

Freedom Series

6. Freedom from fear of the flesh (1 Cor 10:1-17)

"Lord, I confess my sinfulness, and acknowledge my weakness. Often it is but a small matter that defeats and troubles me. I resolve to act boldly, but when I am assailed even by a small temptation, I am in sore straits. From a trifling thing sometimes arises a strong temptation; and when I am secure, I am almost overwhelmed by a mere breath.... I am weary of living constantly at conflict. My weakness is apparent to me, for evil fancies rush in on me more readily than they depart."
Thomas à Kempis

So wrote this man 700 years ago. What goes around comes around. We suffer all the pains and weaknesses common to mankind and for many Christians they feel they cannot resist the temptations that face them. They sometimes feel overwhelmed by them.

This is you and this is me. We want to be strong. We know there are things in our life that are weak. Things we say and do that we know dishonour God but somehow we do them anyway. And then we feel guilt. And failure.

In the last few weeks we have been exploring how even though we have been made free people in Christ, free from the bondage of sin and of Satan, free from death and hell. No longer chained up but free to worship and live as a child of God and living in service to Him. But so often we become chained up in service again to those things we were freed from - whether those things be of the world, of the flesh or of the devil. Last week we saw how fear of the world can paralyse us and chain us up. We saw how the world could crowd in and prevent us from realising our potential as children of God.

Today we are going to look at the trio of enemies again and this time to look how the weaknesses of the flesh bind us and even make us fall. For many of us, we live in fear that we may fall when we are faced with temptation.

We've already seen in the first of this series how the old nature is still there in all believers and we saw how Paul struggled with it himself. He said *Rom 7:22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* We are in good company. Even more so when we look into History. Look again at our reading this morning.

10:1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

2 They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

The whole nation of Israel, even though they had experienced so much of God's grace and power, fell. The Israelites who left Egypt all had the same grace - they all went forward under the cloud that God provided to lead them, they all went across the Red Sea, they all had the same food and drink that God provided. He uses some Christian words here baptise, spiritual food. He's making a comparison. Never mind who the Israelites were and how strong or weak their faith may have been or however upright or otherwise they may have been, we read that *God was not pleased with most of them.*

What Paul is saying here is that, we all have the same weakness. We were all saved by the same grace and we all continue to receive the same grace, but we all have the same danger of falling. In fact, later in the chapter he says this

12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Temptation is common to all of us. I suppose I could go through all the ways in which the Israelites yielded to temptation because we do the same.

▶▶ *Their idolatry* - their seeking after other gods - other things that would give them satisfaction and meaning to life rather than obey the Lord their God. It comes out in obsession and addiction. And we know the pressure we are under to make things and people more important than God.

▶▶ *Their sexual sins.* They yielded to the desires of their bodies and condoned the actions of others in the camp which were an abomination to God. We may not be people that commit indecent acts; but we are constantly bombarded with the language and images of sexual immorality. We tolerate it in our homes and some even tolerate it in their churches.

▶▶ *Their testing* of His faithfulness. "God's let me down in this or that". Or testing His righteousness "It won't hurt if I do a little bit of this or that".

▶▶ *Their grumbings* "Why can't we do things may way."

Over the months we have been through all of these in one shape or form. And so often our weaknesses and our sins are something we keep covered up because we are guilty. We know of the things that are in our lives that pressurise us from following God, from honouring Him. And it comes out in guilt or shame. Or worse - because we have things in our lives that tempt us;

we feel that we are somehow inferior Christians. Our churches are full of failures. People that are fearful because they've failed God and aren't up to the mark and they know it.

It comes out in two ways.

🕒 *In Failure* Some feel that they are never good enough for God - they are chained and never reach their potential because they believe they are inferior.

🕒 *In Fatalism* Others will just live two lives. They will come to church but they will just fill their lives with whatever because they don't believe they can do anything else about it. They go through their lives hoping that somehow what's left will be acceptable to God.

I'm not here to make you feel any worse this morning. Because I'm so aware that is often what preachers do. They say "You should be like this". And you say "Gulp" or words to that effect. What of course they never say is that they're just as bad as you are! My endeavour this morning is to share with you some thoughts from God's word that will give you encouragement.

The first sermon in this series was the foundation sermon -*therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. This is so important. If you are a Christian, you ARE a child of God. And by the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling, you have the means within you to be the man or woman in Christ that God, your heavenly Father wants you to be! That's the exciting thing about being a Christian. In your humanity you may be a failure, but in Christ you are a child of God.

Maybe you were heartened by that. But you are still faced by issues in your life that draw you away from God. We might not feel condemned but we still feel our human weaknesses. And Paul comes to us and says: *13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.*

I always find it helps when I know that I'm not the only one who is suffering. We all suffer from temptation. What you may be going through you may think is unique. The pressures in life you may be facing you may think are just yours. They're not. Other people have already been there. The same bonds which tie you tie others too.

God wants us to be free to be able to walk and face the trials and temptations of life with confidence and power rather than with a fear of falling. So if temptation is what is common to all of us, what is it?

The Bible wasn't written in English but in Greek. In the NT it is the Greek word *peirasmos* {pi-ras-mos' } seems to have the roughly the same set of uses. Remember, when you translate between two languages, words in one language often don't have the same meaning as in another, although in this case it's not a bad match.

- It is an enticement to sin, temptation, whether arising from the inward desires or from the outward circumstances e.g. by pressures from the world or satan. That may be the condition of things, or a mental state, by which we are enticed to sin, or to a lapse from the faith and holiness. It may be adversity, affliction, trouble: serving to test or prove one's character, faith, holiness. This is the context at which we will be looking at it this morning.
- An experiment, attempt, trial, proving, a the trial of man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy. God tempted Abraham (Gen 22:1) it means tested him rather than enticed him to sin and this is an important distinction. As we shall see, God never entices men to sin.
- A test or trial of God by men or satan - usually by pushing Him and test His boundaries. God rarely permits anyone to test Him - He calls us to trust His word. Jesus gave the devil a reproach in His temptation - You shall not tempt the Lord your God! We get the same phrase in 1 Corinthians 10 and we'll talk about that in a few minutes.

In common with all people we are tempted. We are enticed or induced to sin and the pressure is always there to do it. Where does that inducement come from. First of all, it never comes from God. James says this:

James 1: 12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul says roughly the same

13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

God doesn't tempt you, but He lets you be tempted. Why? Because temptation is all part of the human condition and we don't cease to be subject to the frailties of humanity for as long as we walk this earth. Each day and each hour, our sinful nature tries to draw us away from doing what is right. The world bombards us with images and language that dishonour God. Satan uses these things to draw us away from God. That is the human condition and that is what we will continue to face throughout our lives.

It's a simple truth. That's why so many Christians live in fear of falling. They know the weakness of the flesh - but it comes with a promise from God - *He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*

Now, there are some Christians who believe that they are so spiritual that they will never be caught out and that they will never succumb to their flesh. They think themselves too spiritual. Our churches have plenty of them too. "Ugh! Isn't it disgusting that so and so does this. I'd NEVER do it."

This passage in 1 Corinthians 10 was not written for weak Christians but arrogant ones who thought that they were superior to others. They looked down on their "weaker brethren" who as far as they were concerned had hang-ups about certain kinds of behaviour. From what we can gather about chapter 9, they even looked down on Paul. I think you're already guessing that it was not too bright to do that and Paul is going to say as much in the passage we read together earlier.

There was a preacher in the USA called Gordon MacDonald. He was a respected Pastor of a large church in the USA. Everybody thought of him as a pillar of the church. But news of a short-lived affair surfaced, and he was ruined. MacDonald commented, "I always guarded myself in areas where I knew I was weak. To my surprise, Satan defeated me in an area where I thought I was strong."

If you think this sermon is for the spiritually weak believers here this morning - then you are mistaken - it's for all of us. If you think you are a strong Christian this morning, you can just as easily be tempted and fall as anyone else. Why? Because we are all subject to the stresses and strains of temptation.

But let's remind ourselves of that promise again *He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*. Being tempted by itself is not a sin,; yielding to it is. And the good news is this morning is that not only is there no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus but as a child of God. The temptation's there but there need be no failure or fatalism. We have the means to live as a child of God. Let's see how.

 *We have a pioneering role model*

Hebrews 4 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

What an exciting verse. We can face temptation, because Jesus faced it! His temptation was a test of His perfect humanity and He passed it with flying colours. He knows all the stresses and strains of life. He faced all the temptations - yet without sin! "Oh, yeah" I can almost hear you say, "He stacked things in His favour because of who He was." But let's remember that Jesus walked the earth in the frailties of the flesh. He became hungry. He became thirsty. He became tired. He felt pain. But with all these *He was tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin*. Therefore when

we are tempted, *let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

He's been there. When Christians face problems and temptations they often hide and don't pray. In my last Church, people would often disappear when they ran into problems. They said "I'm taking time out." Did they pray. probably not. But by denying themselves coming to worship and hiding away was a disaster.

The reverse is true. Pray. Jesus knows all about it. In Him you do find grace and mercy in your hour of need. Grace to handle the situation and mercy as you repent when you have yielded to temptation. He may not have yielded to temptation, but He will understand the frailty that caused you to fall.

But there's more. Take a look at Luke 4:1 *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.* As with us, Jesus found that God had allowed Him to be tempted by satan in the desert. But look. The Holy Spirit led Him. When we find ourselves in our wildernesses, the Holy Spirit is there with us and we are never alone. We are the children of God! Remember that! It's important because as a child of God, and therefore indwelt by the Spirit of God, you have authority to see the devil off in the same way. Jesus used scripture heavily to remind the devil who He was. Remember the promises of God and see him off!

🍌 *God has provided a way of escape*

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

There's always a way out. Someone once said *"The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you."*

God doesn't let things go too far. We might. Yes, we might. But we have that promise of a way out. So when we pray when we come under temptation (and do we??) let's seek for that way of escape.

In most cases God has given us a very useful little word to use with ourselves, with others and with satan and that word is "No". The way of escape is always there. When we are tempted to watch the violent or pornographic movie, the off switch is in front of you. There's always a way out. Sometimes it takes great moral courage to say "No". Maybe you will lose friends. Maybe you will lose family. Maybe you will lose financially. But what's more important - pleasing God, or pleasing man or yourself. Remember Jesus has been there too. *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

🕯️ *He's given us a prayer of power*

God allows us to continue to have what is common to all men but look at the Lord's prayer . You'll remember it has the phrase *and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*" Bumper sticker: "Lead me not into temptation, I can find it myself." Lead us not into temptation. How often have you prayed that and meant it. When we look at our frailties in life, how often do we pray not to be tempted, or even *deliver us from evil* or maybe as some translate it *deliver us from the evil one*. I bet that's a prayer you don't pray often - and mean it. it trips off the tongue. But if fear of succumbing to temptation is a problem this morning. Then pray it! It was given to us by Jesus. If it is of Him, then it works. The problem is, we are given all these things and never use them. What's the point of having a Hoover, never using it and then complaining that your carpets are dirty!

So are you under pressure this morning. Are you a failure or a fatalist. God can change that. You have some tools in your box, some weapons in your armoury. You can deal with it and be victorious like Jesus was. You may still find it difficult to pray. If that's the case, get someone to pray with you and for you. Go before that throne of grace, claim that way of escape, ask for that deliverance. Throw off the bonds that hold you. Now, today.

Let's pray

Father

You know the pressures that I've been under

You know the times when I've fallen and sinned against you

You know how I've yielded to temptation

You know how I've felt I've failed You

I repent of that sin and come before you for forgiveness afresh that comes through the shed blood of Jesus.

I pray this morning that you will show me the way of escape where I am suffering temptation.

By the power of Your Holy Spirit , give me the strength and courage to overcome it and do

Your will.

I pray the prayer, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil and from the evil one.

Free me from my bonds of fear this morning, that I may walk in newness of life.

In the name of Jesus

Amen



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