



## THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

November 11, 2012

### *‘Two Lessons On the Right Estimation of Temptation’*

#### **Sermon Text: First Corinthians 10:1-13**

*“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

Fellow Redeemed from the Tempter’s power, through Christ our Lord, Amen,

The Bible teaches that there is a temptation to good and a temptation to evil. The temptation to good comes from God and it’s sole purpose is the strengthening of faith by testing – much as gold is tested and hence refined by fire.

We have many examples of such testing and strengthening of faith recorded in Scripture for our learning and spiritual growth.

In Genesis 22:1-18, God tempts Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

In another example, we read that God in dealing with the Children of Israel, permitted false teachers to arise within their congregation with a show of signs and wonders and so tested His people as to whether they would remain steadfast in the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 10:10 reads: “...*the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*”

So also, in *our* time, God, though never the source of evil, will in His divine providence permit heresies and false teachers to arise within Christian congregations, *not* to bring about apostasy – the falling of away of those professing to be Christians from His Truth – but rather, as we read in First Corinthians 11:19: “*For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*”

Temptation to evil, on the other hand, comes from the Devil – The Great Tempter. It also comes from the World around us – at times including fellow Christians – and from our own depraved sinful nature – our ‘Old Adam’, which clings to our flesh so long as we are in these bodies in this sinful world. The goal of all these enemies of our faith is the seduction of the believer into sin and eternal death.

It is the temptation to evil against which the Child of God must needs be on guard and it is the temptation to evil upon which I would direct your attention this morning.

Now the ironic thing about the temptation to evil is that many Christians are inclined to hold one of two wrong views of it. Either they will become obsessed with worrying they will not be able to resist temptation and remain in the faith to the end; or they become presumptuous, thinking that simply because they call themselves ‘Christians’ – “*after all we have our faith to protect us*” – they can go into any situation – no matter how vile and perverse – and not fall into Sin.

The first is an *overestimation* of temptation and the second, an *underestimation* of temptation. *Both* of these views are erroneous and are in and of themselves, the result of giving into evil temptation and thus *Sin*.

You see in the first instance – where a person worries about their ability to resist temptation – there is a lack of trust in God, which is at the root of their obsessive worry. To worry thusly is to call God a liar. Therefore worry is *Sin*.

And in the second instance – where a person presumes that simply because they are a Christian, they are somehow in their own right superior to other people and can therefore trust their own ability to withstand the temptation to evil – no matter what the situation – it is again, a distrust of God, the illusion of carnal security, a matter of ‘self-esteem’ (which is nothing more than idolatry) and extreme foolishness.

For knowingly going to, or staying in a place or situation where there is the temptation to evil is as foolish as a soldier knowingly walking into an enemy ambush or carelessly dancing about in a mine field.

And it is not only foolish to place oneself – or stay – in the way of temptation, but it is disobedience to the command of God to flee *Sin*.

And so today we want to learn from Scripture:

*'Two Lessons On the Right Estimation of Temptation'*

The first lesson is this: ***Beware, Temptation can be fatal!***

In our text, the Apostle Paul refers to the history of the Children of Israel in the desert wilderness.

When Moses by the power of God brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt, *all* the Israelites – *without exception* – escaped the land of their sore bondage. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, not only to guide them along the way, but also as a reminder that He was their God and was with them.

The entire congregation – again, *without exception* – then passed through the Red Sea on dry ground – the Lord of Hosts, Himself, causing the waters to stand as a great wall on either side. Yes, dear Christians, the merciful presence of God surrounded them every step of the way – just as His presence surrounds you, as you sojourn through this veil of tears.

And so it was that they all – *without exception* – received their baptism unto Moses, receiving in them the obligation to follow him as their God-given leader. The cloud and sea then became the elements by which the Children of Israel were separated to the Lord as His Holy People.

Thus the cloud and the sea are types of the *New Covenant* – the New Testament sacrament of Holy Baptism. The cloud and the miraculous escape through the sea were God's seal and pledge of His undeserved mercy and promise unto His Children, just as the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper are for us today.

For just as the children of Israel were delivered from the tyranny of Pharaoh and led out from under the terrible bondage of Egypt to freedom through the cloud and the sea, likewise we – *through our baptism into Christ* – are delivered from the power of the devil and freed from our slavery to Sin by the One Mediator between God and Man – our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And God not only brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt, but we are told He also in His great mercy *sustained* them. For our text says that they all ate the same spiritual food and drank of the same spiritual drink. Yes, God caused manna – bread – to rain down from heaven to feed them. And not once – but twice – when they were athirst, gave them water which flowed out from solid rock. And this bread and water were not only intended to sustain their physical bodies, but *by the Word of God* it sustained also their faith – their spiritual life – for while they indeed physically drank of the water which flowed at their feet, they were also drinking from the *Spiritual Rock* – Jesus Christ – and so their faith was refreshed and sustained.

Dear Friends, we are blessed in like manner when we eat the bread and drink of the cup connected with the Word of God in the Sacrament of the Altar. For by God's grace and

mercy and without any merit or worthiness on our part, we do *indeed* receive the true body and blood of Jesus Christ – *our Rock and our Salvation!*

But how did the Children of Israel repay the wonderful blessings bestowed upon them? Laying aside and neglecting the Word of the Lord, they readily – and *willingly* – gave into vile temptations to evil and in Sin did lust after evil things.

**They were idolaters.** As we read in Exodus 32:1-10, “*And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the Lord. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.*”

**They sinned sexually,** as recorded in Numbers 25:1-9, “*And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor. And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.*”

**They tempted God and murmured against Him.** In Numbers 21:4-6, we read: “*And they (the Children of Israel) journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to*

*compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.”*

We have here the clear Word of God that tells us because of all these sins – and similar others – of the thousands of adults among the Children of Israel when they were first brought out of Egypt, only two men – Joshua and Caleb – entered the Promised Land.

This too, is written for *our* learning and as a warning *to us*.

You see, one of the most successful devices the Tempter employs against Christians is to lead us into the sin of supposing we are somehow different – *better* – than those who went before us. We might even be tempted to say within ourselves, as did the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day: *“If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them...”* (Matthew 23:30).

Oh, Dear Christians, let us not succumb to the Devil’s ploy to lead us to think we are somehow different or better than they!

For are we really so much different?

As New Testament Christians – believers alive in these End Times – do we not *also* have that same Old Adam – that man of sin – within us? Are there not *many* times we have fallen into the temptations to commit sins of idolatry, sensuality, presumption and discontent with which we are confronted each and every day of our lives?

Let us confess our sin before God and repent!

Have we given into temptation to sexual sin?

The Bible says that whoever simply looks upon a woman with sexual lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28) *And God’s standard applies to women concerning lusting after men as well.* God would have us know that simply entertaining the thought of sexual immorality with one who is not our spouse is as much Sin as physically acting upon the temptation.

Let us humbly confess our sin unto God and repent!

Are we content with the many temporal blessings God has given us, rendering unto Him due praise and thanksgiving? Or do we rail against Him and express resentment for what we believe is ‘not enough’?

Do we grow weary and dissatisfied with the solid nourishing spiritual food of the whole Truth of God’s Word – wishing we could perhaps join a larger church body regardless of

its teaching and practice – thinking how much easier it would be if we ‘just wouldn’t be so concerned with the purity of Scriptural doctrine and practice in our midst’?

Let us confess our sin before God and repent!

Do we engage in playing with temptation – and in doing so, tempt God?

What about the places of ‘entertainment’ we frequent, the music to which we listen, the books and magazines we choose to read, the television programs we watch, the internet sites we visit, the videos we rent, or the movies we see at the theater?

Are these materials which encourage and seduce us to sin against God and man? Or do they serve to glorify Him?

Do we willingly run after these temptations when we should rather be fleeing such temptations to evil and occasions to sin as God commands us?

*This is not a game, dear Christians!*

To underestimate the temptation to evil is pure folly and can indeed be fatal to the soul. To think you can stand in the middle of such temptation to sin – especially such as we are faced with so openly in these last days – without suffering serious injury to our faith-life is *not* ‘courage of faith’! It is but a foolish and false security, that can only lead once more to spiritual death. As the Words of our text warn us: “... *let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*”

So, Dear Christian Friends, let us repent of our sins and lay hold of, receive and ever hold fast to the undeserved forgiveness of all our sins – the Forgiveness that is ours by the Grace of God Alone – through faith alone in the all-atoning suffering and death of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ.

And then let us re-dedicate our lives to Christ and strive by the power of the Holy Spirit in His Word to resist all temptation to evil and lead a God-pleasing life in *all* our thoughts, our words and our actions.

The second lesson we would learn this morning is this:

**Temptation to sin does not *have* to be fatal.**

While the temptations we face may at times seem unusual and great, they are no different and of no greater degree than the temptations which are commonly experienced by all people – including your Savior, Jesus during His mission here on earth.

Furthermore, every temptation comes upon you only by the permission of your Heavenly Father, who works all things together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28) – *including the temptations we endure.*

And what comfort it is to all who believe that Jesus successfully endured and overcame every temptation of the Devil.

And more, He suffered and died for you, so that you would be freed from slavery to sin and have life – and have it more abundantly – *through Him!* For after His suffering and death on the Cross, Jesus rose again on that first Easter morning and is ascended into heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father as our Prophet, Priest and King.

Dear Friends, Jesus has promised that you will not be tempted beyond that which you are able to bear without falling. But that He will, with the temptation, provide a way out of it, so that you can faithfully endure and finally overcome all temptation.

Therefore, temptation – no matter what the source – is *NOT* beyond human endurance, if we will but deny ourselves and place all our trust in our good and gracious God. For without Him, we can do nothing, but we *CAN* accomplish all things by the power of Christ that works in us. For God is faithful. *He loves you.* So much so, that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, to save the whole world from Sin and Death.

So, fellow Christians, let the focus of your daily life be *Jesus Christ and His Gospel.*

And let us be ever certain of the salvation we have so freely through Him.

So motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, let us be ever mindfully vigilant and faithfully flee those temptations – whether they be of the Devil, the World, or our own sinful flesh – that seek to seduce us to sin against our good and gracious God.

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”* (First Peter 5:8-11)

**And now may the Peace of God, the Love of Christ and the Communion  
of the Holy Spirit, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.**