

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Lent 3, March 20, 2022
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For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ 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." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 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. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ 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.

The night before Jesus died, He ate with His disciples, instituted the Lord's Supper, and then led them out toward the Mt. of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane. There, He turned to His friends and said, ***"This very night, you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."*** (Matthew 26:31) That couldn't be true, could it? His disciples would desert Him? Think of who they were: Simon Peter, James and John—the sons of thunder—, Phillip and Andrew, Matthew—these were the cornerstones of the early church! These were some of the men that God would choose to write down the words of the New Testament! These were the men who had casted out demons in Jesus' name, the same ones who had dropped everything in order to follow Him! Could *these* men *really* fall into temptation and distance themselves from their beloved Master?

Peter couldn't believe that, and he boldly declared, ***"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. . .even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!"*** (Matthew 26:33,35) And, of course, we know what happened next, don't we? Before the rooster crowed at the break of dawn, Peter had already, three different times, denied that Jesus was even a passing acquaintance of his. The rest of these men were also quite certain of themselves, and yet as soon as Jesus was arrested, ***"All the disciples deserted Him and fled."*** (Matthew 26:56)

We can learn a lot from the disciples' mistakes. They were very sure of themselves, a little *too* sure, in fact, and that was their downfall. Each of us ought to pay careful attention to the words of the Apostle Paul today, when he says, ***"Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."*** Be careful, he says, because you can indeed fall. And so, the theme we'll be considering today is:

If You Think You Stand Firm, Re-check Your Balance

- I. Realize that you too can fall
- II. Take note of the warning signs
- III. Reach out to Christ for support

The FedEx shipping company has cycled through a number of slogans over they years, all of them saying pretty much the same thing. "Relax, it's FedEx." Another was, "The world, on time." Or maybe you remember, "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight." All of these campaign

slogans are just different ways of saying, "It's ok, we can handle it." Now, it's one thing for a giant multi-billion dollar company to make that claim, "I can handle it." It's another thing when a person says that, and people do tend to carry that mindset.

You've probably heard it before when children stubbornly insist to their parents, "I can handle it." As adults, we often have that same attitude. "I can handle it." In pride, we regularly think things like, "I can do it myself," because society drills it into our heads that "you can do anything you put your mind to." Now, it's one thing to try to fix your car by yourself or to try to find an item at a grocery store without asking a clerk for assistance, it's another thing to approach spiritual matters like this.

In spiritual matters, this mindset becomes particularly dangerous. Take, for instance, how casually we approach the subject of temptation. There are plenty of Christians, like Peter, who figure they stand pretty firmly in the faith and will be able to resist whatever the Devil throws at them. They might not think those things in so many words, but their actions testify to that attitude.

Are you such a Christian? We can figure that out pretty easily, because there are a few telltale signs of Christians who think they are standing pretty firmly. Such a person tends to have a rather careless approach when it comes to reading God's Word. God calls the Bible the Sword of the Spirit (cf. Ephesians 6:17), with which we can defend ourselves against the attacks of the Devil. But, if we think we're standing pretty firmly, we tend to leave the Bible to a "if I have time later" part of our routines, or we just leave it to an hour on Sunday mornings.

Another telltale sign of Christians who think they're standing pretty firmly is that they won't think of church as being the essential lifeblood of their lives, rather church attendance becomes a matter of convenience, easily pushed off till next week if something else comes up or if we're simply too tired and would prefer a lazy Sunday. Maybe that doesn't perfectly describe you, but I think we can all agree that we've pushed God's Word further into the corner to allow room for distractions.

Many a pastor has tried to encourage members who were not regularly hearing the Word of God at church or receiving the Lord's Supper, only to hear them say, *"It's alright pastor. You don't have to worry about me just because I'm not at church. I still believe in Jesus, and I pray everyday."* That response makes a pastor cringe because it's a sign of a person who is not going to be able to resist when temptation comes.

We learn from Scripture that anyone can fall into temptation and sin no matter how strong they think they are. For proof, at the beginning of our text, Paul points to the people of Israel who had a very close, special relationship with God! Paul writes about how God led them out of captivity through powerful miracles, walked them through the Red Sea on dry land, guided them with a pillar of cloud, fed them manna from heaven and miraculously provided them water to drink. And what happened? They fell into temptation, did not trust God, and the whole population was condemned to die in the wilderness without reaching the promised land. If it can happen to them, it can happen to anyone, including you.

And that's Paul's point here. Jesus told His disciples to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation while He was just a few feet away! They were tempted, they did fall, but thank God that Jesus was *just a few feet away!* When the mob came to arrest Jesus, the ever-caring Savior said, ***"If you seek me, let these men go."***⁹ ***This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: 'Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.'***" (John 18:8-9) Even with their misplaced confidence failing them, Jesus

showed that they could remain confident in *Him*. He would not run away, leaving them, and forsaking them! And He won't leave you, either. When tempted, realize that you too can fall. But at the same time, you have the ever-present, ever-stable Savior in whom you *can* trust. He is present to help you fight against temptation, He is present to keep you out of the devil's clutches, and He is present to pick you up with forgiveness when you fall.

And you will fall, so it's also important that we take Paul's warnings here very seriously. You've all seen the signs before: "Walk, don't run. Slippery when wet." The signs are plastered around every pool in America, words memorized by all, and yet every pool you've ever gone to you've undoubtedly seen children excitedly fast-walking around the edge of the pool while lifeguards blow their whistles at them to tell them to slow down. It's easy for a child to read the signs but still think, "It's ok, I won't slip. I can be careful while running."

Paul gives us a few warning signs in our text as well, warning us against certain sins. We should pay special attention to these, not because these sins are worse than all others, but because they are the types of temptations that can easily sneak up on us. These are the types of sins that we think we can fool around the edges of without falling in. But again, Paul warns us, ***"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"***

The first warning sign is in verse 7: ***"Do not be idolaters as some of them were."*** He's speaking about the Children of Israel there. They ate and drank, and they didn't think it was a big deal if they participated in some of the practices of their heathen neighbors, and in the end it cost them. God's warning to us is that if we spend too much time acting like those who despise God, we will soon become one of them. You can't be a Christian on Sunday and act like an unbeliever the rest of the week. That arrangement won't last for long. If you try to run around the edges there and ignore God's warning signs—you will soon fall.

The second warning sign is in verse 8: ***"We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did."*** With sexual immorality running rampant at the time, in one day, 23,000 of the Children of Israel died in a plague, and everyone learned the seriousness of sexual sins. The world treats these things as "everyone, just do what makes you happy." And we might often agree! We might think that we can give things a simple look and there's no harm done; we can watch what we want—no harm done; we can push the envelope, but that's not what God thinks about sexual sins, is it? And we shouldn't think along those lines either. If we ignore God's warning signs, we'll end up with the same terrible fate.

The third warning sign is in verse 9: ***"We must not put Christ to the test"***—always challenging Him to "prove Himself" to us, trying to make Him answer our prayers on *our* terms. This only demonstrates a lack of faith on our part.

And fourthly, in verse 10: ***"We should not grumble"*** as some in Israel did against Moses and Aaron and then 14,000 people died as a result. The people complained about how God had cared for them in their lives—they complained that He hadn't done enough. We might feel at times that we are *right* in grumbling; we might feel justified by our sour mood when God allows difficulty in our lives. This can only lead us away from God, undermining our trust and confidence in Him.

The Israelites ignored the warning signs, thought they stood firm, and they fell. And these things were written down for our learning, so we must not see the same warning signs and think, "It's ok, I should be fine!" No matter how strong you think you are, you too can fall! So, the question remains: **How do we find our balance?**

Well, if you've ever been in a pitch-black room before, you might know that when your eyes can't see anything at all, it becomes rather hard to balance. In fact, you may even begin tipping one direction before you realize it. Paul has been warning us about losing our balance and falling. What's the natural solution? What do you do if you find yourself teetering in a pitch-black room? You reach out, trying to grab a hold of something firm.

It's rather sobering to realize that even you, no matter how strong you are in the faith, can fall. Especially if you become too sure of yourself and confident that sin won't get you, you are headed for disaster. This realization might make us feel like we have to walk through life filled with fear—fear that at any moment we could fall into sin and perish like so many before. So, can we step forward with any sort of confidence at all? Yes! Not because we have any reason for confidence in ourselves, but because we can grab ahold of God's Son Jesus Christ for support!

Verse 13 of our text is one of the most comforting passages in Scripture on this subject. There we read, ***"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."*** Even when sin is crouching at your doorstep, God is still there defending you. He says, ***"He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability."*** He does for you just as He did for Job when the Devil went to go and test Job. God came to his defense and put a limit on what the Devil could do, and He does the same for you too.

As we fight against temptation, we do so not by simply trying our best, but by turning daily to God's Word, growing in our love and trust and faith in God. Clinging to that Word, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to simply say, "No." Through Christ, we have the ability as James writes to ***"resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*** (James 4:7)

But what happens if you do fall? We all know that sometimes, no matter how sure your footing is, you hit a wet patch of ground and soon you're sitting on the ground. As you get older, it doesn't matter how stable you feel, sometimes you just fall. That's the case spiritually for us too. Even when we recognize temptation, when we heed the warning signs, and when we trust in the Lord—we still fall into sin. But even when we're on the ground—*especially* when we're on the ground having tumbled headfirst into sin—especially then we must grab hold of Christ. He is our way of escape.

Just as impetuous Peter denied Christ three times, but then after Jesus died and rose again, Jesus didn't let Peter's fall be the last words. He spoke again with Peter and restored him. Peter had the assurance that when Jesus hung there on the cross, He was paying even for the sins that Peter had committed in those final hours, and He was willing to do it. When we inevitably crumble to temptation and fall into sin, we still have a strong support in Christ, whose cross says, ***"For every time you have fallen, I have suffered your penalty. My death, my cross, is your assurance that when you fall, there is still hope—you can trust Me for forgiveness."*** From there on our butts, we can look up at Him and confidently claim, ***"He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world—even mine."***

So, if you think you stand firm, you need to recheck your balance. Realize that you can fall. Take note of the warning signs. And reach out to Christ for your support. And *then*, you are indeed standing firm, dear friends, because Jesus stands with you. Raise Him as your shield and your defense. He is your defense against the tempter and against temptation. He is your defense against sin and its guilt. And He is your defense before your Father's throne in heaven, pleading on your behalf, so that you might inherit eternal life. Thanks be to God for our confidence, in Jesus' name. Amen.