

Escape Route: I Corinthians 10:13

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

Imagine for a moment you are sleeping peacefully in your bed at home. Suddenly, you are awakened by the scream of your smoke detector. Wiping the sleep from your eyes, you see smoke is indeed coming into your room from under the door. You test the door as you were taught in school, it is burning hot. What would you do? Have you ever thought about it? Have you taught your kids about it? Have you ever practiced it? For years, I have been given the reasons for having a planned escape route in case of fire. However, not once have I given it any more than a passing thought. I think I have mentioned it to the children on one occasion, but we have never had a practice. What do you think will happen if we actually have a fire? I imagine we will have a great deal of panic and trouble. We might get it out of it alive and then again, we might not. Clearly, the Crozier family needs to take the advice offered and have a practiced plan.

There is a similar scenario to which we must all give more thought. **I Corinthians 10:13** says, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (ESV). This verse, for me, is one of the most hopeful verses in Scripture because its author is the same person who wrote **Romans 7:15-20**.

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

The same man who struggled so much with covetousness he claimed to be unable to stop proclaims there is an escape route for every sin. But where? Do we face temptation the same way my family has faced a possible house fire? Have we considered how we will escape temptation? We must not expect to get to the moment of overwhelming temptation and think we will see a neon sign flashing an escape direction to us. As with the possible house fire, we need to premeditate our route of escape. Only then will we learn to overcome and conquer Satan by the grace of God. So, we ask, what must we do to escape our temptations and sins?

Discussion:

- I. Escape Route Step #1: Rely on God
 - A. **Romans 7:14-25** is pretty clear. While we are relying on ourselves, trying to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get control of our lives, we will always fail. If Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, Pharisee of Pharisees and as to the law blameless demonstrated that with some sins he couldn't overcome on his own, why do we think we will be any different? Let's face it, **Ephesians 2:1-3** explains where we put ourselves. We were by nature children of wrath, following the lead of the devil. We will not overcome that on our own.
 - B. This is not to say there aren't any sins we have committed that we can't easily overcome. It merely demonstrates that each of us have at some point given control of some part of our lives over to some sin. The only way to overcome that bondage and break free on any permanent basis is to let God handle it by simply following His direction. As long as we think we are strong enough to overcome temptation all by ourselves we will always fall prey. But, when we recognize how truly weak we are and simply rely on Christ for strength, then we can overcome (cf. **II Corinthians 12:9-10**; **Philippians 4:13**).
- II. Escape Route Step #2: Knowledge
 - A. If we want to escape a fire, we have to have some knowledge. We need to know not to open doors that are hot. We need to know smoke rises so crawl out. We need to know how to open windows or where ladders are to get off the roof, etc. Without knowledge, we will die in the fire.
 - B. If we don't know what sin is, then we can't possibly escape from it. Further, we can't know in which direction God is leading us if we don't know His Word. God said, "My people are

destroyed for lack of knowledge” (**Hosea 4:6**, ESV). Further, **Psalms 119:11** says, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (ESV). Finally, we see Jesus escape temptation because of His knowledge of the Word in **Matthew 4:4, 7, 10**.

III. Escape Route Step #3: Work on the heart

- A. **Proverbs 4:23** says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (ESV). In **Mark 7:20-23**, Jesus explained the connection between our heart and our actions. The immoralities that we commit all begin in the heart. Thus, if we want to overcome our temptations to act sinfully, we have to start by working on our heart. We see this as Jesus spoke to the Pharisees in **Matthew 23:25-28**. They tried to make the outside appear righteous while leaving the inside filled with hypocrisy and unrighteous thinking. No doubt, this inner corruption could not be permanently hidden but came out.
- B. We often make this point to talk about what we put in our hearts and what we think about. We should make that point. As **Philippians 4:8** says, we should think about, focus on and meditate upon things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. If we fill our time thinking on these things, we have no time to think of immoral and sinful things. However, I would like to take us further.
- C. I want to tell you about my house. Some time ago, I noticed that the siding underneath our back door had popped loose. I recognized that was a problem. I made a mental note to do something about it sometime. A couple weeks ago, I had Kenny Wells come to my house to fix it. Fortunately for me, Kenny is a much wiser man than I am. I would have popped off the siding, replaced that piece of wood and reattached the siding. It would have looked good on the outside. Kenny however checked around it and found the problem didn’t begin there. There was rotten wood up on the side of the door and then up on the side of the window and above the window and up on the overhang. In fact, he found the problem began about halfway up the roof with a section of messed up siding on the overhang. He fixed that. Now, it not only looks good on the outside, but the real problem is fixed. Many of us are like my house. We see an external problem—perhaps drinking, drugs, lust, pornography, sexual immorality, lying, gossip, outbursts of anger. We attack it. We set up restrictions and rules to stop those bad habits. The problem is those sins are not the root problem. Rather, we have a problem in our heart. Perhaps we have never learned how to appropriately face stress, sorrow, emotional pain, confrontation, or even merely to talk through our problems with somebody, etc. We may make ourselves look good on the outside, but the problem is still on the inside. Eventually, the struggle will surface and all our attempts to white knuckle it on the outside won’t accomplish anything, we will find ourselves right back in our active sin. It was painful to come home and watch Kenny work his way up the side of my house and address the real problem. It would have been cheaper and easier if he had just replaced that one piece of wood and reattached that one piece of siding, but the problem would still have been there. Eventually, more damage would have appeared. That is the way it is in our lives. It is painful to address the heart issues that cause us to sin. It is easier to just try to address the external problems. But, in the end, looking only on the outside simply allows more and more damage on the inside that will find its way to the surface sooner or later. If we want to escape sin, we need to start with the heart.

IV. Escape Route Step #4: Don’t make provision for the flesh’s lusts

- A. **Romans 13:14** makes it very clear that we must not make provision for the lusts of the flesh. Understand what this means. I recognize that making a trip to the water park or the beach is not the same as lusting after a woman. But what do we really think is going to happen there? The idea of making provision is akin to what we do when we take a trip. We have to prepare. We have to pack our bags and include what we are going to need on the trip. In our lives, we must not pack our luggage with anything that will pave the way for us to sin.
- B. I do recognize this may mean different things for each of us. For instance, by God’s grace alcohol has never been a struggle for me. If my car broke down and the nearest phone was in the liquor store across the street, it would not be a bit of a temptation for me to walk in there, use the phone and walk out. However, if you have had struggle with drinking alcohol, you can argue all day long about how it isn’t unlawful for you just to go in and use the phone, you are a

fool if you walk in there. Don't make provisions for your flesh's lusts. On the other hand, there are certain television shows that I don't watch anymore because I have learned they pave the way for the sins of lust with which I struggle. They may not bother you that way.

- C. But let's take this a step further. If you were to talk with folks involved in the Anonymous programs (Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, etc.) you would hear them use terms like triggers and rituals. A trigger is something the addict recognizes prompts a fleshly desire. Making no provisions for the lusts of the flesh means avoiding our triggers. For instance, I knew one brother who is a recovering alcoholic. He gave up caffeine because he knew that the stress and agitation of several caffeinated cups of coffee made him feel the internal need to calm down. His natural method of calming down was getting a drink of alcohol. So, he didn't just try to avoid the alcohol, he got rid of the trigger and quit drinking caffeine. Rituals are the actions someone goes through leading up to the actual active sin. I know of several dating couples that have struggled with sexual immorality. They would go on a date with every intention of staying pure. They might even pray together to start the date to ask for strength to be pure but they ended up messing around anyway. The story almost always came out the same. They would go through a ritual that they didn't realize was the start of the problem. They drove out to a secluded place to have some privacy. Or they wanted to get away from their roommates and so they went into their room and closed the door. They had no intention of committing immorality when they did these things, but for some reason it just kept happening. They stopped their immorality by stopping their rituals. That is, instead of driving out to secluded places or going into a room and closing the door they started having privacy in public—taking walks in public parks, staying in the restaurant, going out on to the front porch to talk, etc. Making no provision for the lusts of the flesh means recognizing our rituals that lead up to our sin and cutting the temptation off at the knees. Don't make provision for the lust of the flesh.

V. Escape Route Step #5: Pursue righteousness

- A. **I Timothy 6:11** and **II Timothy 2:22** explain that fleeing sinful things is not enough to escape. If we really want to find God's escape routes, we have to pursue righteousness. After all, we are supposed to hunger and thirst for righteousness (**Matthew 5:6**).
- B. Jesus provides a great picture of this problem in **Matthew 12:43-45**. Jesus wasn't really talking about demon possession. Rather, He was using the picture of the unclean spirits He had cast out as an illustration about facing temptation and sin. When the unclean spirit returned, he did not find anything in his old place. All he found was a dwelling place swept out and cleaned up, but empty. He took along seven more and took over the person again with a vengeance. This is a picture of temptation. How many times when we have turned away from sin to we spend all our time merely trying to keep the dwelling place cleaned up. However, we aren't pursuing anything else in the place of the sin. It shouldn't surprise us that the sin comes back with a vengeance. That especially happens because when we shift our focus from focusing on sin to merely focusing on not committing that same sin, our mind is still dwelling on the sin. We need to fill our minds and hearts with a greater pursuit. We need to pursue righteousness. The principle of **Ephesians 5:18** fits here. Paul is saying it is not merely enough to refrain from filling our bodies with intoxicants because that leads to debauchery, rather we must actively fill our minds with the Spirit because that will lead to self-control.

VI. Escape Route Step #6: Humility

- A. **I Corinthians 10:12** is clear, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (ESV). This calls to mind the repeated sentiment in **Proverbs** that pride goes before a fall (**Proverbs 11:2; 16:18; 18:12**). I know for me personally most of my biggest falls with any particular sin come after I have bragged to someone about how I've beaten some problem. It is almost as if Satan waits to hear those words and then pounces.
- B. Jesus said we must be poor of spirit if we want the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:3**). There are two sides of this. The one side is the poverty of spirit that comes by recognizing how sinful we have been, this causes us to turn to Jesus for mercy and forgiveness. The other side is the humility to realize that apart from Jesus I am merely going to continue in my sins. The moment I

start thinking I can beat the devil in this temptation game is the minute he gains a foothold and then I am violating step #1 of relying on God. When I rely on myself, I lose.

VII. Escape Route Step #7: Use strong moments to prepare for the weak

- A. There is a second point I think we can draw from **I Corinthians 10:12**. When we think we are standing is when we need to take heed. When you reach that plain of thinking you are standing, when you feel like you have beaten the sin, be humble enough to admit you won't always feel this way. We all have up times and we all have down times. We may have gone a few days without lying, cheating or stealing. We may think we have it beat and we don't need any more help. Don't fall prey to that thinking. Instead, recognize Satan is about to mount bigger attacks. He is merely lulling you into a false sense of security. This is when you establish plans. Use these moments to prepare for weak moments.
- B. Use this time to establish accountability relationships that will be in place. Instead of waiting until your weak moments to try to gather the strength to call someone, use your strong moments to establish their calls. That is, when you are strong and really intent on overcoming some sin get some friend to commit to call you at certain times to check on how you are doing and hold you accountable, especially get them to agree to call you in times you know are problem times for your sin. For instance, if you know you have a tendency to use your lunch hour to gossip with co-workers, have someone agree to call you just before or during your lunch break. Use your strong moments to establish the walls that might help you avoid sin in your weak ones. If you struggle with internet pornography or internet gambling, use your strong moments to go get a filter placed on your computer so in your weak moments you cannot access the cyber-filth. If you struggle with alcohol, use your strong moments to pour out your hidden stash and throw away the bottles.

VIII. Escape Route Step #8: Confess to and pray with our shepherds

- A. **James 5:14-15** is a difficult passage. I have taught and believe it is not dealing with physical sickness but spiritual. Thus, the anointing oil is not dealing with physical medicine but spiritual. I believe this is one of the greatest steps we can take to overcome our temptations and sins. When we are struggling spiritually, whether it is merely with doubts and weaknesses or full-fledged in sin, we mustn't wait for our elders to finally see it so they have to come to us. Instead, go to them. We should share our struggles, temptations and sins with them. Then let them shepherd us. Listen to their guidance.
- B. I can personally attest to the benefit of this. I preached this message for a long time without living by it. I preached it over and over again trying to convince myself to do what I was saying. All the while, the temptations and sins festered inside like an infected, puss-filled boil. When I finally was pushed to follow through it was like a lancing of an infected sore. Yes, there was some pain, but the following relief and help was immense. I don't know what you may be struggling with, but let me assure you we have shepherds who care about our souls. They will not sit in condescending judgment over you. They will hear your pleas and they will help as much as they can giving you guidance and shepherding to overcome your sins and temptations.

IX. Escape Route Step #9: Confess to and pray with our brethren

- A. **James 5:16** goes on to say that we need to confess our sins to one another and pray with one another. I don't believe this passage means every Sunday we need to air our weekly dirty laundry to the entire congregation by "going forward." But it does mean we need to find brethren we trust with whom we can share our struggles. We need to let them pray with us. This passage says that the prayer of our righteous brethren is very effective. These prayers alone will help us overcome and escape our sins and struggles.
- B. Further, this will develop relationships of help and strength. It will open doors with brethren who can then stir us up to love and good deeds as **Hebrews 10:24** advises.

X. Escape Route Step #10: Flee immediately

- A. If we take these first 9 steps, we will actually have taken God's escape route before we even realized there was a temptation. We will avoid many of the temptations and traps Satan is setting before they even become a problem. However, there will still be times when Satan

springs a trap on us that we didn't see coming. There is one final maneuver we must take. Flee. Run. Don't linger. Don't think you can hang out there and fight it. Get away from the temptation as fast as you can and do not worry about the other consequences.

- B. We have already read **I Timothy 6:11** and **II Timothy 2:22** that speak of fleeing immorality. We need to remember Joseph's example in **Genesis 39:12**. He fled, leaving his garment in the house, which paved the way for him to be framed for a sin he didn't commit. If you struggle with gossip and you walk up on brethren who are gossiping, you can flee in two ways. One, you can rebuke them for gossiping and ask them to stop or, two, leave. Don't stick around and try to be the mature brother or sister who doesn't submit. Get away from them. If you have trouble with stealing and you find yourself in a store with the overwhelming desire to shoplift, push your basket aside, put all your unpurchased items down and get out of the store. If you are watching tv and a scantily clad woman pops up, don't continue to watch and try to fight your lust. Walk out of the room, change the channel or turn the tv off. Run, don't walk, away from the temptation.

Conclusion:

Take courage. When our spiritual house is on fire and Satan has launched his burning assaults, God has paved the escape route. Flames may lick all about us, but we can be rescued if we merely follow God's escape plans. Take courage. **II Peter 2:9** explains that the Lord knows how to rescue us from trials and temptations. Let's rely on His escape plans. Our house may burn, but we will escape saved and whole.