

We have a lot to do so we're going to turn right away. Let's open our bibles. 1 Corinthians, chapter 10 is where we are this morning. 1 Corinthians, chapter 10 as we continue in our little mini-series, working through chapter 8, chapter 9, and chapter 10. We want to pick up where we left off last week. We're studying the topic of Christian liberties. We've been in it for a few weeks. I've been reminding you week after week of that first initial definition that we learned many weeks ago is that Christian liberty is any conduct not specifically addressed in scripture. It is often referred to as a gray area. Now you understand what that means—it's an analogy, right? Scriptures are filled with black and white areas where the scriptures speak about conduct that should govern the lives of a Christ follower. That's black and white. But what do we do when there are conduct issues that are not addressed in scripture...that are not black or white. They fall into that gray area. We are essentially asking the question how do we know what is right and what is wrong. That is the issue of Christian liberty.

We have been learning as we have been working through the chapters a number of principles that help us make those decisions. Now last week we learned that Christian liberty can be misused and that has been the driving point for Paul since he moved into chapter 10—actually verses 1 all the way through the end of verse 11. Paul is moving toward one point. You will remember we worked through those verses last week. Paul is using the nation of Israel, the history of the Jewish people as the primary illustration. He is talking to us about their advantages that they had as the chosen people of God. He transitions then into their failures and he is really moving and pushing toward verse 12. Look at verse 12. He says, "Therefore, (that's the transitional word; it is pointing back to everything he just said, verses 1-11...therefore, he says) let anyone who thinks that he stands..." (and this is the idea that someone who thinks that they are above any type of infiltration of sin in their life, that a liberty would not move to something other than a pure liberty. That a liberty would not turn into a sin issue for them. If you think you stand, he says) "Take heed (which is his warning) lest you fall." In other words, lest you fall into sin. Paul is driving at the concept of overconfidence. Essentially, he is telling the Corinthians, do not be like what you have seen the Jewish people display, i.e., a sense of over confidence, especially, when it comes to this area of freedom in your life of Christian liberty because when you do that you are going to fall.

Now what happens? We spoke about this towards the end of last week. What happens when you misuse your liberty? Well, it is no longer a liberty, right? It becomes a sin. What was once a gray area for you has now become black and white because what has essentially happened is that you have taken a liberty and you have pushed it too far and now that has become a point of temptation and sin in your life. And that is exactly where Paul begins to transition from verse 12 into verse 13. Essentially Paul deals with the after effects of liberty misused in verse 13. He begins to discuss temptation. So in verse 13, what we are going to discover is that Paul is going to teach us how to be triumphant over temptation—very practical. We are going to look at one verse this morning and that is it...one verse.

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Gray Areas Pt 4
The Temptations of Christian Liberties
1 Corinthians 10:13
Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

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Before get there, I want you to hear this and I want you to hear me clearly because it is important for us to understand this as we move into this study. If you are going to be serious about following Christ...if you are going to be serious about naming the name of Christ as his disciple, then you have to be serious about your lifestyle, about your liberties and about temptation. If you just move through life and there is a sense where you are not serious about these particular issues, you are going to have a stunted growth as a follower of Christ. You have to take on the issues of white as a follower of Christ. You cannot assume the lifestyle is one who is not a follower of Christ so you have to look at lifestyle issues. You have to look at freedoms and liberties and you have to judge them carefully, and you have to look at temptations.

Now the thing about temptations is that none of us can avoid them. It does not matter how long you have been following Christ, you cannot avoid temptations. Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant reformation, said, "You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head but you can certainly prevent them from building a nest in your hair." And that is what we are going to be doing today. We are going to learn the techniques of how we can overcome temptation. Let's look at the text and then we are going to unpack it. Verse 13, he says, "No temptation is overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability but with the temptation, He will also provide the way of escape which you may be able to endure." Is it possible to overcome temptation? Is it possible? Yes, if you understand this text. What we see here are four statements in the text that we need to understand if we are going to be triumphant over temptation. So let me just break them down for you.

The first statement is simple to a point. It gives us detail. He says, "No temptation has overtaken you." Stop right there. What does temptation want to do in your life? It wants to overtake you. The Greek word is *lambánō* which literally has this sense that it will take in whatever manner. Temptation wants to seize you. It wants to paralyze you. It wants to dominate you. It wants to control you. It wants to lead you to sin. We might say that this is temptation's desire; that temptation's desire in your life is to rule over you. This is something that is important for us to understand. Why is it important? Well, for one thing, you need to understand the battle. You need to understand the battle that we are in. Remember what Paul says in Ephesians 6. He says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." You hear what Paul is saying? He is saying, you need to be serious about what is going on in the greater dynamics. You need to understand that it is just not some whimsical impact in your life called temptation trying to lead you into something that is wrong. No, it is much greater than that. The reality is that you are now a child of God. You are a son or daughter of God. You are in a spiritual battle. And this is something you need to take seriously.

Remember what Paul said. I was reminding our house church pastors just a couple of Fridays ago when we were meeting. I took them to II Timothy, chapter 2 and I said, “Do you remember what Paul said should be a mindset of yours as a pastor, that you are a soldier and that you are in a battle.” Well, that is not just for pastors. That is for all of us. We need to understand that we are now called into a way of thinking, a way of life that is similar to that of being in the military. Think about it. When they call you into the military, they do not just say, well, you know what? If you feel like showing up, show up. If you wake up one morning and you want to join us, well, come out in the field and we will do some calisthenics. No! What do they do? I mean, when you are in, you are in! Right? They shave your head, they give you the uniform, and they give you the number. It is the whole nine yards. And if you do not do what they want you to do, well, you are in big trouble. They change the whole framework of your mind. Now you are in the military! You are a soldier; you do not entangle yourself with the affairs of those who are outside the military. That is the sense; that is the concept that you need to take on—that you are in a battle and temptation wants to overtake you. Now the thing is, is that you cannot allow that. You cannot allow that defeat to happen in your life. Well, why? For one thing, it tends to grow. Temptation left unchecked will grow in your life. Again, quoting from Martin Luther, he says, “The people who intend to stop temptation by yielding to it only sets themselves on fire all the more. For although the temptation may be quiet for awhile, it returns with a greater force at another time and finds the nature weaker than before.” That is true, is it not? You yield yourself to temptation and what do you find? You set yourself up to fall easier the next time. So first, it is just temptation’s desire. You have to have a mindset that you are not going to allow it to overtake you.

Now the text has good news for us because...finish reading the sentence: No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. That is good news. Now we are understanding temptation’s nature. First we looked at temptation’s desire. Now we are understanding temptation’s nature. And the first thing we understand about its nature is this word, common. Why is that an important word? Because, well, think about what it means. It means that it is common; it is not superhuman. It is not supernatural. It is not beyond your ability to overcome is what Paul is saying. It is defeatable; that is why this is good news. Sometimes when you are in the midst of a struggle with something in your life, does it not feel like you are never going to be able to defeat this? That it will always be hounding you and it is going to overcome you and overtake you. That is not the sense. This is common; it is human. It might have a non-human push behind it but it is not beyond your human ability to endure. That is what Paul is saying. Not only that, common has this idea that it is not exclusive or unique to you. Now that is something we need to know. Because often when we get into a point of temptation, we think we are the only ones struggling with that. That is not the case. Now we might have our own sins that we tend to fall into and we struggle with it and it is different from somebody else’s but our temptations are not unique. The same temptations that you have are the same

temptations that I have and visa versa. This is the idea that this is not something that is exclusively happening to you; it is the same for all of us.

So what is Paul saying? Well, first we have to understand temptation's desire, then we have to understand its nature. We have to understand that it is common. But now we are getting in to the real thick of it where we transition into the next sentence. Notice, he says, "God is faithful and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability." Now we are learning about temptation's capacity. What is the first thing that you notice in this sentence? Look at it. God is what? Say it! Faithful. God is faithful. By the way, this is one of Paul's favorite topics—the faithfulness of God. He uses this word all throughout I Corinthians 1:9, I Corinthians 10:13, II Corinthians 1:18, I Thessalonians 5:24, II Thessalonians 3:3 and on and on. He uses this concept and he uses the Greek word, a specific word, *pistós*. Now that just woke up a bunch of people because they are saying, "Did he just curse?" No, it is a foreign language; I am allowed to say that. You know what it means? Worthy of trust. Is not that cool? That God is worthy of trust. He is worthy of our trust. That is one of Paul's famous concepts; that we have a faithful God. It says something about God's character, does it not? We can trust this God.

I was reading the commentary by John Calvin on this passage and Calvin points out two things that God does to demonstrate his faithfulness. Number one: He gives us strength. He does not allow us this sense of weakness; rather he strengthens us. Again, look at the text: God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability. There is this undercurrent that God is going to provide something. What is that something? He is going to provide you strength. Now why is that critical? Because when you are being tempted you need a strength beyond yourself, do you not? And who is that strength? Here it is—God. Remember what the psalmist said, Psalm 46:1: God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of trouble. What is God? God is an ever present help when we need him the most; in times of trouble he gives us strength.

Calvin also says the next thing, not only does he give us strength, he sets limits. The temptation, listen to this, has a breaking point before you do. The temptation that you are struggling with actually has a break point. If you will maintain the course of righteousness, God will give you strength but he also limits the capacity of that temptation. There is a sense where is going to break the temptation before you break yourself. He is not going to allow you to be tempted beyond your ability. The word ability is the Greek word *dúnamai* it is where we get the idea of power. It is the idea of capacity. He has given you a certain capacity to overcome the temptation. What do you do? You have to be faithful to God. Now follow-up the thinking— God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability.

But here is the transition—next phrase: But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape. He is going to provide the way out. This is a great promise. This speaks of temptation's limit. We have seen temptation's desire, temptation's nature, and

temptation's capacity. Now we look at temptation's limit. Temptation has a limit. It is limited because, why? God has provided an escape plan—a way out. This word, escape, *ékbasis* literally means exit or egress. The best way I can help you understand it is how it is used in classic Greek literature. It is used like a landing area. Remember when I am trying to explain the Greek language, I am trying to explain a very graphically image-oriented language into a linear English language so it does not always match up. So I have to tell you a little bit of a story. The way this best can be understood in our English vocabulary is think about a ship that is being tossed out at sea and it is in real danger and what is the ship in need of? It needs a landing area; it needs a port. It needs a safe egress and that is what Paul is saying God is going to provide when you are in the midst of the storm of temptation, that he already has the port, the landing zone in mind for you. Now look at the text. I did not see this at first but then it just popped out. Notice how the text flows, it says: But with “the” temptation, “the” definite article, he will also provide “the—definite article” way of escape. You say, what does that mean? Well, he is saying, with the specific temptation that you are experiencing, he is going to provide a specific way of escape for you. Do you see that? God is going to provide for you the specific way out. Why is this such good news? Because it points back to the faithfulness of God—that God is involved in our lives. Even involved to the point that when he sees us moving through a temptation that wants to overtake, overpower us, he says: I know that temptation; I am going to provide a way out—a certain way out, a singular way out. And it is going to be like a landing zone for you into a safe harbor.

Walk in righteousness and you will experience it. That is the push of Paul in verse 13. In fact, at the end of verse 13, what does he say? He says: All this happens so that you may be able to...read the text! Endure it! He has your endurance in mind; that is the meaning of the text. Now you know the text. Now you need to understand how to apply it, right? We need to take our knowledge and we need to make it practical so that is what we will do. Let me just get real practical in the next few minutes. Let me give you three ways to overcome temptation—three ways just to overcome temptation when it impacts your life.

First thing—it comes right out of the text. First thing: Remember God. That is where you start. You say, so what do you mean by that? I mean remember God. Remember what God has done in your life in the past. Remember God's past power in your life. When you read through the Old Testament, for example, especially the Book of Deuteronomy, we have this repetitive sense of remembering. Deuteronomy is a repeat of what the Jewish people have already experienced. It is a repetition of their history. God repeats all that he has taken them through by the pen of Moses. So Moses is essentially using the Book of Deuteronomy as a tool for the people of Israel to remember the faithfulness of their God. In fact, the word, faithfulness, is used fourteen times throughout the book of Deuteronomy. He says: Remember God's faithfulness when you were in bondage. Remember God's faithfulness when he released you into the wilderness. Remember how He cared for you. Remember how He fed you. Remember how He met your needs. Just remember, remember, remember, remember!

Why is that critical? It is critical for one thing in a practical way in that it takes your mind off the temptation, does it not? It takes your mind off that thing that is moving you towards sin and puts it on righteousness—puts it on God. So there is a very practical element to it.

But there is something even greater. It reminds us who God is. In fact, you see this all through the Old Testament—this call to remember. I was thinking about the Book of Isaiah as I was thinking about this particular concept. Isaiah, classic examples that he is constantly telling us to remember, not ourselves, not our situation, but to remember God. Isaiah 46:8—you might just want to write that down and turn there if you fast fingers. But I am going to start reading before you get there. Isaiah 46:8, God says: Remember this and stand firm. Remember what? By the way, do you see the parallel? Remember, stand firm. Got that? That's an imagery. Remember God; stand firm. Remember the stand firm recalls to mind; remember the former things of old for I am God and there is no other. I am God; there is none like me. Do not forget who you are dealing with; you are dealing with your God. He says: I am the God who can declare the end from the beginning. I know your comings and your goings. I know where you started and where you are going to end. I know everything about your life; remember that. Remember that because my counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purposes. Remember God.

One of the first things that we do when we are in the midst of temptation is our mind focuses completely on the situation—the here and now, the moment, the temptation. God says: Do not do that; take your mind off that and remember a much larger scheme that God is control. He has been faithful to you in the past; He will be faithful to you in the present and the future. So the first thing you do is remember; the second thing you do is you trust the God you are remembering. You trust God; you trust your life to him. You trust your circumstances; you trust your temptations.

A great illustration in the importance of trusting God comes right from the teachings of Jesus. Mark, chapter 11, he is in His passion week. This is the last week of his life and what does he teach the disciples. He teaches the disciples to trust God. Now you would think that Jesus would have taught his disciples long before that the importance of trusting God. He did; he does it all throughout the gospels. In fact, there are probably so many occasions that are not written of where Jesus spoke and reminded his disciples, taught his disciples to have faith in God that we probably cannot even imagine it. It is so often in the gospels that it is almost a shock that He is repeating it again in the last week of his life. But what does that tell you about the disciples—that they were a lot like us; they forget things; they needed to be reminded. And what was one of the essential things they needed to be reminded about—that God was trustworthy. He does this in Mark, chapter 11, verse 22. He just gets done—he is actually walking toward Jerusalem one morning. He is coming over the Mount of Olives; He is going up to the Temple Mount. From Jerusalem it is up; he was walking the path and the night before he had cursed a fig tree. A fig tree represented Israel and it was a representation of what was to come. The

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disciples are walking by this cursed fig tree which now had withered and they are questioning Jesus about it. Jesus takes the opportunity to teach them about trust. And he says in verse 22: Have faith in God, which by the way is the central point of everything that He is about to say. Remember that because you are about to forget it. Why? Because he moves to verse 23 and He gives an illustration and the illustration kind of blows your mind. But you have to remember what He just said in verse 22. The illustration is: Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Now the illustration tends to overpower what we are thinking, does it not? Because when you look at the illustration, you think, really? I mean, if I have enough faith, if I really muster it, I could move a mountain and make a mountain move over and drop into the sea? Really—is that what it is saying? You can go out a try it; I do not know if you will have much success—because this is an illustration. This is a hyperbola. This is an analogy; this is a figure of speech. He is actually trying to move the minds of the disciples with His illustration back to one salient point. What is that salient point? Well, he is saying that the power to move that mountain does not happen in your ability or inability to trust God or to have faith. That is not what He is saying. It is a figure of speech, remember? We all use figure of speech. I remember growing up, my parents would say to my sister—I have an older sister. She used to be very emotional—that is what I remember growing up. I learned a lot of what not to do by following after her. That is a clue for you who have older siblings; watch what they do and do the opposite and you will be fine. My Dad would say to my sister, “You would dry at the drop of a hat.” I never saw her cry at the drop of a hat. Am I taking that literally? He did not mean it literally. Or he would say, “You can cry a river.” She never could cry a river because it is a figure of speech. This is a figure of speech. In fact, if you read the Babylonian Talmud, it talks about Rabbis’ who were so wise who could figure their way out of problems that they could literally (figuratively) move mountains. The saying was: You are so smart, as if to say, you could literally move a mountain. That was their figure of speech. So Jesus is not saying that you could with enough faith move a mountain, no, look at the text! Verse 23, He says: Be taken up this mountain and thrown into the sea and does not doubt (there is the operative word in his heart) but believes what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. The operative sense of the text is doubting. You are not to doubt. Who are you not to doubt? You are not to doubt God. So we go back to verse 22: Have faith in God; doubt will not serve you well is what He is saying so do not doubt. When you doubt, it puts you in a dangerous place. If you want to be triumphant over temptation, you must not doubt but trust God. What are you trusting? You are trusting that he literally has a specific path, an egress, an exit, a way out, an escape for you—that is what you are trusting. When you allow your mind to think there is no way out of this, I am going to yield to this temptation, it is going to haunt me, you are doubting God. Jesus said to His disciples, have faith, do not doubt God. Paul is saying to the Corinthians, have faith, trust God, do not doubt. That is the same thing when you encounter temptation.

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So you remember God, you trust God, thirdly, you ask God. You ask. I do not think we ask enough. James says: You do not have it because you do not ask. Jesus says in Mark 11:24: Therefore, I tell you whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it (there it is; do not doubt), and it will be yours. Ask God. You say, what do I ask? Ask for help. You are in the midst of a dangerous situation where temptation wants to overtake you. What do you do? You ask God for help. Do not try to manage it on your own. Do not try to tough it out; do not try to manhandle it. What do you do? You humble yourself and say, "God, I am weak; I am being tempted. I do not want to fall to unrighteousness. My desire is to walk in righteousness. Give me help."

You remember God, you trust God and you ask God. You see, that is the practical formula for applying I Corinthians 10:13. You do not have to fall to temptation. The faithfulness of God has provided a way out. As children of God, walk in righteousness.

Let's pray together.