

## **NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 10:6-13.**

*Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyer. Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.*

### **CARNAL SECURITY AND ITS VICIES**

1. Here is a very earnest admonition, a message as severe as Paul ever indited, although he is writing to baptized Christians, who always compose the true Church of Christ. He confronts them with several awful examples selected from the very Church, from Israel the chosen people of God.

2. Paul's occasion and meaning in writing this epistle was the security of the Corinthians. Conscious of their privileged enjoyment of Christ, of baptism and the Sacrament, they thought they lacked nothing and fell to creating sects and schisms among themselves. Forgetting charity, they despised one another. So far from reforming in life, and retrieving their works of iniquity, they became more and more secure, and followed their own inclinations, even allowing a man to have his father's wife. At the same time they desired to be regarded Christians, and boastfully prided themselves on having received the Gospel from the great apostles. So Paul was impelled to write them a stern letter, dealing them severity such as he nowhere else employs. In fact, it seems almost as if it

were going too far to so address Christians; the rebuke might easily have struck weak and tender consciences with intolerable harshness. But, as in the second epistle, seeing how his sternness has startled the Corinthians, he modifies it to some extent, and deals tenderly with the repentant.

3. However, in the striking Scripture examples of the text here, he sufficiently shows the need for such admonition to them who would, after having received grace, become carnally secure and abandon the repentant life.

4. The text should properly include the beginning of this tenth chapter, which is read in the passage for Third Sunday before Lent. He begins with: *“I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink .... Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”* Then follows our text here – *“Now these things were our examples.”*

5. As we said, the admonition is to those already Christians. Paul would have them know that although they are baptized unto Christ, and have received and still enjoy his blessing through grace alone, without their own merit, yet they are under obligation ever to obey him; they are not to be proud and boastful, nor to misuse his grace. Christ desires obedience on our part, though obedience does not justify us in his sight nor merit his grace. For instance, a bride’s fidelity to her husband cannot be the merit that purchased his favor when he chose her. She is the bridegroom’s own because it pleased him to make her so, even had she been a harlot. But now that he has honored her, he would have her maintain that honor henceforth by her purity; if she fails therein, the bridegroom has the right and power to put her away. Again, a poor, wretched orphan, a bastard, a foundling, may be adopted as a son by some godly man and made his heir, though not meriting the honor. Now, if in return for such kindness the child becomes disobedient and refractory, he justly may be cut off from the inheritance. Not by the merit of their devotion, as Moses often hinted, did the Jews become the people of God; they were ever stiff-necked and continually rebelled against him. God, having chosen them and led them out of Egypt, urgently commanded them to serve him and obey his Word. But when they failed to fulfil the commandments; they had to feel the terrific force of his punishment.

### **ISRAEL’S CARNAL SECURITY A WARNING TO US**

6. Their example Paul here, with great earnestness, holds up to the world as a warning against carnally and confidently presuming upon the grace and goodness of God because we have already received of them. In unmistakable colors the apostle portrays the teaching of this striking and important, this weighty and specific, example. Rightly viewed, there certainly is no greater, more wonderful, story from the creation of the world down to the present time, nothing more marvelous to be found in any book – except that supremely wonderful work, the death and resurrection of the Son of God – than this history of a people led by God’s power out of Egypt, through the wilderness and

into the promised land. It is filled with the remarkably wonderful works of God, with striking examples of his anger and of his great kindness.

7. Referring to these examples, Paul goes on to imply: “As Christians and baptized, you should be familiar with them. If you are not, I would not fail to bring them before you for reflection on what befell other people of God, according to the Scripture record. They were our fathers, a noble, intelligent and great company and congregation of men, numbering over six hundred thousands, not counting wives and children.” They, Paul tells us, were termed, and rightly, the holy people of God. God designed their welfare; and through Moses, their bishop and pope, they had the Word of God, the promise and the Sacrament. Under Moses they were all baptized, when he led them through the sea, and by the cloud, under the shadow of which, sheltered from the heat, they daily pursued their journey. At night a beautiful pillar of fire, an intense lightning-like brilliance, protected them. In addition, their bread came daily from heaven and they drank water from the rock. These providences were their Sacrament, and their sign that God was with them to protect. They believed on the promised Christ, the Son of God, their guide in the wilderness. Thus they were a noble, highly-favored and holy people.

8. But with the great mass of the people, how long did faith last? No longer than until they came into the wilderness. There they began to despise God’s Word, to murmur against Moses and against God and to fall into idolatry. Whereupon God vindicated himself among them; of all that great nation which came out from Egypt, of all the illustrious ones who assisted Moses in leading and governing, only two individuals passed from the wilderness into Canaan. Plainly, then, God had no pleasure in the great mass of that host. It did not avail them to be called the people of God, a holy people, a company to whom God had shown marvelous kindness and great wonders; because they refused to believe and obey the Word of God. The prospect was good when they were so wonderfully and gloriously delivered from their enemies, and had at Mount Sinai received from God the Law and a noble order of worship – their prospect was good for them to enter into the land; they were already at the gate. But even in that auspicious moment they provoked God until he turned them back to wander forty years in the wilderness, where they perished.

9. Their punishment was wholly the result of their odious arrogance in boasting in the face of God’s Word, of their privileges as the people of God, upon whom he daily bestowed great kindness. “Do you not recognize,” they bragged, “the holiness of this entire congregation, among whom God dwells, daily performing his marvelous wonders?” In their pride and defiance they became stiff-necked and obstinate enough to continually complain against Moses and to oppose him whatever course he took with them. Thus they day by day awakened God’s wrath against themselves, forcing him to visit them with many terrible plagues. These failing to humble, he was compelled to remove the entire nation. Many times God would have destroyed them all at once had not Moses prostrated himself before him in their behalf and with earnest entreaty and strong supplication turned aside his wrath. Because of their perversity, Moses was a most wretched and harassed man. “The man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.” Numbers 12:3. For he was daily vexed with the

defiance, disobedience and opposition of this great company of people; and further, he had to witness and endure for the entire forty years the numerous and awful plagues sent upon his people, his heart being filled with anguish for them. Then, too, it was his continually to withstand God's wrath.

10. Terrible indeed is the thing we learn of this famously great people – God's own nation, unto whom he reveals himself, to whom God and Christ himself are revealed; a nation God governs and leads by his angels; a people he honors by wonders marvelous beyond anything ever heard on earth of any nation. As Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:7: "What great nation is there, that hath a god so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is whensoever we call upon him?" Yet all who came out of Egypt and had witnessed the mighty wonders God wrought among themselves and among their enemies, fell and glaringly sinned; not according to the measure of the mere weakness and imperfection of human nature, but they sinned disobediently and in willful contempt of God. Hardened in unbelief unto insensibility, they brought upon themselves overwhelming punishment.

11. Paul mentions several instances of the sin whereby they merited the wrath of God, to illustrate how they fell from faith and disregarded God's Word. First, he makes the general assertion that with many of them God was not well pleased. He means to include the great mass of the people; particularly the officials and leaders, the eminent of their number, individuals looked up to as the worthiest and holiest of the congregation, and who actually had wrought great things. Many of these fell into hypocrisy through boasting of the divine name, the divine office and spirit; Korah, for instance, with his faction, including two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation. Numbers 16:1-2. He and his leaders claimed right to the priesthood and government equal with Moses and Aaron, and so ostentatiously and boastfully that only God could say whether they were right. Necessarily God had to make it manifest that he had no pleasure in them; for they boasted until the earth swallowed them up alive, and many who adhered to and upheld them were consumed by fire.

## **ISRAEL'S VICIES IN THE WILDERNESS PUNISHED**

12. Proceeding, Paul recounts the vices which occasioned God's punishment and overthrow of the people in the wilderness. First, he says, they lusted after evil things. In the second year from the departure, when they actually had come into Canaan, they forgot God's kindness and wonderful works in their behalf and, becoming dissatisfied, longed to be back in Egypt to sit by the flesh-pots. They murmured against God and Moses until God was forced summarily to stop them with fire from heaven. Many of the people were consumed and a multitude more were smitten with a great plague while yet they ate of the flesh they craved; therefore the place of the camp was named the "*Graves of Lust.*" Numbers 11. Such was the reward of their concupiscence, which Paul here aptly explains as "*lusting after evil things.*"

13. Truly it is but lusting after the wrath and punishment of God when, in forgetfulness of and ingratitude for his grace and goodness we seek something new. The world is coming

to be filled with the spirit of concupiscence, for the multitude is weary of the Gospel. Particularly are they dissatisfied with it because it profits not the flesh; contributes not to power, wealth and luxury. Men desire again the old and formal things of popery, notwithstanding they suffered therein extreme oppression and were burdened not less than were the people of Israel in Egypt. But they will eventually have to pay a grievous penalty for their concupiscence.

14. In the third place, the apostle mentions the great sin – idolatry. “Neither be ye idolaters,” he counsels, “as were some of them.” Not simply the lower class of people were guilty in this respect, but the leaders and examples. As they led, the multitude followed. Even Aaron, the brother of Moses, himself high-priest, swayed by the influential ones, yielded and set up the golden calf ( Exodus 32:4) while Moses tarried in the mount. We are astounded that those eminently worthy individuals, having heard God’s Word and seen his wonders liberally displayed, should so soon fall unrestrainedly into the false worship of idolatry, as if they were heathen and possessed not the Word. Much less need we wonder that the blind world always is entangled with idol-worship.

15. Where the Word of God is lacking or disregarded, human wisdom makes-for itself a worship. It will find its pleasure in the thing of its own construction and regard it something to be prized, though it may be imperatively forbidden in God’s Word, perhaps even an abomination before him. Human reason thinks it may handle divine matters according to its own judgment; that God must be pleased with what suits its pleasure. Accordingly, to sanction idolatry, it appropriates the name of the Word of God. The Word must be forced into harmony with the false worship to give the latter an admirable appearance, notwithstanding the worship is essentially the reverse of what it is made to appear. Similarly popery set off its abominations of the mass, of monkery and the worship of saints; and the world in turn seeks to set off that idolatry to make it stand before God’s Word. Such is the conduct of the eminent Aaron when he makes for the people the golden calf ( Exodus 32:5-6), an image or sign of their offerings and worship. He builds an altar to it and causes to be proclaimed a feast to the Lord who has led them out of the land of Egypt. They must imitate the worship of the true God, a worship of sincere devotion and honest intention, with their offering, the calf, in the attempt to introduce a refined and ennobling worship.

16. Thereupon follows what is recorded in Exodus 32:6, to which Paul here refers: “And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” That is, they rejoiced and were well pleased with themselves, content to have performed such worship, and deemed they had done well. Next they proceed to their own pleasure, as if having provided against God’s anger. Thenceforth they would live according to their inclinations, wholly unrestrained and unreprieved by the Word of God; for, as they said, Aaron made the people free.

17. Such is the usual course of idolatry. Refusing to be considered a sin, it presumes to merit grace and boasts of the liberty of the people of God. It continues unrepentant and self-assured, even in the practice of open vice, imagining every offense to be forgiven before God for the sake of its holy worship. Thus have the priestly rabble of popery been doing hitherto; and they still adorn – yes, strengthen and defend – their shameful adultery, unchastity and all vices, with the name of the Church, the holy worship, the mass, and so on.

## **ISRAEL'S TRIAL OF GOD**

18. In the fourth admonition, the apostle says, “Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents.” This, too, is a heinous sin, as is proven by the terrible punishment. In Numbers 21 we read that after the people had journeyed for forty years in the wilderness and God had brought them through all their difficulties and given them victory over their enemies, as they drew near to the promised land, they became dissatisfied and impatient. They were setting out to go around the land of the Edomites, who refused them a passage through their country, when they began to murmur against God and Moses for leading them out of Egypt. Thereupon God sent among them fiery serpents and they were bitten, a multitude of the people perishing. Complaining against God is here called tempting him. Men set themselves against the Word of God and blaspheme as if God and his Word were utterly insignificant, because his disposing is not as they desire. Properly speaking, it is tempting God when we not only disbelieve him but oppose him, refusing to accept what he says as true and desiring that our own wisdom rule. That is boasting ourselves against him. Paul says in Corinthians 10:22: “*Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?*”

19. Such was the conduct of the Jews. Notwithstanding God's promise to be their God, to remain with them and to preserve them in trouble, if only they would believe in him and trust him; and notwithstanding he proved his care by daily providences expressed as special blessings and strange wonders, yet all these things availed not to save them from murmuring. When the ordering of events accorded not exactly with their wisdom or desire, or when, perhaps, disaster or failure threatened, immediately they began to make outcry against Moses; in other words, against his Godgiven office and message. “Why have you led us out of Egypt?” they would complain, meaning: “If you bore, as you say you do, the word and command of God and if he truly designed to work such marvels with us, he would not permit us to suffer want like this.” In fact, they could not believe God's dealings with them were in accord with his promise and design. They insisted that he should, through Moses, perform what they dictated; otherwise he should not be their God. At the outset, when they entered the wilderness, after having come out of Egypt and having experienced God's wonderful preservation of them in the Red Sea and his deliverance from their enemy, and having received from him bread and flesh, they immediately began to murmur against Moses and Aaron and to chide them for leading into the wilderness where no water was. “Is Jehovah among us, or not?” they burst forth.

Exodus 17:7. This was, indeed, as our text says, tempting God; for abundantly as his word and his wonders had been revealed to them, they refused to believe unless he should fulfill their desires.

20. And they persisted in so opposing and tempting God as long as they were in the wilderness, unto the fortieth year; to which God testifies when he says to Moses: “Because all those men that have seen my glory, and my signs, which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice,” etc., Numbers 14:22. It was in the second year after the departure from Egypt that the Jews murmured about the water, and now in the fortieth year, when they should have been humbled after so long experience, and when they whose lives covered that period ought to have been conscious of the wonderful deliverances they had experienced in not being destroyed with others of their number, but being brought safely to the promised land – now they begin anew to complain with great impatience and bitterness: *“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?”* Or, in other words: *“You often remind us you represent God’s command, and you have promised us great things. This is a fine way you take to lead us into the land when here we have yet farther to journey and are all going to die in the wilderness !”*

21. Notice, Paul in speaking of how they tempted God says, “They tempted Christ,” pointing to the fact that the eternal Son of God was from the beginning with his Church and with the people who received from the ancient fathers the promise of his coming in the form of man. They believed as we do that Christ – to use Paul’s words in the beginning – was the rock that followed them. Therefore the apostle gives us to understand, the point of the Israelites’ insult was directed against faith in Christ, against the promise concerning him. Moses was compelled to hear them protest after this manner: “Yes, you boast about a Messiah who is one with God, and who is with us to lead us; one revealed to the fathers and promised to be born unto us of our flesh and blood, to redeem us and bring relief to all men; a Messiah who for that reason adopts us for his own people, to bring us into the land; but where is he? This is a fine way he relieves us! Is our God one to permit us to wander for forty years in the wilderness until we all perish?”

22. That such sin and blasphemy was the real meaning of their murmurings is indicated by the fact that Moses afterward, in the terrible punishment of the fiery serpents by which the people were bitten and died, erected at God’s command a brazen serpent and whoever looked upon it lived. It was to them a sign of Christ who was to be offered for the salvation of sinners. It taught the people they had blasphemed against God, incurred his wrath and deserved punishment, and therefore in order to be saved from wrath and condemnation, they had no possible alternative but to believe again in Christ.

## MURMURING AGAINST GOD OPEN REVOLT

23. This last point is akin to the one preceding. Paul defines murmuring against God as an open revolt actuated by unbelief in the Word, a manifestation of anger and impatience, an unwillingness to obey when events are not ordered according to the pleasure of flesh and blood, and a readiness instantly to see God as hating and unwilling to help. Just so the Jews persistently behaved, despite Moses' efforts to reconcile. Being also continually punished for their perversity, they ought prudently to have abandoned their murmurings; but they only murmured the more.

24. The apostle's intent in the narration is to warn all who profess to be Christians, or people of God, as we shall hear later. He holds that the example of the Israelites ought deeply to impress us, teaching us to continue in the fear of God and to be conscious of it, and to guard against self-confidence. For God by the punishments mentioned shows forcibly enough to the world that he will not trifle with, nor excuse, our sin – as the world and our own flesh fondly imagine – if we, under cover of his high and sacred name, dare despise and pervert his Word; if we, actuated by presumptuous confidence in our own wisdom, our own holiness and the gifts of God, follow our private opinions, *“God is not our own judgment and inclinations, and vainly satisfy ourselves with the delusion: angry with me, one so meritorious, so superior, in his sight.”*

25. You learn here that God spared none of the great throng from Egypt, among whom were many worthy and eminent individuals, even the progenitors of Christ in the tribe of Judah. He visited terrible punishment upon the distinguished princes and the leaders among the priesthood and other classes, and that in the sight of the entire people among whom he had performed so many marvelous wonders. Having by Moses delivered them from temporal bondage in Egypt, and through his office spiritually baptized and sanctified them; having given Christ, to speak with, lead, defend and help them; having dealt kindly with them as would a father with his children: yet he visits terrible destruction upon these Jews because they have abused his grace and brought forth no fruits of faith, and have become proud, boasting themselves the people of God, children of Abraham and circumcised, sole possessors of the promise of a Messiah, and consequently sure of participating in the kingdom of God and enjoying his grace.

26. Now, as Paul teaches, if terrible judgment and awful punishment came upon these illustrious and good people, let us not be proud and presumptuous. We are far inferior to them and cannot hope, in these last ages of the world, to know gifts and wonders as great and glorious as they knew. Let us see ourselves mirrored in them and profit by their example, being mindful that while we are privileged to glory in Christ, in the forgiveness of sins and the grace of God, we must be faithfully careful not to lose what we have received and fall into the same condemnation and punishment before God which was the fate of this people. For we have not yet completed our pilgrimage; we have not arrived at forward in the undertaking, in spite of dangers and hindrances that may assail. The work the place toward which we journey. We are still on the way and must constantly go of salvation is indeed begun in us, but as yet is incomplete. We have come out of Egypt

and have passed through the Red Sea; that is, have been led out of the devil's dominion into the kingdom of God, through Christian baptism. But we are not yet through the wilderness and in the promised land. There is a possibility of our still wandering from the way, into defeat, and missing salvation.

27. Nothing is lacking on God's part; he has given us his Word and the Sacraments, has bestowed the Spirit, given grace and the necessary gifts, and is willing to help us even further. It rests with ourselves not to fall from grace, not to thrust it from us through unbelief, ingratitude, disobedience and contempt of God's Word. For salvation is not to him who only begins well, but, as Christ says ( Matthew 24:13), "**He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.**" But the apostle continues:

### **ISRAEL'S CAREER AN ADMONITION TO INDIVIDUALS**

*"Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come."*

28. When you read or hear this historical example, the terrible punishment the Jewish people suffered in the wilderness, think not it is an obsolete record and without present significance. The narrative is certainly not written for the dead, but for us who live. It is intended to restrain us, to be a permanent example to the whole Church. For God's dealings with his own flock are always the same, from the beginning of time to the end. Likewise must the people of God, or the Church, be always the same. This history is a portrait of the Church in every age, representing largely its actual life – the vital part; for it shows on what the success of the Church on earth always depends and how it acts. The record teaches that the Church is at all times wonderfully governed and preserved by God, without human agency, in the midst of manifold temptations, trials, suffering and defeat; that it does not exist as an established government regulated according to human wisdom, with harmony of parts and logical action, but is continually agitated, impaired and weakened in itself by much confusion and numerous penalties; that the great and best part, who bear the name of the Church, fall and bring about a state of things so deplorable God can no longer spare, but is compelled to send punishments in the nature of mutinies and similar disorders, the terrible character of which leaves but a small proportion of the people upright.

29. Now, if such disaster befell the nation selected of God, chosen from the first as his people, among whom he performed works marvelous and manifest beyond anything ever known since, what better thing may we expect for ourselves? Indeed, how much greater the danger threatening us; how much reason we have to take heed that the same fate, or worse, overtake not ourselves! With reference to the things chronicled in our text, Paul tells us: "*They were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.*" That is, we are now in the last and most evil of days, a time bringing many awful dangers and severe punishments. It is foretold in the Scriptures, predicted by Christ and the apostles, that awful and distressing times will come, when there shall be wide

wanderings from the true faith and sad desolations of the Church. And, alas, we see the prophecies only too painfully fulfilled in past heresy, and later in Mohammedanism and the papacy.

30. The era constituting the “last time” began with the apostles. The Christians living since Christ’s ascension constitute the people of the latter times, the little company left for heaven; and we gentiles, amidst the innumerable multitude of the ungodly generation in the wide world, must experience worse calamities than befell the Jews, who lived under the law of Moses and the Word of God, under an admirable external discipline and a well-regulated government. Yet even in this final age so near the end of time, when we should be occupied with proclaiming the Gospel everywhere, the great multitude are chiefly employed with boasting their Christian name. We see how extravagantly the Pope extols his church, teaching that outside its pale no Christians are to be found on earth, and that the entire world must regard him as the head of the Church.

31. True, his subjects were baptized unto Christ, called to the kingdom of God and granted the Sacrament and the name of Christ. But how do they conduct themselves? Under that superior name and honor, they suppress Christ’s Word and his kingdom. For more than a thousand years now they have desolated the Church, and to this hour most deplorably persecute it. On the other hand, great countries, vast kingdoms, claiming to be Christian but disregarding the true doctrine of faith, are punished by the Turk’s desolating hand, and instead of the incense of Christianity, with them is the revolting odor of Mohammed’s faith.

32. Great and terrible was the punishment of the Jewish people. Seemingly no disaster could befall man more awful than overtook them in the wilderness. Yet it was physical punishment, and although many, through unbelief and contempt of God, fell and incurred everlasting condemnation, still the Word of God remained with a remnant – Moses and the true Church. But the punishment of this last age is infinitely more awful, for God permits the pure doctrine to be lost, and sends strong delusions, that they who receive not the truth nor love it shall believe falsehood and be eternally lost. 2 Thessalonians 2:10. Such has been our reward; we have only too terribly suffered punishment. And if we are not more thankful for the grace God extends in his Word – a last gleam of light, on the point of extinction – we shall meet with retribution even more appalling.

*“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”*

33. Here is summed up the teaching of the above examples. The sermon is directed against the self-confident. Some there were among the Christian Corinthians who boasted they were disciples of the great apostles, and who had even received the Holy Spirit, but who stirred up sects and desired to be commended in all their acts. To these Paul would say: “No, dear brother, be not too secure, not too sure where you stand. When you think you stand most firmly you are perhaps nearest to falling, and you may fall too far to rise again. They of the wilderness were worthy people and began well, doing great deeds, yet

they fell deplorably and were destroyed. Therefore, be cautious and suffer not the devil to deceive you. You will need to be vigilant, for you are in the flesh, which always strives against the spirit; and you have the devil for enemy, and dangers and difficulties beset you on all sides. Be careful lest you lose what you have received. You have only made a beginning; the end is yet to be attained.” So we must be wary and steadfast, that we may, as Paul has it, work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Philippians 2:12.

*“There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear [such as is common to man]: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.”*

34. Paul’s meaning is: “I must not terrify you too much. I would in a measure comfort you. So far you have had no temptations greater than flesh and blood offer. They have risen among yourselves – one holding another in contempt, one doing another injustice; allowing adulteries and other evils to creep in, which things are indeed not right nor decent. You must resolve to reform in these things lest worse error befall you. For should Satan get hold of you in earnest with his false doctrine and spiritual delusions, his strong temptations of the soul – contempt of God, for instance – such as assailed Peter and many others of the saints, you could not stand. You are yet weak; you are new and untried Christians. Then thank God who gives you strength to bear your present temptations; who, to retain you, presents what is best for you, admonishing you, through his Word, to be on your guard against falling yet deeper into temptation.

