Overcoming Temptation

Read 1 Corinthians 10:9-22

Key verse: “No temptation has seized you that isn’t common for people. But God is faithful. He won’t allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Do you think your will-power or spiritual maturity is all you need to handle temptation? If so, you may be headed for a big fall. That’s the evidence of scientific research as well as the Bible.

An article in *Live Science* documents a series of experiments run by Dr. Loran Nordgren, who teaches at Northwestern University. The experiments put college students in situations where they were tempted to smoke, eat junk food, or neglect their studies.

The research found that we overestimate our ability to overcome temptation until we’re in the “heat of the moment.” We think that we can handle more temptation than we really can. Dr. Nordgren cautioned: “Those who are most confident about their self-control are the most likely to give in to temptation.”

The good Doctor Nordgren’s advice? “The key is simply to avoid any situations where vices and other weaknesses thrive and, most importantly, for individuals to keep a humble view of their willpower.”

This advice, coming from a teacher in a secular university, is biblically sound. “So those who think they are standing need to watch out or else they may fall [to temptation]....So then, my dear friends, run away from [temptation]” (1 Corinthians 10:12,14).

For Christians in first-century Corinth, an especially strong temptation was the temptation toward idolatry. “Run away from the worship of false gods!” (v. 14)

In Corinth were numerous temples for the worship of false gods including Asclepius, Apollo, and Aphrodite. The worship of Aphrodite, with its many “sacred prostitutes,” was an especially strong temptation.
The Apostle Paul contrasts the worship of Jesus, through the sacrament of Holy Communion, to the worship of false gods (vv. 14-22). Paul contrasts the Corinthians’ participation “in the table of the Lord” (v. 21) with offering sacrifices to the false gods, a practice Paul calls “sharing in demons” (v. 20). He warns: “You can’t drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you can’t participate in the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (v. 21).

How does this passage speak to us today?

1. No matter how spiritually mature you think you are or how much will-power you possess, never discount the power of temptation or your susceptibility to it: “So those who think they are standing need to watch out or else they may fall” (v. 12).

2. Stay away from situations where you are likely to face temptation. “Run away from [temptation]” (v. 14).

3. At the same time, trust in God’s faithfulness and God’s power to deliver you from every temptation: “But God is faithful. He won’t allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it” (v. 13).

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