

**“THERE WILL BE A TEST”**  
March 23, 2025      I Corinthians 10:1-13

A woman tells the story about an event from her ninth-grade **physical science class**. “**The teacher** told us we could have one single-sided page of notes to use during the final exam. About a week before the exam, one enterprising kid wrote out a page of notes, made copies, and quietly started selling them in class for \$5.

A girl in the class went over to young man’s desk, grabbed one of the sheets, and walked to the teacher’s desk at the back of the class. She handed it to the teacher and very indignantly told him what her classmate was doing. The teacher looked at the sheet, read it for a minute, looked at the young man, and said:

**Teacher:** “Class, it has come to my attention that Marty is selling note sheets. If you didn’t know about it, these are very good notes. I suggest everyone buy one from him.”

The girl was furious but couldn’t do anything. (teacher’s pet). However the teacher kept Marty’s notes, and made the test based on what was not on the sheet. About 75% of the class got a C or worse. In other words, he tested on what they didn’t know and hadn’t prepared for.

**“There is going to be a test!”** Notes or not, these words strike fear and panic into the heart of many student. It is the moment when their recall abilities are put to the test, the moment when their understanding of the material is revealed, the moment when they will prove themselves capable

of advancing to the next step in their educational journey or not. Yes, there will be a test.

It may surprise you to know that Paul's message to the Corinthians is, **"There is going to be a test!"** We adults especially don't like to hear these words. We thought we were done with test taking once we graduated! Most of the tests we take are issued by the doctor. But those are not any we need to study for. Just look in the **Binocular Indirect Ophthalmoscope** or offer your arm for a little blood work.

But Paul is not talking about Medical Tests. He's talking about a test upon our character and faith. The biblical word for **Test is Temptation**. Whether we realize it or not, every day our discipleship is being tested by life. Will we be loyal and obedient to Christ, will we be true the Christ's call upon our lives, will we serve and bless those around us with integrity, or won't we? The teacher in Paul is attempting to prepare his students to pass the tests that challenge our faith.

## **I. LEARN FROM THE PAST**

Paul's first lesson is learn from the past. **"I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized 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 drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness."**

Paul is using the **Israelites in the desert story** and attempting to create Christian parallels, which I don't think he quite accomplishes. However, he does make the point that these people experienced great blessings of God, but because of their sin they died in the desert and consequently didn't enter the Holy Land. **“Now these things have occurred as examples for us, so that we might desire evil as they did.”**

We need to learn from the past both the biblical past as well as our own. The same stuff that snagged Israel can snag us today: idolatry, sexual immorality, impatience, complaining. Rev. Carl Wilton wrote, “Satan is boringly predictable; he hasn't had any new temptations in years. 1 John summed up his Big Three as **“the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches”**. Call it what you want. Passion, Position, Possession. Sex, Power, Money. Sensuality, Status, Salary. To feel, to have, to be.

These are the same temptations that Adam, David and Jesus experienced. They're basically Israel's vices that Paul recounts. Although the specifics may change, it seems like the Big Three is all that the devil has working for him. **Problem is, they work.** We have been falling for them ever since, well since the Fall.

Recently I came across this definition for temptation. **“Temptation is a fundamental desire to engage in short-term urges for enjoyment, that threatens long-term goals.”** I like that. Short term urges, with short term pleasure, that threatens long term goals. Giving attention and energy to an immediate pleasure at the sacrifice of long-term goal. The problem

is if we give in to those temptations enough, they take over our lives, and we become less effective, and less human, and less than God has called you to be. Paul urges us to recognize the test problems for what they are and the results, especially the pain, they bring. Learn from the past!

## II. DON'T COURT DEATH

A woman wrote, “After starting a new diet, I altered my daily drive to work to avoid passing my **favorite bakery**. One morning, I accidentally drove by the bakery, and as I approached, a host of goodies were in the window. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, “**Lord, it’s up to you. If you want me to have any of those delicious goodies, create a parking place for me directly in front of the bakery.**” **And sure enough, on the eighth time around the block, there it was!**

On a much sadder note, many years ago I was a counselor at a conference. During the week one of the young men received a phone informing him that a friend had died. In the course of comforting this young man he told me the story of a little game he and his friends liked to play. They would go out drinking and whoever they felt was the drunkest got to drive the others home. At the end of his story he said, “**I guess we won’t drink and drive anymore.**”

Now I was being pastoral, but inside my head I wanted to shout, “**Seriously! It takes a dead friend to learn that! What is wrong with you? How could you not see the outcome of driving drunk?**” He and his friends were courting death and death won.

Paul instructs, **“We must not put Christ to the test, as some did, and were destroyed by serpents.”** In other words, to pass the temptation test, don’t intentionally put yourself in position of weakness. If you have a problem watching certain shows, have friends who want to take you down a wrong path, or work with business colleagues who are prone to pilfering or gossip, take another course of action. I know we can’t always avoid the bakery, and I know in our youth we make some poor choices, its part of growing up, but by the time we become adults we should have figured a few things out.

One is, don’t stick your hand in the fire and then expect Christ to rescue you. That is putting Christ to the test. It’s like a little child pushing the limits until mom blows up. But we are not dealing with mom, we are dealing with the living God. Don’t place yourself in spiritual danger and hope it all turns out okay. You’ll fail the rest.

### **III. DON’T THINK YOU’RE ABOVE IT.**

When I was younger, I had a pretty good short-term memory. When I was hired to work at Dairy Queen, I memorized all the items on the menu and their prices in 20 minutes. I could tell you in order all 100 addresses on my paper route. And I could study 20 minutes before a test and pass it. But as I got older, and the schoolwork became more challenging, that little skill didn’t work anymore. Trying to cram for a college exam did not produce good results, especially on essays.

Paul is writing to a church that had developed some spiritual arrogance. They thought because of their freedom in Christ and their

spiritual knowledge and blessedness that they were somehow immune to any harm from dabbling in pagan worship festivals. After all, they reasoned, we know there is no such thing as other gods.

Paul writes, “**So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.**” The quickest way **to fall is lift your head** up too high. Paul is warning the church against arrogance. There will be tests and temptations. Never think you are too good, too smart, too talented, too pure, or too spiritual that you can’t fall flat on your face. Attempting to struggle with temptations all on your own usually ends in failure.

**Rick Warren of Saddleback Church**, writing to fellow pastors, says, “There are some temptations your people face that it will take a team to tackle. We simply can’t overcome all temptations alone. We need other people to come alongside us and help.

“Many people in our congregations have tried battling temptations for a long time. They’ve read all the right books, tried all the new methods and bought into all the latest fads — but nothing has changed. The truth is, we don’t really change without accountability. We’re kidding ourselves if we want to battle temptation but won’t let other people hold us accountable.

“When we can be honest about temptations, that’s called authenticity. We don’t have to share our temptations with the whole world. You just have to be open with one person who will love and accept you unconditionally. When you tell that kind of person your secret sin, they don’t rub it in, they rub it out. ... We all need an accountability partner

who'll listen to us, check up on us and ask us the hard questions.

“ ... Satan is out to get us. Every person in your congregation is vulnerable to temptation — including you. If you ever hear someone say they're not tempted by anything, you can be sure of one thing — they're not being honest.”

#### IV. EMBRACE THE TEST AND LISTEN TO **YOUR COACH**

That last bit of advice teacher Paul give is this. **“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure.”** In other words, the tests and temptations will come, but the good news is God wants us to pass. If we are wise, don't be afraid. Keep your eyes on the Heavenly Coach and listen to his voice. You will find strength to pass the tests.

**Henri J.M. Nouwen, in *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*** puts it this way. “As you see more clearly that your vocation is to be a witness to God's love in this world, and, as you become more determined to live out that vocation, the attacks of the enemy will increase.

You will hear voices saying, "You are worthless, you have nothing to offer, you are unattractive, undesirable, unlovable." The more you sense God's call, the more you will discover in your own soul the cosmic battle between God and Satan.

Do not be afraid. Keep deepening your conviction that God's love for you is enough, that you are in safe hands, and that you are being guided

every step of the way. Don't be surprised by the demonic attacks. They will increase, but as you face them without fear, you will discover that they are powerless.

What is important is to keep clinging to the real, lasting and unambiguous love of Jesus. Whenever you doubt that love, return to your inner spiritual home and listen there to love's voice. Only when you know in your deepest being that you are intimately loved can you face the dark voices of the enemy, without being seduced by them. Only when your roots are deep can your fruits be abundant.”

Have you ever tried to **paddle a kayak**? If you have, you know how easy they are to tip. The advantage of kayaks, though, is that as easy as they are to tip, they're just as easy to right. An expert kayaker can tip completely over, hanging head downward — and then, with a quick twist of the paddle, turn the boat back upright again.

That isn't a bad image for Lent. Lent is a time for restoring balance to our lives, a time of God reshaping our hearts and minds. Whatever spiritual disciplines you adopt, these 40 days are a time of shedding baggage, of getting back to basics in our spiritual life, and studying for the tests of life. If you capsize, though — if you succumb to temptation — it's no biggie. One of the lessons of Lent is that, as long as we're traveling light, it takes only a quick twist of the confession paddle to right us. So don't get worried if your spiritual discipline fails. Learn from your past, keep your eyes on the coach, get upright, and start over again. But make no mistake, there will be a test. Amen.



# First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

## Sunday, March 23, 2025

### Second Scripture Lesson

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#### **I Corinthians 10:1-13**

**10**I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. <sup>10</sup>And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be To God.**

