

Learning from Temptation

1 Corinthians 10:6-13

INTRODUCTION

- A. In the Australian bush country grows a little plant called the “sundew.”
 - 1. It has a slender stem and tiny, round leaves fringed with hairs that glisten with bright drop of liquid as delicate as fine dew.
 - 2. Woe to the insect, however, that dares to dance on it.
 - a. Although its attractive clusters of red, white, and pink blossoms are harmless, the leaves are deadly.
 - b. The shiny moisture on each leaf is sticky and will imprison any bug that touches it.
 - 3. As an insect struggles to free itself, the vibration causes the leaves to close tightly around it. The innocent-looking plant then feeds on its victim.
- B. Is that not a perfect illustration of the powers of temptation?
 - 1. Temptation looks so very harmless, looks so appealing, and then we are caught in the grasp of sin.
 - 2. Jesus spoke about that grasp of sin; “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (Jn 8:34).
- C. Many of the Corinthians found themselves in the grasp of sin:
 - 1. There was a man who was living with his step-mother.
 - 2. There was a lawsuit—likely involving that immorality—which was tearing the Corinthian church apart.
 - 3. There were some in Corinth eating in pagan temples and leading their weaker brethren into sin.
- D. Paul has already given an example from his own life about how he abandoned his rights to further the gospel.
 - 1. Now, Paul is going to give an example from Israelite history about what happens when you just give into sin.
 - 2. In this passage, the apostle tells of EVIL DESIRE, EVIL DEATH, EVIL DOWNFALL, & EVIL DIVERSION.
- E. The whole point of this text is found in verse 11: “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

EVIL DESIRE, vv. 6-7

- A. “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’”
- B. The Israelites in the wilderness desired evil.
 - 1. We read of evil desire in Numbers 11:4-6: “Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.’”
 - a. Because of the strong craving the people had Egyptian food, “the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague” (Num 11:33).
 - b. What a very mean God!
 - 1) I recall that when I was quite young, a couple from church invited my family over for a picnic.
 - a) The family had gone through a lot of trouble to fix a very nice meal.
 - b) My brother Aaron said, “I don’t like this. Do you have any bologna?” She didn’t kill Aaron because he didn’t like her food, although Mom and Dad about did.
 - 2) Why would God strike down the Israelites simply because they didn’t like their food?
 - 3) We understand that food is to be received with thanksgiving: “Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tm 4:4-5). The Israelites were demonstrating no thankfulness for God’s bounty.
 - 4) I think there’s even a deeper issue here:
 - a) God, through Moses, is leading his people from captivity to freedom.
 - b) There’s not any food in the wilderness, and God’s gracious hand is providing food for his people, but it’s not good enough for the people. They want more.
 - c. In wanting more, the people are craving, desiring what they do not have.
 - 2. Why did the people desire evil?
 - a. They desired evil because it’s easy.
 - 1) Paul follows up their evil desire by referencing the worship of the golden calf in Ex. 32.
 - 2) Do you recall why the Israelites requested a golden calf? “When the people saw that Moses

delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him' (Ex 32:1).

- 3) The people couldn't see Moses—he had gone up the mountain quite a bit ago (probably about a month before this)—and they didn't know what was going to happen.
 - 4) Therefore, it was easier to have this golden calf to look at and bow down to than to wait on Moses to come down from the mountain.
- b. They also desired evil because it's fun.
- 1) Notice the quote Paul uses from Ex 34:2: "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."
 - 2) The people basically had a party! They got together around that golden calf and had a good ol' time.
 - 3) We dare not forget the fact that sin is fun:
 - a) If sin were not pleasurable, why would we even need to talk about it? If sin felt so horrible, why would I need to preach about it?
 - b) The Scriptures inform us that sin is pleasurable: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:24-25).
- C. I have no doubt but that this hit the Corinthians right between the eyes.
1. I'm sure the strong there really craved that food in the pagan temples. Meat was expensive, and it was far cheaper to go to the temple to eat than it was to buy meat in the marketplace. It was easier to eat meat in a temple than to buy it and prepare yourself.
 2. You often went to pagan temples for celebrations, quite like description of the "eating, drinking, and playing" of the Israelites around the golden calf. It was fun to go to these celebrations.
- D. Paul's point, of course, is "Don't do this." We need to think seriously about our own evil desires.
1. Are there sins we need to give up, but are so very hard to give up, because we desire them—because they're fun?
 2. Are there sins we need to give up, but it's going to require work to give them up and it's far easier just to stay in the sin than it is to get rid of it?
 3. As much as evil might allure us—as much as we might desire evil—we would do well to remember Moses who chose to give up "the fleeting pleasures of sin." Do you need to give up the fleeting pleasures of sin?

EVIL DEATH, vv. 8-10

- A. Because of their evil desire, God punished the people with death; "We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer."
- B. Paul references numerous occasions on which the Israelites were punished with death for their disobedience.
1. Honestly, there are too many examples for us to go through in the time allotted this morning, and I think you already know that.
 2. One example will suffice.
 - a. When the people grumbled in the wilderness, "The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died" (Num 21:6).
 - b. Even then, the Lord demonstrated mercy and had Moses construct a bronze serpent so that whoever was bitten could look on the bronze serpent and live (Num 21:8-9).
- C. Here's what Paul wants to get across to the Corinthians: because the Israelites desired evil, they perished. If you likewise desire evil, you will perish.
1. While there are some cases in the New Testament of physical punishment for sin, I doubt seriously that's Paul's point, for he is concerned with spiritual, not physical matters, throughout this text.
 2. You know that if we repeatedly have evil desires and refuse to rid ourselves of them, we will suffer consequences.
 - a. Jesus says about the parable of the weeds and tares: "Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers (THOSE WHO DESIRE EVIL), and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 13:40-42).
 - b. Speaking of false teachers, Peter writes, "And many will follow their sensuality (DESIRE FOR EVIL), and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep" (2 Pt 2:2-3).
 3. Are you in danger of losing your salvation because of an evil desire?

EVIL DOWNFALL, v. 12

- A. "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."
- B. Why did Paul place this admonition where he did? I think there are two reasons:
 - 1. It seemed that the Israelites were standing tall. God had led them through the Red Sea, provided food for them, and they fell dramatically. In fact, Moses was on Sinai receiving the law when the people are down below urging Aaron to construct a golden calf.
 - 2. The strong in Corinth likely thought they were standing tall.
 - a. In fact, that seems to have been a large part of their problem. From what we read back in chapter 8, it seems that the strong were saying, "Look, we know those idols aren't real, for there's only one true God. Therefore, if you have a problem in our eating meat sacrificed to idols, just get over it."
 - b. Oh, they were strong, but those who consider themselves strong in the faith need to be careful that they don't fall.
 - 3. Think of the examples where the strong fell mightily.
 - a. Immediately before we read of David's adultery with Bathsheba, we learn that the Syrians and Ammonites attacked Israel, but David's men were able to fight them back. Then, after a success at God's hands, David sins with Bathsheba (2 Sm 11-12).
 - b. Do you recall what Peter said before his denial of Jesus? "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (Mt 25:33).
 - 4. Why is it that those who believe they are standing firm often fall?
 - a. There is a belief that we can overcome sin on our own, without the help of God.
 - 1) I'm convinced that was part of Peter's problem.
 - 2) Notice what he says to Jesus: "I will never fall away." He didn't say, "If God strengthens me, I won't," but he depended on his own strength and power. He, therefore, fell.
 - b. There is also the belief that we don't need to guard ourselves against temptation.
 - 1) Again, think of Peter.
 - 2) He said, "I'm not going to fall away" Therefore, he wasn't cautious when the opportunity arose for him to fall.

EVIL DIVERSION, v. 13

- A. I like the way Paul ends this paragraph.
 - 1. He has been warning the Corinthians of all the dangers they faced, and then he brings the paragraph to a high point and says, "Yes, there's danger, but there's also hope."
 - 2. He writes, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. 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, that you may be able to endure it."
- B. What hope for the strong in Corinth who were struggling with eating meat sacrificed in temples and engaging in sexual immorality.
 - 1. Their temptations were not unique in man's existence—but others have struggled with sexual immorality and the desire for fine dining and paganism.
 - 2. Their temptations could not overcome the power of God—as strong as the temptations were, God is stronger, and he would not allow Satan to tempt beyond their ability.
 - 3. Their temptations were not the only way to handle the situation—God would not only force Satan to keep the temptation at a manageable level, but God would provide an alternative to the temptation.
- C. What a comfort to us in this age!
 - 1. Our temptations are not unique among men.
 - a. I don't know what temptations you regularly face—sexual temptation, greed, anger, tongue—but I know that you are not alone. Others face the exact same temptations you face.
 - b. In fact, Jesus faced the same sort of temptations we face: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Heb 4:15).
 - 1) There's not a type of temptation we face that Jesus himself did not face. While the Bible doesn't say this, I'm fairly certain that Jesus even faced more intense temptations, for Satan knew that if Jesus did not sin and died for man, he would be forever defeated.
 - 2) The caveat with Jesus' temptations, of course, is that Heb 4:15 goes on to say that he was without sin. If Jesus overcame temptation, we can overcome as well through the power he gives us.
 - 2. Our temptations cannot overcome the power of God.
 - a. While Satan has the power to come and tempt us, he does not have all power. He cannot tempt us more than we can handle.
 - b. God knows you.
 - 1) "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Mt 10:30).
 - 2) If God knows how many hairs are on our head, doesn't it stand to reason that he knows what

level of temptation we can endure?

- 3) The good news is that he does, and whatever your struggle, he will not allow Satan to torment you beyond your ability to withstand.
3. Sin is not the only way to handle the temptation.
 - a. Whatever we're tempted to do, we can find a more appropriate way to handle the situation.
 - b. David could have gone back in his palace when he saw Bathsheba bathing, Peter could have walked away from the fire when he was tempted to deny Jesus, and Paul could have investigated Stephen's claims before he participated in his martyrdom.
 - c. Whatever our temptation, God will provide another way. Shall we look for the other way, or shall we indulge our flesh?