Coming. "The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2Pet 3:10). If God did not spare the Israelites who sinned, will He spare those who have trusted in their own wisdom and works and presumed upon the grace of God on the day of Judgment? It is good therefore, for us to heed this salutary warning.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

Take Comfort in the faithfulness of God.

And yet heeding God's warning is only a part of what it means to be steadfast and vigilant in the face of temptation. The chief focus of our attention in temptation should be on God's faithfulness. We should take comfort in God's faithfulness to His promises of help, protection, empowerment and deliverance. Look at verse 13:

1 Corinthians 10:13 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.

When we are tempted we are to anchor ourselves to this: "God is Faithful". In the Lord's prayer we are taught by the Lord Himself to pray, "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil". Luther tells us that when we pray this prayer, we are asking "that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into mischief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory." Now if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us to pray after this manner, should we then suppose that he will leave us unaided in temptation? The answer is self-evident. In faithfulness God fulfilled the promises made in the Old Testament to send the Messiah into the world. In faithfulness, Jesus Christ fulfilled His saving mission completely, crying out as He hung dying in our place on the cross, "It is finished!" In faithfulness He rose from the grave on the third day, victorious over death for us. He commissioned His chosen Apostles, indeed the whole Christian Church, to preach the good news to the world. In Him all the promises of God find their "Amen!"

Now, God's faithfulness is manifested toward us in times of temptation in two ways according to the passage we are considering. First we are told that despite the devil, the world, and our own flesh, God manages and limits the temptations that assail us. Nothing happens but what He permits. The devil himself is but a vicious dog on a leash; he is God's devil. Therefore, our text says: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." Though we sometimes feel particularly singled out and hard pressed, all of the temptations we've experienced are temptations that are common to man. Other have been where we find ourselves. But the text says further that in faithfulness, God "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able". He will not permit more than you can handle with His grace.

Job experienced uncommon temptations at the hands of the devil, yet even in that particularly intense bout of temptation, God still limited what Satan could do:

Job 1:12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:6 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

Now, Job endured a lot by most standards, but God allowed it so that Job's endurance would be an example of the mercy of God. Satan would have tortured and killed Job, but God permitted only so much for so long, and in the end Job was vindicated and more blessed in the end than he had been at the beginning. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet 4:19). God's purpose in allowing us to be tempted is good: our faith is being tried, and we are being schooled to trust in the promises of the Gospel and not to rest secure in our own strength or righteousness. But what He permits, He still controls, so that we may conquer with His help. Therefore, when tempted, remember that God will never be untrue to you.

The second way that God's faithfulness is manifested toward us when we are tempted is that He will enable us to bear temptation until deliverance comes. Temptations don't last forever; they pass. But while we are in the midst of, we have this promise to cling to: God is faithful, and "will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." God is not the author of our temptations. They come from the devil, the world, and our own sinful natures. He does, however, permit these temptations to come to us. But with the temptation, He will enable us to bear it. The way to escape that the text talks about is precisely the ability to bear the temptation until deliverance comes.

In Ephesians 6, St. Paul tells us that there is a host of demonic forces arrayed against the Christian. We are at war! Yet Paul tells us to use the whole armor of God so that we are able to withstand in the evil day. To wear the armor of God means to trust in the benefits which Christ purchased and won for us in His defeat of Satan on the cross. It means to trust the promises of the Gospel which assure us of grace and help in time of need. He is our strength for the battle. Therefore we can say with David: "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped" (Psa 124:7).

A Christian is a sinner, forgiven through the blood of Christ, and granted the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit not only enables me to believe in Christ through the gospel, but He also enlightens, sanctifies and keeps me in the true faith. The redeemed are also the empowered. The gospel assures me that my sins are forgiven; it also assures me that the God who saved me also makes me able to bear temptation. Therefore, when we fall, it is not because the temptation was too strong, nor because God would not help, but because we unheedingly gave ourselves to the bait.

Conclusion

Temptations are bound to come. It is so easy to fall into a casual disregard for the spiritual dangers around us all the time. We see others living in blissful disregard of God's will; apparently happy in their sins. The Day of the Lord will catch them unawares. We are to be steadfast and vigilant when we face temptation, learning the lessons that God gives as a warning, but most of all trusting in the faithful Lord who helps those He has saved.