

KNOCK, KNOCK
1 Corinthians 10:1-14
(sermon outline and some content from Joel Gregory)

Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
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“Knock, knock.”

“Who’s there?”

“Temptation.”

“Temptation who?”

“Temptation you! Always! Every time!”

A young couple is struggling with their finances. In an effort to get a better handle on their spending, they agreed that whenever they were tempted to make an impulsive purchase they would say, “Get behind me Satan.” One evening the wife came home with a very elegant dress that was obviously not a budgeted item. She proudly modeled it for her husband and asked him what he thought. He noted its beauty but wondered why his wife had not adhered to their little agreement. He remarked, “I thought we agreed that whenever we are tempted to make an impulsive purchase we would say, ‘Get behind me Satan.’ Did you forget to do that?” The wife replied, “Oh no, I did that just like we agreed.” The husband then asked, “Well, what happened this time?” She confessed, “He said it looks good from back here too!” (John Ortberg, 6/26/96, quoted in IOW Fall 1996)

Among the milieu of reality television shows, we find a show that is called “Temptation Island.” Fox describes the show as an unscripted dramatic series in which unmarried couples travel to an exotic locale to test and explore the strength of their relationships. Put plainly, they throw good looking men and women your way to see if you will remain faithful to your boyfriend or girlfriend.

This show, perhaps, hits reality more than any of the others, for all of us dwell on Temptation Island. We’re all tempted by greed, lust, money, power, or substances – whatever it might be that would drag us away from Kingdom values.

Temptation is always knocking at our door.

1 Corinthians 10 talks about temptation.

I. Remember the results of failure to resist temptation.

Divine biblical revelation as well as mere human history leave no doubt about the results of failure in temptation. You pay the price when you fail to resist. There are real, radical, results when you fail to resist temptation.

In verses 6-10, Paul lists four temptations failed by Israel: idolatry, sexual immorality, testing God, and grumbling (of all things), which God obviously takes more seriously than we do.

God's punishment was no fluke. Multiple, successive examples in this passage make it too clear to avoid. Yielding to temptation costs. A whole train of events in Israel's history and in world history demonstrate the cost of yielding.

The evidence of failure to resist temptation is recorded. These things are written down for an example to the rest of us. The record of ancient Israel's failure was of no help to Israel any longer. They had already fallen. They had already failed. The biblical stories are intended for us as warnings. They are admonitions that we change our behavior before facing the same end. The whole of sacred and secular history stands as a warning. Listen to it. Do not yield to temptation.

For all the theories of learning proposed by educators, I've concluded there are basically two ways to learn how to live life. You can live life by learning from your own failures, or you can live life learning from the failures of others. You want to avoid a lot of failures of your own? Watch with wide eyes as those around you fall to temptation, fail, and end up with broken lives and shattered dreams. You can learn by living, or you can learn by looking.

One lady said, "You can live life being a good example, or you can live life being a horrible warning."

It's much cheaper tuition when you learn by looking. That's what Paul calls them to do here in 1 Corinthians 10. Look at verse 6. "These things happened as an example for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved." He says it again in verse 11. "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."

Paul says we now live in the time when the age to come, the age of the Messiah, has already occurred – yet not in its fullness. So we live in that time in which the old age is here, yet the age to come is already begun. It's all written for us, that we who live in this age of Messiah, this age to come, might be able to live victoriously.

Learn from the examples of others.

II. Understand the results of overconfidence.

Look at verse 12.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Be careful of the words, “That’s the last thing that I will ever do.” Or, worse yet, “I’ve done that before, but you can be sure I’ll never do that again.”

Pride is a telescope turned the wrong way. It magnifies self and makes the heavens small.

It’s our pride that makes us independent of God. It’s appealing to feel we are the master of our fate, that we run our own life, that we call our own shots, that we go at it alone. But that feeling is our basic dishonesty. We can’t go at it alone. We are dependent on God for our very next breath. It is dishonest of us to pretend that we are anything but human – small, weak, and limited. So, living independent of God is self-delusion. It’s not just a matter of pride being an unfortunate little trait and humility being an attractive little virtue. It’s our inner psychological integrity that’s at stake. When we are conceited, we are lying to ourselves about what we are. We are pretending to be God and not men. Our pride is the idolatrous worship of ourselves, and that is the national religion of hell.

Pride in our own abilities gets us nowhere. Don’t be overconfident. There is not anything that someone else has done that you might not also do.

A man had been listening all afternoon as two church ladies tried to impress each other with how religious they were. After one finally left, the second one turned to him and noted smugly, “Betty is a good Christian, I suppose, but I just think I live closer to the Lord, that’s all.” The man thought about that for a moment, then replied, “Ain’t neither one of you crowding Him much.” (*Preaching*, Vol. 2, No. 3)

Those of us who think we soar too high fall hard. That’s why a low, humble dwelling is preferable. The tallest trees are the most swayed by the power of the winds, and ambitious men the blasts of fortune. (William Penn, “Some Fruits of Solitude,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 34, No. 1)

Be careful of the words, “I’ll never do that.” Heed the words of the apostle Paul, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” You and I are all just one bad decision away from disaster. And usually pride will cause us to put ourselves in a position that, in the end, can hasten our fall.

I was watching a preseason NFL game and noted one player who was so elated by his catch that he slammed the ball in a victory celebration – before he ever crossed the goal line. The ball was called back to the four yard line. He was so proud of his accomplishment, he was so sure of himself, that he celebrated prematurely.

You can’t celebrate before life is over because the game clock is still ticking.

St. Anthony said, “Expect temptation with your last breath.”

Bonhoeffer describes our tendency to turn off warnings when sin's allurements wink at us.

In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money, or, finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world of nature. Joy in God is extinguished in us, and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, He loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real. The only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God. And now his falsehood is added to this proof of strength. The desire thus aroused envelopes the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us. The questions present themselves: "Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?" "Is it really not permitted to me, yes, expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, to appease desire?" The tempter puts me in a privileged position as he tried to put the hungry Son of God in a privileged position. I boast of my privilege against God. It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.

Don't be proud.

Don't hurl stones too vigorously.

When you see a brother or sister fall, know in your heart that you, yourself, are not above the same sin. Know that if you say yes to the tempter and no to God, you, yourself, will suffer the same consequences.

Adventurer Harry Pidgeon circled the globe in a small sailboat. Once, during an interview, he asked, "Do you know the most dangerous thing a man sailing alone has to face?" The interviewer responded, "I suppose storms and rocks."

"You're wrong," Pidgeon said. "It wasn't storms I was afraid of, but the clear, calm weather when a good breeze was blowing. In a gale when a man goes on deck, he holds fast to something, for he knows he might fall overboard; but in fair weather he's apt to walk around the deck without thinking. Then a little roll of the boat can throw him overboard and he is lost."

The same thing happens to us. When the storm is raging in our life, when temptation is bold, we might hold fast to Jesus. But when the weather is fair and things are calm, we forget to hold on. We walk around in self-confidence, a self-confidence that will cause us to fall.

"Let him who things he stands take heed lest he fall."

Sometimes we try to stay too close to temptation. **In his book *Three Steps Forward and Two Steps Back*, Charles Swindoll wrote, "Do not try to co-exist peacefully with temptation.... If you are weakened by certain kinds of music, you are playing into the hands of Satan himself**

to listen to it. If you're weakened by certain pictures that bring before your eyes that build desires within you that you can't handle, then you're not counteracting sin and temptation. You're tolerating it. You're fertilizing it. You're prompting it.... If you're weakened by a relationship with certain people, abstain from them.... There's a name for folks who linger and try to reason with temptation: victim."

There is no sin in being tempted. "Jesus Christ, Himself, was tempted in every way that we've been tempted," says the author of Hebrews. Temptation is not a sin. God is not disappointed or displeased with us when we are tempted. But when we linger around temptation, we are inviting our own fall, we're staging our own disaster.

Brad Ronnell Braxton, pastor of the Douglas Memorial Community Church in Baltimore, contends that most Christians pray a slightly expanded version of the Lord's Prayer. Instead of stopping with "lead us not into temptation," most of us add "but at least let me flirt with it occasionally." (Brad Ronnell Braxton, "The Greatest Temptation," *The African American Pulpit*, 1 (Winter 1997-1998), 31-39)

III. Recall the remedy in the time of temptation.

Look at verse 13.

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, that you may be able to endure it.

Remember the limitation of temptation: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." If you sin, you choose to sin. You have not been sent some extraordinary test beyond what others must endure. No Christian can ever truly say, "It was more than I could handle, and the devil made me do it."

Recall the character of God. Our strength in temptation is to say that God is good, God is faithful. Temptations are inevitable – daily inevitable, as we all live on Temptation Island. But God does not allow us to face temptations beyond His provision to deliver us.

Many years ago the British Parliament passed a law requiring that a series of marks be painted on the hulls of merchant ships. They consisted of several lines, one above the other. The top was called the "Plimsoll mark" or "load line." It indicated the maximum depth the vessel could be submerged in the water without endangering it in a storm. The practice of putting these markings on large ships was introduced in Parliament by one of its members, a reformer by the name of Samuel Plimsoll. Because the legislation he proposed prevented many disasters at sea and saved thousands of lives, he became known as the sailors' friend.

In God's vision, there is a "Plimsoll mark" on each one of us – an unseen Plimsoll mark. Therefore, the temptations and trials He allows to come our way will never exceed our capacity to bear them. He knows the limit of our load.

Recall the provision of God. God will provide you a way of escape. Look at verse 13 again. "...will provide you the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." The language here is that of an army trapped in the mountains which escapes from an impossible situation through a pass. God will provide a way of escape. You will not be trapped in a cul de sac. Know the key – at the front of temptation there is a way out. At the back end of sin, there may not be.

Don't linger too long lest it grasp you and refuse to let you go. There is a way out – and the way out is early.

Dr. George Sweeting wrote, "Several years ago our family visited Niagara Falls. It was spring, and ice was rushing down the river. As I viewed the large blocks of ice flowing toward the falls, I could see that there were carcasses of dead fish embedded in the ice. Gulls by the score were riding down the river feeding on the fish. As they came to the brink of the falls, their wings would go out, and they would escape from the falls. I watched one gull which seemed to delay and wondered when it would leave. It was engrossed in the carcass of a fish, and when it finally came to the brink of the falls, out went its powerful wings. The bird flapped and flapped and even lifted the ice out of the water, and I thought it would escape. But it had delayed too long so that its claws had frozen into the ice. The weight of the ice was too great, and the gull plunged into the abyss." (Leadership, Vol. 9, No. 3)

Temptations.

Be careful. Most people want to be delivered from temptation, but they'd like to keep in touch.

Temptations of every form come from the same root – the same as the very beginning temptation. Satan tells us there is a better way, just like he told Jesus. There is a short cut. There is more pleasure. He tells us, as he told Adam and Eve, "God is holding back on you. There is so much more to experience. Go ahead and take a bite. God is not to be trusted. God is keeping from you that which is good."

The results and the consequences of yielding to temptation always declare that God is true and that God is good.

I want to say a final word about temptation. Temptation sometimes comes in the forms that we are familiar with. It might be a temptation that is sensual, or it might be a temptation to lie and to cheat. It might be a temptation to find solace in a substance. But there are some other temptations we don't think about as much. The temptation to try to live a life of power – power for yourself.

Henry Nouwen said, "What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life. Jesus asks, 'Do you love me?' We ask, 'Can we sit at your right hand and your left hand in your kingdom?'... We have been tempted to replace love with power." (Henry Nouwen, *Mornings with Henri J. M. Nouwen*, quoted in *Christianity Today*, 2/8/1999)

Perhaps the greatest form of temptation for most Americans is the temptation to be caught in a world that tries to find happiness in material things, a world which consumes more and more, a mind-set which says, “If I buy this, I’ll be somebody, I’ll be happy,” a mind-set that constantly builds bigger and bigger barns, bigger and bigger houses, greater and more powerful cars. When you peel back the skin on this one, it’s the ultimate idolatry. Materialism is idolatry in its finest form – giving myself more sacrifices, worshiping myself.

Unlike some of the other temptations, we don’t fall into this one all at once, but, rather, bit by bit and piece by piece – the decision to have a little more, to go a little easier on yourself, the decision to celebrate this and recognize that. And in the end, you’ve built a temple to yourself.

“Knock, knock.” Temptation is always knocking at our door. So be ready! Be aware!

1. Remember the results of failure to resist temptation.
2. Understand the results of overconfidence.
3. Recall the remedy in the time of temptation.