

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it.

Nevertheless . . .

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane he said to his disciples, **“Watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** The scary thing that I see in our society and even among Christians is that we almost seem to assume it is just fine to fall into temptation. “People are homosexual. Get over it. People get divorced. Get over it. People get drunk. Such is life.” It's like when you have the “Get out of jail free card” in Monopoly. Jesus is your “get out of jail free card,” so don't worry about whether you get caught in temptation or not.

Perhaps it would be good for us to review what temptation is again. It is often used to refer to when someone is put in a difficult position or an even impossible position. It was used of Jesus when He was put in the desert with the devil - going hungry and being alone. (Luke 4:13) Paul used it (Acts 20:29) to refer to the plots that the Jews were making against him to take his life. In this letter to the Corinthians Paul said that we are in the **“culmination of the ages”**, when things would go from bad to worse as Jesus predicted.

In the midst of a difficult situation - you are often given different options to take - how to respond in the temptation to get out of it or to just give into it.

- When your spouse is irritating you, do you lash out in anger at him . . . or do you pray for patience and strength to endure their irritations and become more loving instead of less?
- When you have someone show attention to you and make advances towards you, do you give him everything he wants or do you bridle your passions with God's guidance in the Word?
- When you have an addiction to alcohol that you just can't shake - do you get on your knees and seek help or go to the barstool?
- When you are diagnosed with cancer and are faced with terrible treatments, do you despair and assume God has abandoned you - or do you dig into your Bible all the more and seek God's mercy?

The temptation is when you are put under pressure to cave into sin and do what you know you shouldn't; but what might be the easiest thing to do and least painful at the time.

Paul warns, **If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!** Paul uses the example of the Israelites in the Old Testament. He said that they were all **“baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”**

First of all, let's think about what that means. The Israelites were baptized in the sea without even getting wet. Their backs were against the wall of the Red Sea when they had escaped from Egypt, and Pharaoh's army came chasing after them. They were surrounded. But then God opened up the Red Sea and they passed through on dry ground. God placed a pillar of fire between the Israelites and the Egyptian army so they couldn't attack. Then finally when the cloud was lifted and the Egyptian army started following the Israelites into the Red Sea - it was too late. The Israelites reached the other side of the sea and God collapsed the walls of the sea on the army and they all drowned in one swoop. The Israelites were safe on the other side. God's pillar of cloud provided warmth with fire during the night and cooling shade during the day. (Psalm 105) They were provided with miraculous food every morning they called "manna" which means "what is it?" They were given water to miraculously come from a rock so they could drink. A legend of the Jews said that they carried a piece of that rock with them for forty years through the desert.

Whether that legend was true or not - it doesn't matter. What mattered was that God had provided them with food and drink, protection and leadership. God made it clear to the Israelites that Moses was His man - and that they were to follow him and let him lead them. They were in that sense baptized into Moses. They would be safe with him and protected through his leadership and guidance. They had all witnessed God's miracles and could see His presence hovering over them. They could see His food come from the ground every day.

Paul made a deeper connection - that it was actually Christ that was feeding them throughout the desert. He was the rock that was accompanying them. Hidden behind the cloud, the manna, Moses - all of it - was Christ - who was guiding His people to the Promised Land so that He could be born through them and save them from their sins and take them to the ultimate Promised Land of heaven. Moses and the Prophets made this clear to the people. The Israelites were on a divine mission from God. They were God's chosen people through whom the Messiah would come.

NEVERTHELESS it was that very protection; that very baptism; that the Israelites abused as they fell into the temptation of arrogance. They seemed to assume that life would be easy as they headed into the Promised Land; that would let them just stroll in without lifting a finger. So that every time something difficult happened - a temptation came - they fell into sin.

- When it came time to enter the Promised Land - they fell into fear over the size of the Canaanites.
- When they were at the foot of Mount Sinai and thought that Moses had abandoned them, they fell into idolatry and had Aaron make their god into a golden calf.
- When God fed them with manna and they became weary of the redundancy of the food, they complained because they wanted a different variety of food.
- When they were traveling to the east the Edomites would not let them take a ten mile shortcut through their country - so they had to take an extra 170 mile trip around the whole country just to get where they wanted to go. Instead of just making the trek, the Israelites griped about it and accused Moses and God of bringing them into the desert to die.
- Then, when they finally got to the border of the Promised Land, the Moabites seduced them into worshiping their gods by using temple prostitutes which the men of Israel could have sex with in order to turn their gods on.

Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. In spite of all of these advantages, they still rejected God and fell into the temptation. Their bodies ended up strewn across the wilderness, as dead as can be - by God's wrath. One example that Paul used was how God sent snakes to put many people to death after they complained about going around Edom. (Numbers 21:6) When the Israelites decided to worship Moab's god through sex God put 23,000 people to death in one killing. (Numbers 25 - also includes 1,000 more leaders!) Another example is how even after the Israelites were in the Promised Land, God put 70,000 Israelite men to death as a result of an arrogant census that David took to number how many people he had. (1 Chronicles 21)

Is falling into temptation a serious thing? Paul points back to these awful periods of rebellion and death and says to the Corinthians and to us, **These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.** Warnings of what? Pushing God past the limits of patience so that He will put you to death in your sin. When you habitually yell at your spouse and call names; when you continue to have too much to drink; when you continue to look at pornography; when you continue to have sexual relations outside of marriage; when you continue to ignore His Word; you are playing with fire - even the fires of hell. God has a limit to His patience.

Jesus knew God's wrath well. You could see it in the Garden as He sweat drops of blood. The devil tempted Him in the desert by offering Jesus the easy way out. "Just worship me, and all of this will be yours." Jesus resisted that temptation with the Word. He didn't give in. Thank God for that! When He was put in that difficult position where there was nowhere to go but through hell on the cross - He didn't flee from it. He went into it. He felt every bit of it. He did the only thing that could be done to save you from an eternity in hell. He was baptized with your sins. He was given the cup of suffering and death. He drank the cup in full and licked every drop of it on the cross. He did this with a purpose - to pay for your soul and make you His. He did it to provide a place for us to hide from God's wrath, and He came out alive!

You also were baptized - not into Moses - but into Christ! Instead of drowning the Egyptians, God drowned your sinful nature. Instead of living in a pillar of cloud over your head, He sent His Holy Spirit into your heart to fight with you and through you against your sinful nature and the temptations of the world and the devil. You have the comfort of knowing that your sins have been put on Jesus and you have been bathed in HIS blood and HIS righteousness. He wants you to know and believe that you are HIS; to trust in your baptism. It was no mere ceremony. It was a powerful anointing from God and with HIS Spirit.

You too have a holy manna from heaven. What is it? It is the actual body and blood of the LORD Jesus Christ, shed on the cross; raised from the dead. It is a living bread; a living body and blood; for the forgiveness of sins; that you can eat and drink every week. It is meant to strengthen your faith; to give you forgiveness that you always need and you always have through faith. The Lord's Supper is no mere symbol. Here we are dealing with a miraculous meal for YOU to eat and drink; the eternal covenant of mercy and forgiveness.

NEVERTHELESS that isn't keeping Christians from falling in the desert of this world; falling away from Christ by following after their own sinful desires. They have forgotten how to fight against temptation and cling to Christ. They have forgotten what they were baptized for. They have failed to see how powerful He is and how He can work through and in tiny and sinful people like you and me. The baptism and manna from heaven isn't given to you to make you think God will just let you do whatever you want whenever you want and

that you have freedom to fall into whatever temptation you like. You do have great advantages with the Word and Sacrament NOT to give in to your flesh; not to give up under temptation; to keep running to God for help and forgiveness.

Here's another thing. The word says, "**he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.**"

Sometimes couples who are living together before marriage will say, "We HAD to move in together because of finances." Couples get divorced and when you finally catch up with them they say, "We HAD to do this." Yet many of those same couples never came in for counseling; for one drop of God's Word! Do you really think that you had no other option than to life, when God says this? When other options are offered - you can tell right away if someone doesn't want any other options. They treat you like you are some naive idiot.

Most of the time the problem isn't that there is no other way. The problem is that the way is difficult. It's hard. It involves confessing sin and asking for forgiveness; changing your own sinful behavior. The temptation is that when we are put in a very difficult situation; to despair of God's help; to quit fighting to do the right thing; to stop praying; or to lie or to cheat in order to get out of a problem; or to make excuses as to why we just have no choice but to sin. Standing up under temptation may mean going broke. It may mean enduring a lot of garbage and pain. It may mean working under terrible conditions. But it will also mean clinging to Christ all the more and bathing in His mercy all the more. The test is whether you will trust in God and rely on His mercy even when He is seemingly killing you; even when you are dying.

One of the most fascinating stories to deal with temptation is the story of Corrie Ten Boom in "the Hiding Place." Her family helped to hide Jews from the authorities so that they wouldn't be shipped off to the concentration camps. Corrie was reluctantly willing to lie and bribe people in order to keep the Jews safe. She felt guilty about it; but she felt she had no other choice. But her sister - a seemingly even stronger Christian - was conscience bound not to lie. Then one day the ultimate test came. The authorities barged in their door and asked them if they were hiding Jews. Tell the truth and betray someone to death, or lie to the authorities to keep someone alive. Her sister told the authorities, "They are under the table." But then she laughed derisively as she said it. The authorities scowled at her and left; thinking that she was mocking them. She told the truth in a lying way it would seem. In spite of their best of efforts, they were eventually caught. Corrie's sister died in a concentration camp along with her father for protecting Jews. The hiding place was found and is now a museum in the Netherlands. What a great example of enduring temptation and suffering to death - with one hope - to receive the crown of life through faith in Christ Jesus. He was their hope and their reward.

Nevertheless . . . that word rings out to me in this text. Nevertheless. It is a word that seems to say, "They had it all laid out for them - and they blew it." Nevertheless . . . will that be what God says of you or of me? "I know what He'll say! I've blown it!" Don't give up now! Don't forget - Jesus died for you too. Your salvation is already paid for by Christ. You are baptized. You are fed with Christ on a weekly basis - to eat and drink of His forgiveness - full and free. Today you have God's promise that with all of your problems and temptations - they will not be beyond what you can bear - for Christ bore your sins - you have no reason to run from Christ - to fall from faith and give in to what you know is wrong. You have reason to believe; reason to fight; reason to hope; reason to love; because of Christ and in Christ alone; Who is our only way out of this world. Amen.