

## PREFACE

In my library is a book written by the well-respected pastor and author, Eugene H. Peterson, entitled, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. This thin book, focused on the psalter’s “Songs of Ascents” (Psalms 120-134), is his response to a contemporary culture demanding instant answers, instant and painless gratification. That title, which I have brazenly borrowed for this session, is a phrase Peterson borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche, the nineteenth century philosopher and writer. The fuller quote is

The essential thing in heaven and earth is... that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.

*(Beyond Good and Evil)*

There is a tendency in those of us who study or just read God’s word to want to immediately apply the text before us to our personal situation—to think, “Ah, here is the answer to the problem I am having with\_\_\_\_\_.” Our passage in this session is a common case in point—especially v13. We *want* that verse to speak to our individual, personal temptations and trials. But does it?

By leaping too quickly to the personal application we run the risk of *mis*applying it by failing to first nail down why the author is saying what he does in its context. The “why” is necessary to understanding the “what.” That is, we can only accurately apply what the Spirit is telling us once we discern *why* the Spirit is telling us. And one of the “whys” for our current text, in my opinion, is the need for a “long obedience in the same direction” when it comes to enduring temptation or trials. So let us take these steps in turn. We begin by reading our passage, but including the verse before.

**Read 1 Corinthians 10:11-14.**

It seems a stretch to argue, as some do, that v13, while profitable Scripture in and of itself, does *not* fit into this context. How can one say that with all the connective tissue included, with all the “Therefore” and “these things happened” with which Paul connects everything in this chapter.

v6: Now these things [v1-5] happened...

v11: Now these things [v6-10] happened...

v12: Therefore, [based on what I have just said]... do this

v14: Therefore, [based on what I have just said]... do this

*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*

First, in v12, Paul delivers a stern warning; then, in v13, he extends a word of encouraging comfort. Permit me to offer a verbose paraphrase of v12: *Therefore, based on what I have just said about the disobedience and rebellion and grumbling and complaining of Israel—and the Lord God’s terrible but just response to their behavior—if you think you know it all and are standing on solid, unmovable ground, watch out: you may be about to step off a cliff.*

We need to return to Chapter Eight to see how Paul is still on-topic with this. [Turn to Chapter Eight](#). Verse 12 echoes how Paul began this treatise in v8:2.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 8:2.**

Behind this unhealthy situation of eating in an idol’s temples was an arrogant, even condescending attitude that said, “I’m an intelligent, knowledgeable person; I know that an idol is not a real god, so it is OK for me to be eating in its temple.” Paul’s answer to that? “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (v1b). *You are not wrong in what you know, but your knowledge has so puffed you up that you care nothing for those who do not share your knowledge.* Paul expands on this further down.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 8:9-12.**

*Garland:* That presumed “knowledge” has led them to risk idolatrous associations and to think nothing of it [[as in v8, referencing the events in Numbers 25:1-9](#)]. They remained oblivious to the fact that it placed them, not to mention the person with a weak conscience, in dire spiritual jeopardy.

How many times, we might imagine, did any one of those thousands of Israelites cry out, in the face of the calamities that befell them, “But we are God’s chosen people!” And how many times have we Christians, in the face of hard and trying times, cry out, “But I’m standing on the Rock; how can this be happening to me.”

When you become so nonchalant (read, arrogant) about your faith in Christ that you think nothing of fooling around with idols, you are playing with fire and (mixing my metaphors) setting yourself up for a bad “fall”—the meaning of which here depends on the true condition of the individual. In arguing the meaning of the word “fall” we can miss the more important point. Whether Paul means loss of reward, or death (as with the Israelites), or loss of faith leading to eternal damnation, is less critical than the warning that you *will* lose *something* in your relationship with Christ. Garland’s phrase is apt: you are placing yourself in “dire spiritual jeopardy.”

*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man;*

Just as we have seen before, commentators have, over the centuries, stood on their heads trying to explain why Paul says what he does in v13, claiming that it seems to stand apart from the context. Contrary to these learned scholars, I frankly believe that the context helps explain this verse. I believe it fits in just fine. Earlier I said that in v13 Paul offers a word here of encouraging comfort, and that is true. But the verse includes, as well, a subtext of admonition for enduring obedience.

While our *response* to temptation—our entering into it (Luke 22) or our fleeing from it (1 Corinthians 10:14)—is primarily internal, more often than not the temptation itself is external. The first part of v13 makes it clear that this temptation (*peirasmos*, temptation = “seduction to sin”) has come from outside us. Please turn to James 1.

I think it will be worthwhile—if not necessary—to work this out before we move on. That is, many interpreters of God’s word say that what James states in v14 is that every aspect of temptation and sin *begins* internally in every person.

### Read James 1:13-15.

The word in our Corinthian text translated “overtaken” in all but the NIV is **overtaken, seized**<sup>niv</sup> = *eilephen* = something “lying outside their willing or doing” (Fee)

In James, the word “enticed” translates, **deleazo** (del-eh-ad’-zo) = from the base of <G1388> (dolos); to *entrap*, i.e. (figurative) *delude* :- allure, beguile, entice.

and the word translated “carried away,” “drawn away,” or “dragged away,” is a hunting and fishing term, more literally translated “lured” in the ESV.

**exelko** = from <G1537> (ek) and <G1670> (helkuo); to drag forth, i.e. (figurative) to entice (to sin) :- draw away.

Here is the obvious fishing analogy: The fisherman baits his hook with whatever he thinks his prey will be drawn to. He casts out the line toward the place in the stream he thinks a fish awaits. From his hiding place the fish sees the bait, and, perhaps in spite of some nagging sense that there might be a sharp object hiding inside, his hunger overwhelms and grabs hold. He is then “drawn away” (**exelko**) by the bait to a place he does not want to go. In this analogy the bait on the hook is the temptation, the move the fish makes to acquire the bait is the “sin,” motivated by his “lust” for food.

Let me offer another, slightly more human analogy. Let's pick another "lust" at random—say, gambling. We are all born with a sin nature, but that nature is manifested differently in each person. One has a weakness for one thing, while another has a proclivity for something else.

Overseas for the navy in the early seventies I remember that practically everywhere we went ashore in the far east there were slot machines. Those machines held no allure for me; I could walk right past them and not give them any thought. But others found it more difficult—or even couldn't resist their pull at all. Now, the person with loose change in his pocket didn't make the machine; he had nothing to do with its being there when he walked by. But because of his particular nature, because of the specific lust dwelling within him, he was almost helpless to pass it by. Instead, he was "hooked" and "drawn away," taken to a place he did not intend, nor even desire, to go.

Built into each one of us, because of original sin, is a weakness, a sensitivity, to *something*—one thing or more that exerts a powerful, at times overwhelming tug away from righteousness. We can certainly try to avoid situations where we know that allure dwells; this is Paul's counsel to Timothy in his first letter to him: "But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness" (1 Timothy 6:11). And in the next verse he will tell the Corinthians, "Flee from idolatry." Because of the pervasiveness of certain allurements, however, some times this is impossible. We can also train ourselves, by the strength of God, to resist. In some cases, by His grace, we may even *lose* that proclivity all together. But for many of us, and I fear most of us, that specific weakness may be with us until we depart this mortal coil.

In sum, we may not have created or set in place the object of temptation, but *the reason it is temptation at all is because of what lies within us*. Those slot machines in Hong Kong and Kowloon and Tokyo and Subic Bay were not a temptation for this young sailor—but other things were. We are responsible for our actions when it is.

We can, in our moments of extreme temptation, think that no one else has ever suffered such a powerful pull as we; we may think that we—certainly *we*—have just reason for giving in. But Paul says to the Corinthians that all these temptations are "common to man"—common to all of humanity. Here is the beginning of the encouragement: if we stop here in v13 we have yet no word about what—if anything—God will do for us in such situations. But the first word is that we are not unique, nor is our particular weakness unique. Others have dealt with (implied, successfully) such things before. We are not alone. And there is a measure of comfort in that. But as we proceed into v13, we will discover even more.