

Sermon for Sunday, September 10, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"HOW TO HANDLE TEMPTATION"
I Corinthians 10:1-13

Text: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." I Corinthians 10:13

This morning I want to talk to you about temptation because it is a universal element in human life. Temptation is no respecter of persons and we are all subject to it. Like a man's shadow, it will go with him to the loneliest desert or follow him right into church. However, there is a basic difference between temptation and sin and that difference is this: there is nothing wrong with being tempted. In fact, to be tempted may be a result of a conscious effort on our part to be better than we are. If you are not troubled by temptation, it may be a sign of spiritual sickness. The Bible tells us that even Jesus was tempted "like as we are", yet without sin. A man's downfall comes not when he is tempted, but when he gives in to temptation.

So, the fact is that when a man is trying to live the Christian life, when he is trying to be Christ-like in his actions, temptation is going to come. The question that we face, then, is how are we going to deal with temptation? There are four passages in the New Testament that deal with this matter and each of them suggests ways of dealing with temptation.

The first passage is from our scripture this morning. There we read, "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape..." Here we are introduced to the principle of escape. The Bible tells us that God will provide a way to escape the temptation and our task is to find that escape route.

Joseph used this principle when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. You remember how the wife of Joseph's master arranged to be alone with Joseph and then made overtures to him. The Bible says that Joseph, "left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out." Joseph got out of the danger area as quickly as possible. On the other hand, there is the story of Lot and his uncle, Abraham. They divided the area in which they lived and went their separate ways. Abraham gave Lot the choice of which part of the land he would take and the Bible says that Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom." He was deliberately exposing himself, his family, and all he had to the worldliness and wickedness of that notorious city. Undoubtedly he thought that he and his family could resist the adverse influence of that despicable city. Unfortunately, he was wrong and it cost him very dearly in the end.

Abraham, however, stayed up in the hill country of Judea. Could he have pitched his tents toward Sodom without compromising his ideals and lowering his standards? We will never know because Abraham did not take that risk. He had a way of escape.

Back in the old days when steamships plied the Mississippi and St. Louis was a busy port city, a passenger once asked a pilot, "Sir, I suppose you know every sand bar in the river." "No," replied the pilot, "As a matter of fact, I know where only a few sand bars are." "But," protested the passenger, "if you do not know where the sand bars are, how can you pilot your boat?" The wise pilot answered, "Why should I go knocking about hunting for sand bars. Man, I know where the deep water is." The man who goes knocking about for temptation will find himself in trouble. The principle of escape is to find the deep water.

The second principle in handling temptation is found in Romans 12:21. Moffatt translates it this way, "Never let evil get the better of you; get the better of evil by doing good." Here we are introduced to the principle of preoccupation. In the Old Testament, after the Jews had been in exile for many years, they were permitted to return to Jerusalem, but the city had been destroyed. Under the leadership of Nehemiah the Jews began to rebuild the city. The people in the area didn't want to see the Jews return and especially they didn't want them rebuilding a strong fortified city. So they determined to kill Nehemiah. They tried to set up a meeting with him in order to murder him. However, Nehemiah refused to interrupt his work of rebuilding Jerusalem. He answered them, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." Four times his enemies attempted to entice him away, but four times he sent back that ringing reply, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

A minister is once reported to have asked Thomas A. Edison for some illustration from his own life on how to overcome temptation. Edison replied that he knew little about temptation because he had been so busy all his life that he had not had time to be seriously tempted. Here was a man who from his youth so intently occupied himself with experiments and scientific discovery that he found neither time nor interest in the worldly, sinful activities which destroy so many young people. Yes, the principle of preoccupation, "never let evil get the better of you; get the better of evil by doing good."

The third text in the New Testament on temptation is from James 4:7. James writes, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." The Greek words used in the original are very vivid military terms. A more liberal translation might be, "Put yourselves under God's command, but take your stand against the devil." Here we are introduced to the principle of resistance. It is not always possible to avoid temptation or to be so preoccupied as to ignore its power. Sometimes we have to meet it head on!

Sometimes we have to meet it head on as Daniel did when the Bible says of him, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's dainties, nor with the wine which he drank." Sometimes we have to meet temptation head on as Jesus did in the wilderness, "Get thee hence Satan; for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Sometimes we have to meet temptation in the manner that St. Paul once suggested to the Ephesians when he wrote, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." As some poet has put it:

I want to let go,
But I will not let go!
I never will yield.
What! lie down on the field,
And surrender my shield?
No, I will not let go.

I want to let go,
But I will not let go!
Be this ever my song,
'Gainst the legions of wrong,
O God make me strong,
That I may not let go.

The fourth text I would leave with you this morning is from I John 4:4. There we read, "for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Here we are introduced to the principle of counterattraction. It is the principle that Dr. Chalmers in his famous sermon has called "the expulsive power of a new affection." That is, a new affection for Jesus is able to expel from the heart old affections for things of the devil. Yes, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. St. Paul put it this way, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." He said, "I can do all things through Christ which

strengtheneth me." Jesus himself once put it this way, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

There is an ancient Greek legend which illustrates this method of overcoming temptation. The sailors aboard the Greek ship Argo, set sail in search of the Golden Fleece. They had to pass the perilous region where the sirens lived on the southern shore of Italy. Now, according to legend, these sea nymphs were beautiful in voice and form, but evil in soul. They were accustomed to singing to the sailors in passing ships and luring them to destruction on the rocks. Their voices were so sweet that none could resist them. Now, it so happened that the Argo had on board a man named Orpheus, the famous poet and singer of that time. The enchantment of his voice was such, it is said, that lions and tigers would come crouching to his feet; rocks were softened; and even the oak trees moved from their places. Every day Orpheus sang to the sailors as they went about their tasks on the Argo, until finally they arrived at the place of peril where the sirens lived. The sea nymphs came forth and sang their sweetest. But the sailors only laughed in their faces and rowed steadily on. You see what had happened--the spell of the inferior music had been broken by the superior! The songs of the sirens had no appeal to those who had grown accustomed to the melodies of Orpheus.

In a far deeper sense, the same is true for those who discover the secret of the higher attraction of Jesus. When we have Jesus living in our hearts and when our spirits are filled by His Spirit, the allure and temptation of evil is overcome by a higher attraction.

These are the principles for handling temptation: the principle of escape; the principle of preoccupation, the principle of resistance, the principle of a counter-attraction. But let me leave with you one other principle that you will need in handling temptation. You see, if we could handle temptation perfectly, we would not need Jesus and his death on the cross. If we could handle temptation perfectly, we would not sin. For that reason, I would like to leave with you the principle of forgiveness. You see, no matter how hard I try to avoid falling to temptation, there will come that moment when the sin that is within me will be greater than the resources God has given me for handling temptation. And in moments such as that, I will sin. It is true that I must try as best I can to use the resources for handling temptation, but most of all I will need forgiveness. So, when a man has tried to resist temptation and failed, God offers him a final way of dealing with his failure--it is the way of forgiveness.

There is an old legend that pictures Satan appearing before the throne of God. Satan complains to God, "Why is it that you are so quick to forgive men their many sins, yet never once have you forgiven me?" To which God replies, "Because never once have you asked me for forgiveness." And that's really what it means to be a Christian--to resist temptation by all the means at our disposal, but though we sometimes succeed, we often fail. Yet, in our failure, in contrition and sorrow we turn to God and ask his forgiveness. Then we can live life triumphantly and victoriously, not because we are always successful, but because as we try to follow him, even in our failures we are the forgiven ones.

There is an ancient Greek legend which illustrates this method of observation. The sailors about the Great Ship, they sail in search of the Golden Fleece. They had to pass the terrible region where the winds of the stormy sea of life. Now, according to legend, these sailors were beautiful in voice and form, but all in vain. They were sentenced to sail to the Siles in passing ships and during their stay, it is reported that the sailors were so great that none could resist them. Now, it is reported that the Argo had on board a half-breed Gopher, the famous man and son of that time. The enchantment of his voice was such that he said that these winds would give crowching to his fellow sailors and even the sea would rise. Every day Gopher sang to the sailors as they went about their labor on the Argo, until finally they arrived at the place of their destination. The sea winds came forth and sang their sweetest. But the sailors were laughing in their faces and went steadily on. You see what had happened—the spell of the inferior music had been broken by the superior. The songs of the storm had no appeal to those who had grown accustomed to the melodies of Gopher.

In the better sense, the same is true for those who discover the secret of the higher vibration of Jesus. When we have Jesus living in our hearts and when our hearts are filled by his spirit, the alloy and temptation of evil is overcome by a higher vibration.

There are the principles for handling temptation. The principle of a complete vibration, but let us look with you on other principles that you will find in handling temptation. You see, if we could handle temptation perfectly, we would not need Jesus and his death on the cross. If we could handle temptation perfectly, we would not die. For that reason, I would like to begin with the principle of forgiveness. You see, we cannot live with a sin if we do not forgive. There will come that moment when the sin that is in your heart will be forgiven. For the moment God has given us the handling-temptation. And, I would like to say that I will give you the principle of forgiveness. The reason for handling temptation, but first of all I will give you the principle of forgiveness. When a man is tried to resist temptation and failed, the reason is a lack of forgiveness. In the way of forgiveness, he has failed with the principle of being with his sins.

There is an old legend that pictures Jesus appearing before the throne of God, laden with sins. He says to the Father, "Why do you not forgive me?" The Father says, "You have never once asked me for forgiveness." And that is really what it means to be forgiven. We are not forgiven by all the means we can think of, but through sometimes succeed, we often fail. For, in our failure, in our sin and sorrow we turn to God and ask the forgiveness. Then we can live in the forgiveness and victoriously, not because we are always successful, but because we are always forgiven. Even in our failures we see the forgiven ones.