

“Escaping Temptation”

Liturgical Date: Lent 3 (C)

Primary Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, The Third Sunday in Lent, is the Epistle Lesson from 1 Corinthians 10. Temptation is something that every person is confronted with. My prayer is that the sermon today will be very practical for you. It will give an overview of 9 important things to know about temptation and how to overcome it. The second part of verse 13 in our Epistle Lesson says, *“but with temptation he will also provide a way of escape,”* and thus the title of the sermon is “Escaping Temptation.”

The very first thing we must understand about temptation is that is that all people, including Christians, will be tempted to sin. Temptation is a universal experience. This does not make it a good thing, but in a sense it “normal” in that it something that we should expect. It is not a matter of if, but when. Perhaps you consistently battle against a particular desire to sin. We could be tempted to think that we are alone in this temptation, but we are not. Everyone may not be tempted in the same ways that you are, but they are tempted in some way. Verse 13 of the Epistle Lesson began with, *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.”* No one is immune from temptation. Even Jesus Himself was tempted to sin. We heard about that two weeks ago when our Lord was fasting in the wilderness and satan came to tempt Him. God is not some distant entity that cannot relate to our temptation. Hebrews 4:15 in speaking about Jesus says, *“For we do not have a high priest who in unable to sympathize with our*

weakness, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin.”

Secondly, we must recognize where temptation comes from.

Temptation does not come from God. We know this based on what we have already learned about temptation and know about the nature and character of God. It was the devil that tempted our Lord Jesus in the wilderness. We are tempted to do things that are bad, wicked things that are opposed to the will of God. Since God is perfectly good and holy, He cannot do things that are wrong. James 1:13 is very clear that the source of temptation is not God, *“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”* To be clear God does *test* us. God sends challenges as tests of faith and to grow our faith and devotion to Him. For example, Abraham was tested to obey God even to the point of being willing sacrificing his own son Isaac. God in our text tested the Hebrew people in the wilderness. God tests, but does not tempt to sin. This comes from our own sinful flesh, the fallen world, and all temptation ultimately goes back to the devil. 1 Peter 5:8 provides a warning, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”* The devil tempts us to sin because the evil one wants us to give into that temptation, devour us in sin, and thus lead us away from God.

So is it a sin to be tempted? The third point to understand today is that this is not the case. With our own power, we can never overcome our sinful flesh, nor the devil. The temptation to sin will be there no matter what we do because until the Last Day when satan is cast into the lake of fire he will be out there as that roaring lion, that deceptive serpent, doing what he does so well. So this gives a degree of comfort to us when temptation

comes. To be tempted is not a sin, but it is sin when we give into that temptation. Martin Luther said much about temptation and in the Large Catechism he wrote, *“To feel temptation is therefore a far different thing from consenting or yielding to it.”* Luther also wrote, *“It is impossible to keep the devil from shooting evil thoughts and lusts into your heart. But see to it that you do not let such arrows stick there and take root, but tear them out and throw them away.”* He also quotes an old proverb, which I love, *“I cannot stop a bird from flying over my head. But I can certainly keep it from nesting in my hair.”* Proverbs 1:10 gives good advice, *“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.”*

Now that we understand that temptation is a universal threat to all, that it comes from satan, and that it is not a sin to be tempted but sin when we give into it, are there things that we can be done to reduced the pull of temptation and be victorious over it? The good news is, yes there are. There are ways to escape from the trap of temptation. The fourth key point for today is that we should not test Christ in ways we should not (v9) and we not grumble (v11). We see in 1 Corinthians that this is what the people of Israel were doing and it led to disaster and much hardship for them. We need to be trusting in God and content with what He provides for us. Remember the 9th and 10th Commandments about not coveting. When we want things we don't have in a sinful way, this breeds discontent and a sinful desire to make comprises to get what we want. When one thinks they deserve more material things, the temptation to steal is greater. When one believes they deserve a better position or more prominence the likelihood that they will lie to get there goes up. When the grass looks greener on the other side, it is harder to resist jumping the fence. So being content and thankful for what

God has graciously provided is an important mindset in the battle against temptation.

Fifthly, our text teaches us to learn from the example of others. Verse 6, *“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did”* and verse 11, *“Now these things happened to them as an example but they were written down for our instruction.”* We can learn from good examples where people remained faithful against all odds as the examples of many great heroes of the faith show. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul kept preaching the Word despite intense opposition. But we can also learn from bad examples. We can learn what not to do. We saw the failures of Israel as they wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. There are also plenty of contemporary examples where Christian leaders fell into some type of sin by the positions that they put themselves in and the sinful paths they decided to take.

Verse 12 gives us a golden nugget of a proverb for the sixth point, *“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”* Pride comes before the fall. This was the cause of satan’s rebellion in heaven and his resulting fall. When we rely on only our own strength to resist temptation we are setting ourselves up for failure. When we think that we can just dabble a little bit with sin without getting sucked into its vortex, we place a false confidence in our own abilities. Many a drug addict began thinking, *“I am going to just do this a little bit on the weekends for fun”* before descending into full-blown addiction and hurt to themselves and others. Jesus speaks to this in St. Mark 14:38, *“Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit is ready, but the flesh is weak.”* Recognizing our own sinful weakness helps us avoid situations where the temptation to sin is stronger. You know what your particular weak points

are. If you are prone to substance abuse, avoid gatherings where people will be doing that type of thing. Don't contact old flames privately. If a temptation is to use vulgar language, reduce the amount of media that you consume that is full of profanity. Understand that we as fallen human beings do have weaknesses and don't set yourself up for failure.

The seventh point is very important. Know that you *can* resist temptation. No one forces you to sin. The concept of free will is often abused and misunderstood, but in this context we do have a choice. Every time one gives into temptation and does something that God forbids or doesn't do something that we should it is a willful action. The Flip Wilson defense of "the devil made me do it" is not a good one! The devil can tempt you, but he can't make you do it. So while you don't want to overestimate your strength, you don't want to sell God short either. Because in relying on God, we can overcome temptation. Prayer is key here. A vibrant and active prayer life is vital to a close relationship with God. We pray in the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "*And lead us not into temptation.*" When you are being strongly tempted, take it to the Lord in prayer. The Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and will to resist evil. Stay in the Word of God. As Ephesians 6 says, put on the whole armor of God that we may stand against the wiles of the devil. God gives us the weapons and tools to battle against temptation, so employ them. We are not tempted beyond what we can resist. From our Epistle Lesson verse 13, "*God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape.*"

So this verse transitions us from the seventh to the eighth point. He will provide a way of escape. There are cases when someone is under the threat of bodily harm to commit sin, but there are rare. Most of the time that

we give into temptation, we do it out of selfish desire with no “gun to our head.” God provides a way of escape. The Greek word that is translated as way of escape here literally means “egress” or “way out”. In that time it was often used to describe a landing place for a ship. The implication is that we can land intact on the other side of temptation in the safe harbor of God. This way out often involves removing ourselves from a situation. Literally fleeing. The next verse after our reading ends says to “flee idolatry”. In Acts 15:20 it says to flee fornication, or sexual immorality. The issues of idolatry and sexual immorality were problems for the church at Corinth and they are problems for us today. So the best advice in avoiding a temptation is often to just “get out of Dodge.” In Genesis 39 you can read about Joseph and Potiphar’s wife. She attempted to aggressively seduce Joseph into sexual sin. When he refused, she grabbed his cloak and Joseph took off running naked! Not that is literally fleeing temptation. And let me tell you today that there are times when we need to follow the example of Joseph. Ya’ll are going to do what? I’m headed home then. Your parents are gone for the weekend and some friends want to start a party, then you lock the doors and head somewhere else. God provides an emergency exit and we need to use it.

Finally and most importantly the bottom line in escaping temptation is to look to Jesus Christ. In Him we see the greatest example of being able to resist temptation. Jesus was tempted to sin, as we heard earlier, but beat the devil every single time. Luther said, “*Christ who was tempted in our flesh, is the best Intercessor before God in all temptations.*” In Him we have our strength to overcome temptation. If we rely on our own strength we will fail, but in His strength we win. Luther also provides this simple advice

when we are tempted, *“In all temptations simply close your eyes, and follow the Word.”*

Many who are not in Christ do try to avoid giving in to temptation, but for the wrong reasons. It could be societal pressure. It could be to avoid embarrassment if a certain sin would be exposed. It could be to keep their spouse from getting angry with them. It could be to not jeopardize their financial status. But these motivations pale in comparison to the motivation the Christian has. We seek to defeat temptation because of and for God. We love Jesus. He loves us. Our desire is to live God-pleasing lives. And in those time when we do give into our sinful flesh and fail to take the way of escape God has provided, in Jesus we have forgiveness and mercy. By the work of the Holy Spirit we seek to amend our sinful lives. We look to the cross and see God’s love for us in providing the means for forgiveness for those times when we do fail. We see the empty tomb and see the victory of the perfect Holy One over the devil and his schemes.

There you have it. Nine lessons on temptation and escaping it. And the most important escape from the damning consequences of succumbing to temptation has been provided in Jesus Christ. I close the sermon in prayer as we pray the words from verses 3 and 4 of our hymn of the day *Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing:*

If the world my heart entices With the broad and easy road, With
seductive sinful vices, Let me weight the awful load You were willing to
endure. Help me flee all thoughts impure And to master each temptation,
Calm in prayer and meditation. Every wound that pains or grieves me By
Your wounds, Lord, is made whole; When I’m faint, Your cross revives me,
Granting new life to my soul. Yes, Your comfort renders sweet Every bitter

cup I meet; For Your all atoning passion Has procured my soul's salvation.
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.