**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**Avoiding the Pitfalls of Spiritual Pride**
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Code: 80-291

We are a great and blessed congregation, and we are right at this moment in our history riding the crest in many ways of the goodness of God. People are coming to the Lord, and coming into our church, and our church is flourishing, and its ministries. We're all scrambling to try to keep up with everything. There is great expectation among all of you, and among people around the world who look at our church and trust that they will see the best and the most Christ honoring ministry, and this is a great time for us.

And as I have thought about that, it strikes me that that's a time of great vulnerability. And there's a particular verse that I was actually had prepared something else to say today. But last night, I kept thinking about this verse, and it's a very important one. And I wanna address it this morning. 1 Corinthians chapter 10. I don't often change what I'm gonna say on Saturday night. That is not a good thing to do. That could make for a long night. But last night, I did just that. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 12, here is a manaxiumreally, a principle, "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." No one would be faithful as a shepherd of the flock, as a minister of God's people who have been sound such a warning, that just at the very time you think you are the strongest, you may be on the brink of tragedy. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

I think it would be safe to say that as a church, we think we stand. We would look at ourselves and say we are strong, and we are faithful, and we are knowledgeable, and we are blessed, and we are having an impact. And if I asked you, do you think we're standing? Or do you think we're falling? Most of you would say no, I think we stand. And it's just at that point that we have to be vigilant, because a certain kind of indifference can come in, a lack of vigilance, or a kind of undo liberty. A lot of assumptions about our future, which can be very dangerous. So, we certainly would fall into the category of those who would assess ourselves as being blessed and doing well, and it is just at that point that we need to be reminded of this truth that whoever thinks he stands should take heed, or that will change. Take heed means beware, because built into the confidence of being blessed, and the confidence of doing well, is a certain kind of lethargy, a certain loss of vigilance.

Paul is saying this in a greater context. This 12$^{th}$verse exists at the end of a passage that starts in verse 1. Let me read it to you. "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all were immersed into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most

of them God was not well pleased, for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things as they also craved, and do not be idolaters, as some of them were, as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play. Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and 23,000 fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man. And God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."

This is a powerful and a dramatic passage. And it talks about the danger of being spiritually strong. The danger of experiencing privileges. And the context is very important. Go back to chapter 1 for a moment. Paul is writing this to the Corinthian church, which was a privileged church, a true church. Chapter 1, verse 4, Paul says, "I thank my God always concerning you." There is so much to be thankful for about this church. The Grace of God was given to them in Christ, Jesus. Verse 4, verse 5, "in everything they were enriched in him. They were enriched in all speech, all knowledge." They had heard the truth. They knew the truth. The testimony concerning Christ, the gospel was confirmed in them. They were not lacking in any spiritual gift. They were waiting eagerly for the return of the Lord, Jesus Christ. In verse 9, "God had been faithful to them to genuinely call them into fellowship of his Son, Christ, Jesus, our Lord."

So, the bottom line is that we're a very privileged church. Over in verse 30, it says they are, "in Christ, Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." They were the possessors of the real thing. And they had of course had Paul as one of their pastors. They had been exposed to the teaching of Peter and Apollus. But they developed the wrong attitude. In chapter 4, verse 8, Paul speaks to them with penetrating sarcasm, "You are already filled. You have already become rich. You have become kings without us." They thought they arrived. They were filled. They had all they needed. They were rich in all the necessary resources. They were actually sovereign. They were king. King of the churches. And Paul says, "I wish you were."

The most blistering language that you can offer as a rebuke to someone is in the form of sarcasm. They were smug, and feeling secure and proud, thinking themselves to be rich and having arrived. To literally be kings. And they were therefore in great danger of falling. In fact, they were tilted so far, the fall had already begun. And there was a lot at stake, a lot.

And just exactly what will become clear in chapter 9, back to chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians. And here, the apostle Paul talks about the priority of church ministry, which is evangelism. And in verse 12, he says this, the end of the verse: "we endure all things in order that we may cause no hindrance to the

gospel of Christ."  The bottom line at the end of all of this is that we don't wanna do anything that hinders our mission in the world.  It matters what we are spiritually because we have a mission to fulfill.  And to put it very clearly, if you preach the message of Jesus Christ, and live a life in opposition to it, you are a hindrance to the gospel.

Listen, the unbelieving world is looking for any excuse to reject the truth, right?  And all they need is hypocrisy, and that's plenty for them.  The unbelieving world is very eager to find that you don't live what you say.  Very eager to find out that your church is not what it says it is, that your preacher preaches one message, and lives a different one.  If they can uncover hypocrisy, they can justify their rejection and unbelief.  The gospel is hindered if our lives don't match what we say.  This is what is at stake.  We may have experienced immense spiritual privilege.  We may look at ourselves as being filled and rich and sort of the reigning church.  But it's just at that point that we think we stand that we are in danger of a huge fall, which will cause great hindrance to the gospel.  In fact, in verse 15 of chapter 9, end of the verse, Paul speaking on a personal level, because this does get down to persons and individuals, "it would be better for me to die, than have any man make my boast an empty one."  Paul said I would rather be dead than inconsistent with what I preach.  I would rather be dead than have my life discredited, my ministry discredited, because my church is discredited.  Verse 16, he says, "Look, I am under divine judgment if I don't preach", verse 17, "I have a stewardship entrusted to me."  "My whole life,"  he says in verse 19, "is a kind of slavery, and my slavery is in order that I might win more people to Christ, that I might win,"  twice in verse 20, he says that "I might win"  in verse 21, "that I might win,"  in verse 22.  That's why he existed.  To win people to the gospel, whether they were Jews under the law, whether they were gentiles without the law, whether they were weak, whatever they were.  The purpose was to win them through Christ.

So verse 23, he says, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel".  Now, if we're going to preach the gospel, if we have this stewardship, and this responsibility, and we're here to win more people for Christ, our lives have to match our message.  That's what he means when he says it would be better to die.  Forget the whole thing.  I'll just go to heaven and get out of here if I can't support what I say.  And as a result, in verse 24, he says, look, "We all are running in the same,"  sort of in a spiritual race, with an evangelistic emphasis.  We all have to run to win.  And not just to win for ourselves, but to win others, as he's been talking about here, using the word win now for the sixth time.  It's about winning others.  In order to win others, you got to win your own race to maintain your spiritual integrity.  After verse 25, exercise self-control.  You can't run aimlessly, verse 26, you can't shadow box.  You gotta take this battle seriously, verse 27, he said, "I buffeth my body".  We all spent yesterday buffeting our bodies.  Same word.  Amazing how the English language can pick up two completely different concepts and attach the same word to it.  But it's a matter of pounding your body into submission and making it your slave, because the one thing you don't wanna do is to preach to others and yourself be disqualified as a model for the message you preach.  I mean, that's the worst possible scenario, that you preach the message of the gospel, and you, yourself aren't qualified to demonstrate its power.  There's a lot at stake.  And it's just at the point when you think that you're

standing that you become less vigilant, less concerned about the issues of your life, you give way to your freedoms, you abuse grace, you stop running to win, you stop competing spiritually, you let go of self-control, you run rather aimlessly, and you buffet your body instead of buffeting it. And you wind up useless. And the gospel discredited.

There's an awful lot at stake here. And it is in this context that we come to chapter 10, which begins with the word for, which is a connective. We cannot do anything to undermine our ministry, to undermine our testimony, to undermine our impact for the gospel. But others have, and here's a classic illustration. The classic illustration. Israel was chosen by God as a nation, a witness nation. Their purpose was to witness to the true and living God to all the nations around them. To witness not only to the existence of God, and the character of God, but the word of God, the law of God, the purposes of God, the will of God. They were God's witness nation. But they were useless. They were all disqualified, because they failed to be vigilant spiritually. So he says by way of illustration, ""For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren," about our fathers. Talking about the Jews, our fathers. And he takes us back to the time of the Exodus, "they were all under the cloud. They all passed through the sea. They were all immersed into Moses. They all ate the same spiritual food," the manna that God provided for them, "They all drank the same spiritual drink," God provided, as you remember, water for them, including water from Iraq. And this is a look at the assets, the spiritual assets that were given to them. Notice that the word all appears five times, stressing, without exception, that they had received the blessing of God that had fallen on all of them. Everybody was a beneficiary. They were all under the cloud. And you remember from Exodus 13:21, "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them." They all experienced divine direction, divine leading, collectively. They were all there. And God was leading them, leading them out of Egypt, and from all that they knew, sort of to the unknown. But God knew he was leading them in the direction of the Promised Land. They were all under the leadership of God through supernatural means. They all passed through the sea. They all went through the Red Sea on dry land. You remembered the story, they walked through the Red Sea on dry land because God parted the waters, and then the waters closed in and drowned Pharaoh's army. They experienced divine leading. They experienced divine deliverance. That was what delivered them out of the bondage of Egypt in which they had been slaves for four centuries. They were called out of Egypt by miraculous power. They were called under God's leading by miraculous manifestation of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Verse 2 says, "they were all," and the word baptism means to be immersed into Moses. It's used here not in a wet sense, but in a dry sense. It's metaphoric. You could say you were immersed in your work, or whatever, and by that, you don't mean you're doing work underwater. You simply mean you were literally engulfed in it. And that's the way the word is used here. When we see the word baptize, we have all the Christian connotation in our minds applied to it. It's not talking about any kind of spiritual reality being manifested in some kind of ceremony, such as Christian baptism, which of course was a long way from being inaugurated in the time of Moses. It's simply the word immersed. And what it means, being baptized into Moses is literally that they were identified as one people with their leader. They were identified as one people with their leader. They were united as one community. They

were in solidarity with their leader. God gave them direction supernaturally through a cloud and a pillar of fire. God gave them deliverance supernaturally through parting the sea, and God gave them the law and all that came with the law through the supernatural revelation to their leader, Moses, and they were all there identified with Moses as one people under their leader, receiving the truth of God.

And they all ate the same spiritual food. All of them received that manna which was derived from the spirit of God, who created it and sent it down every day. It was divine provision to add to divine deliverance and divine direction, and a divine union. And they all drank the same spiritual drink. The whole point is here that they had all necessary provisions. God gave them everything he could give them. In fact, verse 4 reveals a powerful truth, "they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them." From the time they started out of Egypt, they had a spiritual rock following them. They had a spiritual person called the rock following them everywhere they went in those 40 years of wilderness wandering. And who was that rock? "The rock was Christ." What a great statement. The rock was literally Messiah. Messiah was there with them when they came out of Egypt. The rock was Christ. He is identified a number of times as the angel of the Lord. But here, the New Testament tells us that the angel of the Lord, who is with Israel, following them, directing them, guiding them, protecting them, supporting them, was none other than the rock, who is Christ. He was the ever present help that the father had sent on their behalf. They knew that. Exodus 17:7, they even comment, "Is the Lord among us?" Of course. What else could they want? Divine guidance. Divine deliverance. A divine union under their leader, from whom came divine truth. Divine provision. And divine presence. The Lord was in their midst.

And I think about that in relation to the church, and that's the point, isn't it? Isn't this supposed to be an example to us? We have so many parallels. We have divine guidance through the truth of God. We have been divinely delivered by salvation. We have been immersed into Christ, who is our head, and we are his body. We are solidly a new assembly, a new fellowship in Christ. We are sustained by the spiritual bread and the spiritual water that feeds our souls and quenches the thirst that is in our hearts. And we have Christ. We have Christ ever with us, as he's pictured in Revelations chapter 1, "moving in his church." We literally have the temple of the spirit of Christ who dwells in us. With all of that privilege, verse 5 says, "Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not well pleased." That's sad. Most of them, all but two. And there could have been as many as a couple of million who started out of Egypt. Seems to me that God killed about 50,000 himself along the way. And there must have been some natural deaths occurring as well in those 40 years. So the numbers diminished some. But it's still a mass of people. And with most of them, God was not well pleased. And the result? "They were laid low in the wilderness." They were strewn like corpses. That was a graphic illustration of verse 27 of chapter 9.

Preaching to others, and being disqualified. The landscape of the church. The landscape of the evangelical church is strewn with corpses. People who are laid low, disqualified, because their lives didn't support their message. Paul didn't wanna be laid low on the Christian landscape. He didn't

wanna just become another corpse, just another casualty, just another calamity. Somebody who talks about Christ proclaims Christ, claims Christ, says he loves Christ, ostensibly serves Christ. And then ends up a corpse on the landscape. He didn't want that to happen, and that's why he said at the end of chapter 9, "I have to run to win. I have to compete, exercising self-control. I have to run not aimlessly, box not as a shadow boxer. I have to pound my body into submission, because I do not want to be another casualty." And that would be true for any of us. It's certainly true for me. It's certainly true for those in spiritual leadership. But it's true for everybody, because all of us are called to witness. All of us who have ever proclaimed the gospel need to support that with our lives. And it seems to me in the day in which we live, there are more corpses around the evangelical landscape than there have ever been in my life.

And it's gonna get worse, folks, because the chief gospel prevails. And you got people who can never live up to the gospel because they're not really Christians. Churches are filled with non-Christians claiming Christ. That's bad enough. Those churches that know the true gospel, where the true gospel is preached and understood, are called to live that gospel because they can. Because the power of the spirit is there. They have the true gospel in _____. They knew the truth. They believed the truth. But still, there were Corinthian carcasses strewn all over the place. What went wrong? What goes wrong in a privileged spiritual environment? And you go from the assets in the first five verses to the abuses in verses 6-10. And there's no ambiguity here. The apostle Paul is crystal clear in drawing this illustration. Verse 6, he begins by saying, "Now these things happened as examples for us," that's what this is about. He repeats it in verse 11, "these things happen to them as an example." We need to learn from this. These are models, figures, types, examples, illustrations. If our smug contentment, if our lack of vigilance, if our lack of self-control, if our failure to win and to bring our body into submission is like theirs, we're gonna end up the same way as they were. And you know how they were strewn all over the desert, the whole generation died in the wilderness. Never entered the Promised Land. Only the two, Joshua and Caleb, from that original generation.

So what were their sins? First one, verse 6, "we should not crave evil things as they also craved," or, it says in the authorized, "they lust after evil things." The text actually says they were longers after evil things. And if you go back to Numbers, chapter 11, verse 4, you'll read this phrase, "The rabble had greedy desires." They just wanted all the stuff they had in Egypt. And they complained because they didn't have melons and onions and garlic and leeks, and whatever other things they had in Egypt. They wanted what they had there. And the Corinthians were sort of the same, you know? They wanted to drag into the church all the stuff they enjoyed. That whole 1 Epistle, 1 Corinthians, attacks them at every point in which they tried to drag into the church their worldly cultural habits. Health, wealth, pre-occupation with the world, with the physical, with the worldly lifestyle, buying into the worldly and cultural viewpoints, perspectives. Sure, the Corinthians had been told the gospel, believed the gospel, been blessed, sustained, provided for through Christ. But they just couldn't let go of the stuff in the world. They hankered for it. And they just kept the door open. They shut - in a

sense, they went through the door into the church, but they kept the back door open for the world to come in, in whatever form. And I don't need to say any more than that. Anything that's a part of the passing system. They were pre-occupied with that. They - it wasn't enough to look ahead to what God had for them. They just wanted all the stuff that they had before they were saved. They wanted to hold on to the world.

The second thing that characterized them, in verse 7, "do not be idolaters, as some of them were, as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." The Corinthians had a problem because they were holding on to their former religious activities. You have to understand something. I don't want to get too bogged down into history. This might surprise you. The United States of America is the first nation in human history that I know anything about, and this can be corroborated by some historians, that has separated the church from the state. Do you understand that? This is the first. That's part of the great American experiment. Every other culture historically connects its religion to its body politic. That's history. And it was no different in the Judaistic culture. While the Jews were in Egypt, they were enamored by Egyptian Gods that dominated the society. And they come out of Egypt, and they go to Mount Sinai, and the first thing they do is to build a golden calf. And they drag the name of God down because they said, in building the golden calf, and carrying on their deviant orgy that this was a feast to Jehovah, God, Exodus 32. What an abomination that was. And the Corinthians were doing the same thing. They couldn't separate their social life from their religious life. Their culture was all bound up in religion. And going to an idol festival, going to the temple to engage yourself in worship was part of what you did. It would be like celebrating the fourth of July, or whatever else your society does. It would be like going to the football game, or the baseball game, or some social gathering. It all had overtones of idols. And the tendency was to come into the church and then to go back. And so here, in chapter 10, he says wait a minute, verse 14, "Flee from idolatry," he says to them. I mean, an idol isn't anything anyway, but you cannot, look at verse 20, you cannot go back and forth. The things which the gentiles sacrificed, they sacrificed to demons, and not to God, and I don't want you to become partakers in demons. You can't drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You can't partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. You're gonna provoke the Lord to jealousy. You think you're stronger than he is?

So they were holding on to the culture, to the idols of the culture. There's overlap in these things. Certainly this is part of worldliness. You hold on to the cultural viewpoints and perspectives and societal events and ceremonies and celebrations. And so, they were really tied to idols, just as Israel was. Israel made the golden calf, and said it was a feast to Jehovah. They even said, this is to honor the God that brought us up out of Egypt. And yet, they were blaspheming. And God was greatly displeased. Why? Because they sat down to eat and drink, which means they had a feast, and then they stood up to play. And that has sexual connotations. They did what the Egyptians did at their idolatry festivals. They engaged in sexual immorality. Fertility rights were found constantly among ancient religions. When it says they stood up to play, uses the same word play found in Genesis 26, I

think it's verse 8, and it speaks of Isaac's conjugal caresses of his wife Rebecca. So they were engaged in idolatry at its grossest point.

So here is Israel, having been delivered, guided, provided for, instructed, and it literally fails as a nation to take advantage of its privileges. And they wind up corpses all over the wilderness. In fact, in Exodus 32, when the golden calf incident happened, God himself killed 3,000 men in one day. And he could have killed them all. But he gave them an illustration of what they all deserved. And the Corinthians were doing the same thing. They were going from their worship back to their world, and imbibing and indulging in all the idols, and all the expressions of the worldly culture. They were bowing down to every Pagan shrine. And they will not suffer it.

There's more. This of course included verse eight, "nor let us act immorally." This gets right to the heart of it. They're acting immorally. Some of the Israelites were, and 23,000 fell in one day. Doesn't mean 23,000 were acting immorally. I think a whole lot more than that were acting immorally. But God killed 23,000 to tell them all what they deserved. Idolatry and immorality are sisters. Numbers 25 talks about them "playing the harlot," with, in that case, Molobites. Israel got caught in harlotry all the time, not just spiritual harlotry, but actual harlotry, because prostitutes were always associated with false worship. In Corinth, there was the principle temple dedicated to Venus. A vile, corrupt place it was, with orgies used to pay homage to her. And I have actually been in sort of a secret artifact room, or center, in Corinth, and seen some of the clay models of things indescribable. It was a vile place. How could they go to the table of the Lord and then go back to that? How can you go to the house of the Lord and then to a pornographic site on your computer? How can you do that? How can you make that kind of transition? How can you worship at the throne of God and at the table of demons? That kind of cultural reality faces us today in ways it never faced people in the past. And in one day, 23,000 were slain by God. Numbers 25:9, "for this kind of activity, God says the next say, he slew 1,000 more." And the Corinthians were already into this. They were joining Christ to a Harlot, he says in chapter 6, and tells them, "even dare to run from immorality."

There's more, verse 9, not only did they engage in worldliness and idolatry and immorality, but it says in verse 9, "nor let us try or test the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents." You remember the 21st chapter of Numbers, it's one of the great stories about the serpent lifted up in the wilderness, which Jesus says is an illustration of his own being lifted up, and the salvation he provides. Here's what brought that about, Numbers 21:5, "The people spoke against God." They didn't like the way things were going in the wilderness. They weren't happy with what God was doing, or not doing. Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There's no food, no water. We hate this miserable food. They didn't like what God had provided. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. We don't know how many, but this must have been a massive number of people. So, 3,000. Another 1,000. Another 23,000. Thousands and thousands more. And finally, they came to Moses and said we've sinned because we've spoken against the Lord. _____ with the Lord, he may remove the serpents

from us.  Moses did, and put a serpent up on a pole, and said if you look to be healed, to remember the story.

This, the apostle Paul, identifies as testing the Lord.  And that's the idea of just seeing how far you can go before God acts.  You know, the Christian life will give you the opposite view.  The Christian life is an effort to get as close to Jesus Christ as you can.  The Christian life is an effort to be as pure as you can.  It's not a life that says because God is gracious, I'm gonna see how far I can go to the edge before he reacts negative.  If that's how you're living your life, seeing how close to the edge you can get, you're testing God's tolerance.  And in Isis and _____, it says in Acts 5:9, "put God to the test,"  and he struck him dead.  Hebrews 3:9, "your Fathers tested me,"  quoting Psalm 95.  And Matthew 4:7, Jesus said, "you shall not put God to the test."  Don't test God.  How far can you push God?  And how much complaining can you do?  How much sin can you get away with?  Rather than how much can I be like the Savior. They did that.

And finally, and this seems benign, verse 10, "Nor grumble,"  murmur.  Grumble's a good word.  It's kind of onomonopaethic.  Some of them did.  And were destroyed by the destroyer.  And the judgment angels, rabbis called them Mashi.  It was the judgment angel the destroyer who destroyed the first born in Egypt, Exodus 12.  It was he who was ready to slay the people in the plagues of Jerusalem, _____ 24, he destroyed the Assyrians, 2 Chronicles 32.  Death to the complainers.  I like that.  I hate complainers.  They're so destructive.  They're so poisonous.  They were assuming that God didn't know what was best.  They were assuming that God didn't do what was best.  They were assuming that their plan was better than his.  There are a lot of terrible assumptions.  And Exodus 16:2 says, "the whole congregation grumbled."  It only takes a few, and pretty soon, it becomes a cacophony from everywhere.  You're saying how did that get in with all these gross vices?  Because you have no right to complain against God.  And Numbers 16 says, "God came down and slew 14,700 of them."  That's why I said when you start adding the numbers up, it gets pretty close to 50,000 or more that God himself has slain in the wilderness.  And here you have the list.  Worldliness. Idolatry.  Immorality.  Testing God.  Complaining.  We stand warned.  If you don't get a grip on your life, and exercise self-denial, self-control, in the spiritual dimension, then all the privileges that you have from God can be diminished, as you abuse those privileges until finally you're just another corpse strewn out there on the landscape, flirting with the world, flirting with its idols, flirting with its morals, flirting with its materials, pushing the patience of God, complaining that you don't get what you want when you want it.  This is a tragic way to live your life.  You may think that everything is okay, and that you're standing pretty strong, but if these are the kind of attitudes that have found root in your heart, you're about ready to have a fall.

And so, verse 11 says, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."  Here we are, living in the time of Messiah, that's a phrase that means the messianic time, and that whole story is an example to us to instruct us not to go down that path.  Here we are, in the messianic age.  It's not that we're hoping for

a Messiah.  We already know the Messiah.  We're the most privileged of all.  That's what he's intending to say.  Most of us upon whom the ends of the ages have come are far greater recipients of divine privilege than those who lived in the day of Moses.  And with even greater privilege than anyone has ever had before this time, are we gonna fail?  Are we gonna wind up as corpses strewn all over the place?  It would be the greatest tragedy, of course.  It always is the greatest tragedy.  For those in positions of leadership in a church with a high profile, that names the name of Christ, endeavors to exalt the word of God, and live according to that word, to be disqualified and have their life wrecked, and the gospel that's been preached undermined.  And that goes for the pew as well as the pulpit, all the way down the line.  All the way down the line.

You carry, in a sense as a Christian, the weight of the gospel on your back.  The credibility of the gospel depends on how you live your life.  You say yeah, but it's so hard out there.  It's tough.  There's a lot coming at me.  Well, let me help you with the closing verse, verse 13.  Before you start making too many excuses, this is the verse that eliminates all your excuses.  Well, Satan's very powerful.  Well, the demons are after me.  Well, you know, I'm overwhelmed by the powers of Satan.  No, verse 13, "No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man."

Now listen to this, folks.  You will never have a temptation that is anything other than human.  What?  That's right.  I thought the Devil made me do it.  No.  The Devil orchestrates the ungodly system, the evil system, the anti-God system.  He works through the unbelieving people.  He does not exercise supernatural power over Christians that makes it impossible for them to do what they should.  That's ridiculous.  Greater is he that is in you that he that is in the world.  Of course.  And any temptation that ever comes your way is just human.  You're not getting - people say, well, you're the pastor of the church.  The Devil probably gangs up more on you.  I really don't know what the Devil is doing.  I couldn't care less what he's doing.  I pay no attention to him.  But I know that I'm like anybody else.  I don't have more or less of anything than any other human being has.  I think maybe the Devil will do some things to discourage me and the environment around.  Could he do that?  I see him at work in the world.  I don't like his work in the world.  And I think he may infiltrate the church with non-believers, and I don't like what he does in the church through non-believers.  But I'm not afraid that the Devil is manipulating me against the power of God, and having the victory.  I don't believe that.  We're all in the same situation.  We're human, and what comes at us comes at us in the way it comes to everybody.  It's our humanity.  It's our humanness that makes us vulnerable.  But I'll tell you this.  You can't blame anybody.  You certainly can't blame the Devil.  And you can't blame a bunch of demons.  No temptation has overtaken you.  None ever.  But such as its human.  It's never going to be so supernatural that it's beyond you.

It's what - the problem is, you're human, and you've fallen.  And that's the problem.  But God is, what?  What's it say?  Faithful.  "Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able."  Did you get that?  The reason supernatural forces of hell cannot overpower a believer is because God would never allow it.  Never.  He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to deal with.

And also, "with the temptation will always provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." You will never have anything in your life by way of a test or a temptation for which God does not provide the way out. So, you have no one to blame but yourself. Don't be chasing the demons and blaming them, and don't be blaming the system around you. The battle comes down to you. And sin occurs because you conceive it in your heart, and it brings forth its own evil. Sorry, but that's it. That's why Paul said, look, I have to discipline myself, exercise self-control. And I have to wage the spiritual battle using the truth of God, and leaning on the spirit, and trusting in the promised faithfulness of God, and buffeting my body. I don't wanna be another casualty. And Paul never was. And the greatest tragedy of course that those who proclaimed the gospel the loudest and the longest should find their corpses strewn all over the place. What a terrible undermining that is. And what dishonor it brings to Christ.

So, it's just when we think we stand that we have to be reminded that we are always necessarily devoted to the spiritual means to win the battle. And as you grow in Christ, and as you mature in Christ, you get stronger. You become a spiritual young man. You become a spiritual father. And you get stronger in that battle. And the Lord will always provide the way out. Nowhere to go. No one to blame but yourself. And of course, my open prayer for our church is at this point in its history, when we stand, and so many look to us, that we maintain the vigilance that keeps up standing, right? And it comes all the way down to your life, my life, the life of the pastors, the elders, the deacons, the deaconesses, the leaders of the church. Comes all the way down to your life, as I said earlier, you bear on your back in a sense the whole of the church in the spirit of influence that you have. We rise or fall on you. You aren't an island out there. You carry us all. And you carry all the saints. And in a sense, you carry the truthfulness of the gospel. There's a lot at stake. God has great things, I know, in the future for us, and we wanna be privileged, as he has privileged us in the past. Blessed us as he has blessed us in the past. But we also wanna be faithful until the end.

Let's pray. Father, I bring before you our whole church family, all of us, my own life and that of my own family, and other pastors and elders and leaders and teachers, and all who serve, and all who worship, and all the folks in the congregation, all of us, as we prayed early in the service that all our thoughts and all our words and all our actions would be honorable to you. That we would embrace the great and immense privileges that we have. That we would never fall to the abuses that Israel fell to, and the Corinthians were so prone to succumb to. That you would give us the strength in the truth, and in the spirit as a church to bear the testimony of Christ with integrity and credibility, and faithfulness. We know there are many that named your name who are corpses on the landscape, and many churches that are dead, useless. We wanna be vibrant, alive, effective, never proud and always humble, but mostly faithful to live the truth we proclaimed. And we know then that you will continue to use these people to your glory. And that is our goal and our desire. Father now, we do commend to you the truth that we have heard from your word, and we place again in your care all of our church family, asking oh, God, that you would sustain us and strengthen us, not apart from our own will, but that you would teach us to follow the path of righteousness that we might always be in

honor to your name, so that we would never cause any hindrance to the gospel, but that we would uphold the light of the glory of the gospel in the shining light of our faithfulness for others to see and to believe.  And we commit this to you in Christ name, Amen.

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