

Nouthesia

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1 Corinthians 10:12-22

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One day mom was out and dad had to watch his 2 year old daughter. Shortly, his daughter appeared in the living room with a little Tea Set she had received for her birthday. The cups were filled with just water, but dad and his princess gave their imaginations some freedom and enjoyed a little spot of tea on a quiet Saturday afternoon. When mom came home, dad could not stop raving about his little girl and the wonderful tea she had made. Mom watched him drink the whole thing (as only a mother would) then said, "Did it ever occur to you that the only place she can reach to get water is from the toilet?"

Okay, now let me ask you this question, did you see the problem? Or were you completely oblivious to the waters origin? I'll be honest. I missed it. I never even stopped to consider where the water might be coming from, but not mom. It's almost as if a little voice in the back of her head whispered "Check the toilet".

I'm not sure if this kind of intuition is something a person is born with or is something a person can learn, but I do know that in spiritual things, God has promised to not leave a Believer helpless or clueless. He has promised the Holy Spirit to those who call Christ Lord and Master. Jesus says that "*When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.*" ¹ (John 16:13) We will not be left as orphans. God will not leave us to figure this out on our own. As a believer, God has equipped us to make heads or tails out of life. And the Spirit is constantly whispering from behind about what we do, what we say, and where we go. "*Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left.*" ² (Isaiah 30:21) But are you listening? See, that's the big question. The Holy Spirit speaks to our heart with *Nouthesia*: a teaching that comes with a warning; a teaching that says "do not go there, don't do that, or don't speak that way". This teaching will help a believer avoid situations that might cause them to stumble or fall, spiritually speaking, that is, but only if they will listen.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

²*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Is 30:21). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Some Corinthian Believers apparently disregarded the warnings of the Holy Spirit, and they found themselves in situations that not only destroyed their testimony but caused them to sin as well. So Paul gives them this warning found in **1 Corinthians 10:12-22**.

It seems some believers were not just eating meat that had been offered to these idols, but actually going to the temple and participating in the festivities. Well, of course these gods were not real. They had that superior knowledge, but, what happened at these feasts would be a big temptation for these believers, and they did not have the superior faith to resist that temptation.

Just across town was the temple to the Greek god Aphrodite. According to the Encyclopedia of Mythology, Aphrodite was the goddess of love and fertility, and her festival was called the Aphrodisiac. Now although they were not called prostitutes, a thousand young maidens would descend upon the worshippers offering their bodies as a way to worship their god. These young girls would customarily have their hair shaved very short, and would solicit anyone who happened to be at the festival.³ That's why Paul warns "So you think you are standing strong! Be careful not to fall". Apparently these believers had too much confidence in themselves.

Earlier, Paul had warned about the way God dealt with the Hebrew people who disregarded His warning (His *Nouthesia*) and provoked His wrath. And those believers who felt they could participate in the worship of Aphrodite **without sinning** were fooling themselves. As Paul points out, there is a big difference between God allowing you to be tempted and you putting yourself in a situation where you will have to resist temptation. Don't think so highly of your self, Paul warns. The moment you think you can resist temptation is the moment you are depending upon yourself and not God.

At first glance it seems Paul is encouraging Christians to avoid the world; to flee from anything that is worldly and instead live in seclusion like some monk in a monastery. Let's face it, we are bombarded constantly with worldly values and worldly pleasures. The images that sear our eyes, the words that pierce our ears, and the actions that make us blush, can lure an unprepared Christian into sin. And

³ Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Hebrew & Greek Study Bible, NASB edition

instead of facing these temptations, it would be a whole lot easier to simply avoid them. Well, I know that's what it seems Paul is saying, but actually he is painting a contrast here between God allowing a person to be tempted and someone putting themselves in a situation where they would be tempted. It's like Joseph and his encounter with Potiphar's wife. He resisted her advances because God had put him in that situation. Joseph didn't scheme and plan to find a way to be alone with her, then struggle to overcome the temptation (Genesis 39).

In light of the command Jesus has given His followers "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations*"⁴ (Matthew 28:19), at some point a Christian will need to come out of the monastery and walk among the people of this world. We are to be His witnesses to those still walking in darkness. But how can we resist the temptations we will obviously face when we do this? What do we do when the Holy Spirit directs us out into the very world we are trying to avoid? Listen to what Paul has said. Where God directs you He will not abandon you. If God has called you to a place or situation in order to be a witness for Him, the temptation you will face **will not** be greater than you can resist, and He will always provide a way for you to escape. But when you put yourself there, that's the difference.

Are you struggling with temptation right now? If so, I'm right there with you. I think we all face it day by day. And sometimes we wonder why. Well, a good exercise is to simply be honest with your self. Did you put your self in this situation or did God? If you did, then the answer is to flee! But if God did, then you can find assurance in the fact that He knows where you are weak, and the temptation will not be more than you can bear. Granted, it's not easy to stand face to face with temptation, but it is an exercise to develop your faith. It is to strengthen you for the work of the Kingdom. "*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*"⁵ (James 1:2-3)

We are all tempted daily, each in different ways. And God has granted us His Spirit to direct us away from the things which will destroy us. But God is also calling us out into the world little by little. And in His strength we will not fall.

⁴New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Mt 28:19). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁵New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Jas 1:2-3). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.