

BEFORE WE GET STUCK

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

A young boy is at the mall with his mom. She holds his hands as she takes him to several stores to pick up various items. She stops in a clothing store and lets go of his hand to check some clothes. The boy looks to his right and sees the bright colors of a sign. He walks over to the sign. As he examines the sign more closely, he hears something. Music is coming from a group of CD players in the electronics department. He moves toward the sounds. Then he is drawn to images on TV screens. After looking at the TV's, he notices motions. It is an electronic toy. He watches in fascination as the toy moves round and round a metal course. That leads him to still other toys.

Then the thought strikes him. Where is my mom? He looks around, but no mom. He realizes he's lost!

St. Paul reminds us of the people of Israel wandering through the wilderness. Again and again, they got themselves "lost."

Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

It wasn't that they set out to do that, but we read in Exodus and Numbers that on several occasions these people got all caught up in temptation, abandoned their faith in God, and got punished for that. Paul tells us that those stories were written in God's Word to warn us—so that we don't go down the wrong path.

We notice something interesting on our computer. So we get sidetracked from what we were supposed to be doing. We delve further and further into it. Then we get to the point where we have to stop. We have to get back to what we should have been doing, but nothing happens. The computer is frozen. We are stuck in something we can't seem to get out of.

Our marriage is falling apart. We overeat. We take little time to pray. We have alienated ourselves from our children. How do we get into those traps? Paul tells us about temptation:

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 get tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

We can read that to say, "Whenever you get into a fix, God will provide the escape hatch." If we get stuck in the "computer" of life, He is the place we can click onto to get out of that window.

Or He is the “Control-Alt-Delete” we can hold down to get unstuck. If we get “lost,” He is the cell phone we can pull out of our pocket to get directions or help.

But Paul is not talking about an escape hatch that says, “Go wherever you want to. Do whatever you want to do. If it gets to be too much, God will forgive you and say everything’s okay.” No, God is giving us a warning light before we go down that path. When we get to a junction where we know we are going down the wrong way God says, “There is another way. I will always provide another door, another path away from it.”

Yet we all go down the wrong paths. Paul gets to the heart of the matter when he tells us, “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.” With all the dishonesty that goes around in politics, historians are always reminded about the downfall of Richard Nixon from Watergate. The ironic thing about that is that what got Nixon into trouble was not what he did, but his attempts to cover up what was done. If he had just let things out into the open, he would not have been forced out of office. Often, we live in that same world of denial. When we are questioning and struggling, then we can look to God. We can see His warnings. But when we think we are standing firm, when we are just “cruising” through life, then we drive past those warnings. We become like a male driver, not stopping for directions, but figuring that if we just keep going on, we’ll find our way out.

Paul mentions three wrong paths we can take. 1.) Idolatry—We usually picture in our minds when we hear the word “idolatry” people kneeling in front of a statue and praying to it. But at the core of idolatry is wanting ourselves and not God to be in the driver’s seat. People made up idols so they could have something they could see, something they could control. And when we treat God that way, when we try to make “deals” with God, then that’s idolatry. 2.) Gratification of our desires—In our world of instant this and instant that, there is a real temptation to build our lives on satisfying our selfish desires. That’s why we often eat too much, exercise too little, watch too much TV, and spend too little time helping others. 3.) Grumbling—It becomes so easy for us to blame others for our problems. In our world of lawsuits, we want someone else to be at fault, not me. Why is it so easy for Christians to condemn homosexuality as such a bad sin? Because it is a sin that someone else does. Unlike sins like lying or heterosexual lust or petty jealousies, I can blame someone else for that sin. Each one of those three paths gets narrower and narrower, until we get caught tightly in the hold of sin.

But God works to stop us. He gives us that wonderful way out of the trap of temptation through confession and forgiveness. We come before God, first realizing our sin, our weakness. Then we hear His forgiveness. Confession shows us that we aren’t standing firm—that we can’t just keep plowing on heading in life. We need to stop and realize, “I am a sinner.” Then we can hear God telling us, “I forgive you.” Then God can put us back on the firm footing he has given us in baptism. We have nothing of our own to stand on. But we are children of God, totally dependent on our Savior. Confession places us back to our Baptisms where our only hope as well is our Savior, Christ Jesus. Then we want to go on God’s path, because we see the other way He offers us in Christ Jesus.

Is there something that really tempts you? Is there something that keeps pulling you from God? Don't ignore it. Don't try to hope it goes away. All that happens then is that we get stuck deeper and deeper in the "woods" of sin. God is providing you a way out now. He has the door open for you to bring your fears, your guilt to Him. He invites you to share that in a real way with Him by sharing it with a pastor or another Christian. And He invites you to do that again and again, because he knows how real those temptations are. Don't wait until later. Right now, jump into His arms; take the way out He offers to us all.