

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Norman “Kid” McCoy, was welterweight boxing champion in 1896. He was fighting a contender who had the misfortune of being deaf. McCoy discovered his opponent’s disability and took advantage of it. Near the end of the third round McCoy stepped back a pace and pointed to his adversary’s corner, indicating that the bell had rung. His opponent thanked him, “Very civil of you.” But the bell hadn’t rung at all, and as soon as the other boxer dropped his hands and turned away, McCoy immediately knocked him out.

That’s how sin works; it doesn’t play fair. If we drop our guard, it can destroy us. Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 11:3(NIV) But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

We drop our guard and our mind is led astray from our devotion to Christ. We may think we are spiritually mature and cannot be tempted. Thinking like that is sure to get us in trouble.

In 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV) Paul said, “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.”

Someone asked me one time if temptation and testing was the same thing. The same Greek word is used for both. Think of it this way: temptations are always a test; the question is will we give in or will we stay true?

Temptation itself is not a sin; it is a call to battle. Temptation confronts us with a situation out of which, hopefully, we emerge stronger for it. Each temptation leaves us better or worse; but one thing is for sure, neutrality is impossible.

It’s right here so many of us fail; we stand in judgment of other’s failures without considering our own weaknesses and failures.

We're Miss Goodie Two-shoes. We're like Margaret in Dennis the Menace—always above the mischief and merriment the boys are into. But folks, there is a sinister force and power in this world that seeks to destroy all that is good.

God has an enemy. Jesus Christ has an enemy. The Holy Spirit has an enemy. As believers who belong to God, that enemy is also our enemy.

That enemy is Satan himself. He knows who we Christians are. He knows us personally. He knows where to attack us. He knows our weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

Satan is the source of all evil—but even without him, we are perfectly capable of sinning all by ourselves. We don't need any help. But he's ready and willing to nudge us over the edge.

Sometimes it seems that the more we mature in our faith and the godlier we become; Satan increases his attacks on us.

1. Why are we Tempted?

(1) Temptation of a non-Christian.

A non-Christian faces the same temptations common to all of us.

Satan tries to convince non-Christians that God doesn't exist, the Bible is full of myths, Christianity is just one of many ways to utopia, and the pleasures of this world are the only things to live for.

All people whether they are Christian or not, are capable of being good and doing good. This is just part of the moral code put into each of us by God.

The one main purpose of Satan with a non-believer is to keep them from becoming a Christian.

When a person becomes a Christian he or she is lost to Satan. They are under the more powerful influence of the Holy Spirit. Their eyes are opened to truth. Their spirit is alive to God. They are in the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Yet, every one of us who have accepted Jesus as Savior knows that we are still tempted and give in to sin every day. Why do we still struggle with sin?

(2) Temptation of a Christian

We are tempted for two primary reasons:

a. To destroy our fellowship with Jesus

Once you accept Christ as your Savior, Satan cannot have your soul. Now you belong to Jesus. Your soul is safe and secure. You can never lose your salvation.

But you can lose the joy of your salvation. Satan wants to destroy your love and service for Christ. He wants to lead you away from a pure and sincere devotion to Jesus Christ.

The relationship between a saved person and Christ can never be severed, but fellowship can be. So he works to cause you to lose the sweet fellowship of Christ.

b. To destroy our Christian influence

Everything Satan does in tempting a Christian is related to this. If he can divert our devotion from Jesus, so that we act like the rest of the world, our Christian influence will be lost. .

More than what we say, living lives for Christ is what really attracts others to Jesus. It is difficult to tell a non-Christian that you are a believer when you don't act like it.

There is nothing as pathetic and sad as a Christian who has lost the joy of his salvation and is out of fellowship with Christ. This is what Satan wants to accomplish when he tempts us.

2. How are Christians tempted?

Satan doesn't flat out say, "I want you to stop being devoted to Christ," or, "Why don't you reject Christ." That would never work.

He's subtle; he knows our weaknesses. He tempts us the way he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride in self (1 Jn. 2:16).

Our weakness becomes the forbidden fruit. He is cunning, deceptive and clever. He appeals to our sense of vanity; he works with our feelings of invulnerability. Here are two underlying ways Satan works on us:

(1) He causes us to forget

I heard a story about two fellows discussing who they were going to vote for in the upcoming election.

One said, "I'm going to vote for the challenger, I'm not going to vote for the incumbent."

His friend said, "That's strange, I thought the incumbent was a long time acquaintance of yours." The first said, "He is."

The other said, "I thought he saved your life when you were a boy." The first said, "He did." "And I thought you were in the service together, and he saved your life in the war." "Well, he did that, too."

"And I thought when you got married he was in your wedding." "Yes sir, he sure was." "And didn't he write a letter recommending your son to the Annapolis Naval Academy? I would think that after all he's done for you, you would vote for him." The first replied, "But what's he done for me recently?"

It is so easy for us to forget the goodness of God. Don't give Satan the victory—think about what Jesus has done—your salvation, his provision, answering your prayers and blessings.

If you have a hard time thinking of anything, then Satan is already blinding your mind. In our forgetfulness we become more attracted to the world than the things of Jesus.

It's so easy to wallow in self-pity and blame God for every little thing we think is not right. We become selfish in our attitudes, thinking more of our selves and less of the needs of others.

(2) He tries to confuse us.

This was a real problem in the Corinthian church. In 2 Cor. 11:4 the people of the church came dangerously close to accepting a different savior than the Jesus of the Bible.

Satan got them to take their minds off the Lord Jesus Christ who had died for them. It's been the same ever since with the occult, false religions, cults, and new age stuff.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer described the birth of sin in Christians this way:

"In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money, or, finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world, of nature. Joy in God is... extinguished in us.

"Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God. The lust thus aroused envelopes the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us. The questions present themselves: "Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?" "Is it really not permitted to me, yes -- expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, to appease desire?"

It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.” (Temptation, Satan the Chief Agent in)

Satan will do anything to distract from the centrality of Christ and to distort the truth. When Satan succeeds you become confused, and lose the joy of your salvation.

3. Overcoming temptation.

(1) Recognize the danger

There was a bloodhound that started chasing a deer but a fox crossed his path, so he started chasing the fox instead. After a while a rabbit crossed his path, so the hound chased the rabbit. Soon a mouse crossed his path and the hound chased the mouse into a hole.

The hound had begun his hunt on the trail of a magnificent deer; he ended up watching a mouse hole. It is so easy to start well but then run after the things that Satan brings across our path. We have to recognize the power of Satan and the dangers we are in with the temptations that cross our paths.

The night before Jesus was crucified he warned the disciples that they would abandon him. Peter said, “Not me. These others may desert you, but I never will.”

Sure enough, before the night was over, Satan caused Peter to forget the past three wonderful years with Jesus. And he so confused Peter’s mind that he lost his devotion to Christ. Peter not only denied Jesus, but he did it with an oath and swearing.

If I were aware of a physical danger that you would face today, and warned you about it, I’m sure you would be extra cautious, and would try to stay away from whatever the danger was. This is how you should also react to temptation.

(2) Trust God

Satan is more powerful and cunning than you and I can imagine. We are no match for his mind or his methods. Our source and strength beyond ourselves is God. The Bible says...

1 Corinthians 10:13(NIV) No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Jesus is our constant companion. His strength is our strength. No Christian can ever claim they were overcome by temptation.

Not even Satan can make us sin. Satan cannot even make a unbeliever sin. When we give in to temptation it's because we want to. But we Christians, however, have our heavenly Father's help in resisting temptations.

Whether your faithfulness is being tested, or an enticement by Satan to sin, there is only one way to pass the test. Trust God. He provides so that you can stand up under it.

He doesn't remove the temptation. He gives you the strength and fortitude to do what is right and necessary in that temptation and test.

Application:

God sees us through it. He is with us in it. Here's how to get through it:

Pray: Turn to God and put the matter in His hands.

Trust: Believe that God will answer and help you. Know that your faith will be stronger for coming through it.

Focus: Focus on Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:3-4). Jesus endured more than we will ever be required to. He understands what it is to be tempted.