

Be careful that you do not fall.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

Anchor verse: 1 Cor 10: 12.

Introduction:

A strong, athletic and confident man walks on a wet pavement. Suddenly, he slips and falls. Paul suggests this kind of scene to us in our text: (1 Cor 10:12) *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"*

Of course Paul is not thinking of a man falling on a slippery surface. Paul is thinking of a man slipping and falling on temptation. He thinks of a Christian who is spiritually over-confident and self-assured. He is thinking of a Christian who believes he or she is so strong in the faith in Christ that temptation can come knocking, but the door will not be opened.

A husband may say, "I will never be unfaithful to my wife, I will never commit adultery." It is wonderful if a husband can talk this way. I pray that every husband have a similar resolution. But do you know what Paul would say to this man? He would say, (1 Cor 10:12) *"be careful that you don't fall!"* If we are not careful, we are headed for a fall.

Perhaps there are teenagers who say: "I will never do drugs, I will never engage in pre-marital sex, I will never get drunk or drink and drive." That's great to hear and every young person should make this commitment. However, says Paul, (1 Cor 10:12) *"be careful that you don't fall!"*

Others say: "I will never cheat on my taxes. I will never engage in unethical business practices. I will never commit fraud." That's what we as Christians want to hear and I hope every businessman and civil servant and every worker say this. However, says Paul, (1 Cor 10:12) *"be careful that you don't fall!"*

The majority of married people will say: "I will never get a divorce. I will never use pornography. I will never abuse my kids. I will never use physical force on my spouse." This too is wonderful to hear. However, says Paul, (1 Cor 10:12) *"be careful that you don't fall!"*

When we join as members of the Church, we all say: "I will never stop attending worship services and especially be present at the Lord's Table. I will always hold my minister up in prayer. I will always tithe. I will always take time for family and personal devotions." Wouldn't it be just amazing if every home and family really meant this declaration? However, says Paul, (1 Cor 10:12) *"be careful that you don't fall!"*

There are so many temptations. We could mention gambling, lust, slander, revenge, pride, greed, materialism and a critical unteachable spirit. We need to realise that there are many temptations, many enticements that Satan dresses up to look as attractive as possible. When we least expect it, when we are not being careful, he sticks them in front of us and we slip and fall or wander away from the truth. It happens so quickly, that we are not even aware of it many times.

There are lots of cattle farms in our country. Every once in a while, a cow wanders off and gets lost. Ask a farmer how a cow gets lost, and he will probably reply, "Well, the cow starts nibbling on some green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next bunch and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next bunch of green grass and starts nibbling on that one, and then it moves to the grass right next to a hole in the fence. It then sees even greener grass on the other side of the fence, so it nibbles on that and then goes on to the next... Before it realises what happened, the cow has nibbled itself into being lost."

This is what happens with sin: you nibble yourself into being lost. So Paul says to us: (1 Cor 10:12) *"be careful that you don't fall!"*

Israel was tempted - and fell.

In our Scripture reading Paul reminds us that the children of Israel thought they were safe from temptation. They were over-confident. They thought they were immune to temptation's snares. They thought they would never fall.

The Israelites based their confidence on the wonderful and miraculous blessings God had graciously shown them. (1 Cor 10:2-4) *They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*

Paul compares passing through the Red Sea and through the cloud of God's presence, to baptism. So all of the Israelites saw God's goodness and firm promises to be their God in the same way we see his commitment to us in being baptised. Paul also compares eating manna and drinking water from the rock to the Lord's Supper. The Israelites thought the experience of being miraculously fed and nourished by God would preserve them from falling, as we believe that the Lord's Supper will sustain us and make us strong in the Lord. Having had such tremendous blessings, the Israelites thought that they could not possibly fall. Being people who have communion with the living Christ, we may also think that temptation can never be strong enough to cause our fall.

Yet, when temptation came, the Israelites fell hard. Paul thinks especially of the golden calf the Israelites made and worshiped while Moses was on the top of Mount Sinai with God (Ex 32). Remember what the people said? *"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt"* (Ex 32:4). As punishment, some 3,000 of the Israelites were put to the sword.

Sexual immorality. Paul thinks here of the unfaithfulness when Israel *"began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women who invited them to the sacrifices of their gods"* (Num 25:1-2). God killed 23,000+ by the plague.

Testing the Lord. Paul thinks here of the people's impatience as they travelled around Edom. They spoke against God and against Moses (Num 21). God sent venomous snakes among them to bite them and kill them.

Grumbling. This was a constant sin in Israel. They were forever grumbling and whining about a lack of water and meat; about hardships; about the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic they had in Egypt but couldn't have in the wilderness, about the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num 11:1; 14:2; 16:11,41; Deut 1:27). God responded with a destroying angel and with fire, earthquake, and holes that swallowed men alive.

Paul says all the Israelites were baptised into Moses. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. They had so many blessings and privileges as the people of God. Yet, when temptation came, they fell. The result was premature death and everyone over the age of 20 was denied entrance into the promised land (Num 32:11).

The church in Corinth struggled with spiritual pride. They boasted about all the gifts of the Spirit in their church. They were proud of all the prophecy, speaking in tongues and miraculous healings that took place amongst them. They were sure that they would not fall. They believed that "spiritual people" cannot fall. Yet they did fall into sin. Some of them committed the most terrible immoralities and abominations. And most of them fell for the temptation to become spiritually boastful and proud!

The lesson to be learned from Israel and from the church in Corinth is captured in our text: (1 Cor 10:12) *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"* We are richer in spiritual blessings than the believers of Old Testament times. Upon us *"the fulfilment of the ages has come"* (vs 11). We have seen Jesus come; we have seen him finish his work as Redeemer; we have seen him rise from the grave; we have seen him ascend into heaven; we look forward to him coming again as the triumphant King and Lord. Upon us the Holy Spirit has descended. We are all baptized in a way the Israelites never were. We eat and drink from the Lord's Table in a way the Israelites never could. But in spite of these wonderful blessings, we are not beyond temptation. So *"be careful that you don't fall!"*

Just as with Israel, there are terrible consequences when we fall into temptation and sin. Israel suffered premature death. If we do not have remorse and repent and receive God's forgiveness, we suffer eternal death. Israel was refused entrance into the promised land. If we do not repent, and turn to Christ, we are refused entrance into the Kingdom of God.

How can we be careful?

Listen again to the words of our text: (1 Cor 10:12) *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!* But how do we keep ourselves from falling and if we have fallen, how do we stop ourselves from falling again?

Lets remember what God does not promise to do. God does not promise to remove temptation. We may wish that he would, but that's simply not the way things are. God's desire is not that we should be delivered from temptation, but God's desire is that we should be able to endure, to bear, temptation. God's desire, says our text, is that we remain standing in spite of temptation.

Nowhere does God promise that the tempter's voice will not be whispering in our ears .So, why does God allow temptation in our lives? Because temptation is good for us. Coming through temptation develops and strengthens our faith. Coming through temptation proves our faith to be genuine and sincere. Coming through temptation brings glory and honour to Jesus. In temptation Satan appeals to the worst in man, with the wish that we may do wrong. In testing us through allowing temptation, God makes an appeal to the best in born again man, with the desire that we should remain standing.

We must realise two things: temptation is part of our life and God is our Defender when we face temptation. Listen again to the words of our text:

(1Cor 10:12-13) So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

As our Defender against temptations, God gives us two promises. We will not be tempted beyond what we can bear, and when tempted, God will always provide a way out of it.

God limits our temptations to a level we are able to bear.

God has set a limit on the intensity of every temptation. He first of all promises that any temptation that comes our way "is common to man." When it comes to temptation and sin there is nothing new under the sun. We do not struggle with temptations that are unique and different and other believers have not struggled with before us.

With Moses, it was murder.

With Elijah, it was deep depression.

With Peter, it was public denial.

With Samson, it was lust.

With Thomas, it was cynicism.

Your temptation is not new or different and has been experienced by other Christians many times.

There is also another way that God set a limit on the intensity of temptation. "He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." God knows how much you can handle. Regardless of the nature of your temptation, be it money, sex, anger, gossip, drugs, alcohol, God knows your limitations. He promises to keep a watchful eye on the level of pressures you have to bear.

God always provides a way out

Our text also tells us that alongside every temptation God has designed a way out. That's God's second promise to us when we face temptation. Although the situation may be extremely dangerous and we may be very weak, there always is a way to avoid falling. When you are tempted, God will "provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." Every temptation has an escape route. There always will be an alternative action. If you sincerely want to escape temptation and you know you are going to face a particular temptation, go ahead and ask God to reveal the way out.

Think of Joseph and Potiphar's beautiful, unfaithful wife. "Come to bed with me!" she said. That must have been a strong temptation for the young man. But God provided a way to escape. Joseph was able to run away (Gen 39:7-12). When we you are tempted, run away!!

Remember Jesus when he was tempted in the desert. He was hungry and tired. The thought of the cross probably was already filling him with fear. Satan's temptations to avoid the suffering of the cross certainly looked appealing. But God provided Jesus with the appropriate words from the Bible to combat Satan and he did not fall and he did go to the cross and the grave for our sins.

In each and every instance God provided the means of escape, a way out and place to hide.

Do you worry about going too far with that guy or girl you are dating? Look for ways to avoid being alone too long. Struggling with lust and pornography? Cancel your Internet subscription! Have an uncontrollable temper? Walk away from the fight before it starts. Whatever your weakness, look for the way of escape. It will be there. God has promised to provide it. Take it. Run!!!

Conclusion

You will hear the tempter's voice again. Even though you heard God's word today, even though you saw his love and provision at his Table, even though you have a personal testimony of his miraculous power, even though you were supernaturally saved and redeemed! Temptation will come to you saying: "Go ahead, it may be wrong but you will like it. Go and have some fun."

But you don't have to fall every time temptation comes knocking. You don't have to fall, because God has made you two glorious, wonderful promises: He has promised to limit the intensity of your temptations and he has promised to provide you a way to escape! Listen again to the Word of God: (1 Cor 10:12) *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*

And if you have fallen - prayerfully stand up in the power of the risen Christ, listen to his words of forgiveness *and never again think that you cannot fall*. Be careful, lean on Jesus, and run away from temptation before you sin again!

This is the Word of God.

Amen.