

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

*“I want you to know, brethren that our fathers 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 supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. 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 dance.” We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put the Lord 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. Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 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.”*

“All right students, it is time to get out your pencils, close your books and remove any notes from your desks. The test is about to begin.” These words make almost everyone shudder, our hearts start to pound and the palms of our hands begin to sweat. From our earliest days in school, we all have had to learn to deal with tests. It may begin with a simple first grade spelling test, but it doesn’t take too long before they morph into the PASS test, and then the PSAT, SAT, GRE, then the Bar and/or Boards, or maybe even a doctoral qualifying exam. Or it might be something as simple as the basic driver’s test or as easy as remembering the correct password on your email account. No wonder the Boy Scouts insist that their young men must “Be Prepared!” (If I remember correctly from my scouting days, that still is the motto of the Boy Scouts right? I mean that hasn’t been changed because it offended someone has it?)

The worst feeling anyone can have concerning a test is when one walks into a class having to take a test and not being prepared. Maybe you forgot to study or maybe you never understood the subject matter in the first place or worst of all you were so sure of yourself that you never bothered to study at all.

But then after taking the test you knew without a doubt you were in over your head. You knew the test would be a disaster. You knew you could have done better, if you just hadn't taken things for granted. If you had just taken the time to prepare.

Every day Christians struggle with tests. Some Christians become obsessed with their grades or scores. Regardless of what you tell them they are obsessed with having the entire Bible memorized and believe they must attend every service they know about never missing one. If doors are open they are present in their pew with pencil and pad in hand to take more notes for learning and/or memorizing. See the gospel is not about how well you can memorize the Creed or Church Doctrine. It is not about reciting all the religious teachings you have ever heard.

Let me stop here and ask a simple question ... I don't want to put anyone on the spot so I want you to just think on your answer and keep it to yourself. I will give the answer to my question, but let's see how you would do on this test. “What do you have to do to be saved?” ..... Answer: “Nothing! Because God did it all for you in and through Christ.”

It's that simple. The problem is too many who know this often get the impression that, since they don't have to do anything, they literally do nothing.

Do they need to study and learn Scripture; YES! Do they need to participate in the life of the church: YES! Do they need to support the church with their time, their talents, and their resources? YES! We need to study and learn Scriptures. We need to participate in the life of the church. We need to support the church with our time, talents, and resources. You need to study and learn Scriptures. You need to participate in the life of the church. You need to support the church with your time, talents, and resources. Too many believe ... since the pastor told them Christ did it all they don't have to do anything! They feel justified in their complacency.

You can see the pickle we have gotten ourselves in. We want everyone to participate, study, and contribute, but what are we, or you, ultimately trying to accomplish? Have we become content with just placing bodies in the pews? Or are we trying to develop the most academically educated pew sitters in this area?

What is it we, or you, are trying to accomplish by and with your presence here? Are you just here hoping against all hope you know enough or have done enough prep work so you develop the ability to pass THE test?

As Jesus once reminded His disciples in Mark 10:14 when they protested His spending time with little children who were far too young to pass any test or memorize any creed or doctrine, “*Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is too such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*” It’s a relationship He desires, it’s the simple trusting faith of a child that God wants. Not some sophisticated, measured, calculated, card signing, prayer repeating, qualified faith of a reasoned commitment. God wants our heart; He wants a relationship with us corporately and personally. God does not require a flawless recitation of the Ten Commandments or the 66 books of the Bible; He doesn’t require a signed time card with it punched for every Sunday you sat idly by doing nothing. So how do we motivate people young and old to learn, study, and develop without the “carrot and stick” of passing some test or the threat of a grade?

Paul faced a similar problem in this morning’s reading. There were those in the Corinthian congregation who had become complacent. They were treating the sacraments, baptism, and communion as if they were some sort of magical and mystical guarantee of their eternal salvation. They could tell you all about God’s grace and forgiveness. They could explain the benefits of baptism. They loved to celebrate communion, so much so that sometimes their celebrations got a little out of hand. They had no problem with participating in the immoralities and excesses of one of the most infamous cities in the entire Roman Empire. But no matter what! They were baptized! They attended services! They received Holy Communion! They also believed they could do anything they pleased because they believed these sacraments and their presence guaranteed their privileged status.

Can’t you see those people standing in the fellowship hall on Sunday morning sipping on their cups of coffee or coming in the narthex and telling one another about some game or some trip to some far off place and thinking to themselves what a “great deal” this being a Christian really is? What could be better, “God loves me, He forgives my sin and all is right with the world.” Wow! Does any of that sound familiar?

These people had lulled themselves into a dangerous false sense of security. Our reading is Paul’s word of warning to them and us. *“So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall!”* They had become so complacent that they had lulled themselves into thinking that nothing bad could ever happen to them. They truly believed they were automatically in. They believed nothing could ever touch them, not even the displeasure of God. They believed they could pass any and every test. No big deal! Again, does this sound familiar to anyone? But they, like us today are just kidding themselves. God will not be mocked.

Sooner or later everyone reaches a point where it feels as if the roof is falling in on us. Everyone must deal with those stretches of life where we are feeling as if we are in the wilderness, utterly alone, where it feels as if no one seems to care. In those dark and dreary expanses of the desert it seems that even God has forsaken us. The sad story of human history is that more often than not in such times of darkness we will turn to anyone and/or anything but God. Instead of trusting God, we will make just about anything we can get our hands on our god. Such idolatry has deadly consequences and it does not go unnoticed by God.

The tests come in a multitude of ways. You are not welcome at anyone's table in the school lunchroom. You tried so hard to make the team and you got cut. You become a casualty of corporate downsizing. You receive that unexpected phone call at 3 a.m. and it is the police with a message you never wanted to hear. The promotion that you knew without a doubt you deserved went to someone else. The friend you thought you could always count on betrays you. The depression everyone tells you to do something about only gets worse, slowly strangling what little hope you had left in your life. Your children, you had such high hopes for them, only continue to disappoint you. You wake up in the middle of the night crying because you never thought that your life would turn out like this. You are in the wilderness ... thirsty, hungry, and alone ... even God seems to have forsaken you.

This isn't supposed to happen to me I'm a Christian. This isn't supposed to happen to those who believe in God. Wasn't going to church, saying prayers, and tossing a dollar or two in the plate supposed to fix all this stuff? This is not what you signed up for.

Then to add insult to injury, someone quotes either Romans 8:28 “*We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose;*” or verse 13 from our reading, “*He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength.*” Really? You have to be kidding! What kind of a God would do this? Does God really think you are strong enough to handle this? You know your strength and it sure feels like it is God crushing you.

Wait a minute, maybe you must be letting God down because God wouldn't be laying these burdens on you if He didn't think you were strong enough. This must be a test and if it is a test; you're flunking it. There is no way you are ever going to pass it.

God wants nothing more from us than a loving relationship. Think about how you love your children. Regardless of what they do you love them. They don't make the team; you love them. They wreck the car; you love them. God is the same way He loves us and all He wants is a relationship with us. But what we need to understand, just like our relationship with our children, it's hard and it requires work the same goes for our relationship with God.

Our relationship with God is not based on our church attendance, our knowledge of Scripture, or how much time and money we give. On the contrary if our relationship is a loving one; if everything we say and do is about our relationship with God then all these I just mentioned happen naturally. Through a loving relationship with God we want to come to service and truly worship Him not be entertained. Through a loving relationship with God we want to as Scripture says in 2 Timothy 2:15 “*Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” Through a loving relationship with God we want to freely give of our time and resources (monies). Luke 6:38 tells us “*give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.*”

Test Today! Actually we are tested every day. And what we need to remember is, it is the world that tests us. They test us as Christians; we are held to a different standard and as children of God we should be. The question is whether you have a relationship with God or are you just putting in your time and punching a spiritual time card. God loves you but do you love Him, or do you just like Him, your test results will show.