

The Continual Testing Of Our Faith

The Framework of Temptation

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Every day we are faced with tests of our character. Many times, these tests begin in the form of very subtle temptations that activate our desires in everyday life. When Satan puts these temptations in front of us, they are designed to entice us in areas of weakness and to do damage to our integrity. But, sometimes temptations arise that form out of our own desires. These, too, are formed out of areas in which we have weaknesses. This is not a surprise to anyone in God's church, because we realize that we are constantly fighting these temptations that come before us.

For one person it may be food, for another alcohol, for another sex. A temptation may appeal to the mouth, ears, eyes, or nose in the form of dessert, music, beauty, or scent. It may appeal to touch and feel. The sources of temptation are unlimited, especially in this society, with TV, radio and the Internet. We are constantly being bombarded by temptations of everything that we can think of through all of these five senses of ours. Constantly we are resisting these things and it wears us down.

The words "tempt, and temptation" have a sinister connotation in present-day usage that has not always been attached to them. Originally, the words were of neutral content, with the sense of "putting to the proof," the testing of character or quality. So those two words 'tempt' and 'temptation' used to have a mutual sense to them.

Accordingly, God is "tempted" by Israel's distrust of Him, as if the people were actually challenging Him to show His perfections. Abraham was "tempted," being called upon to offer up Isaac; and Jesus was "tempted" to a spectacular Messiahship. No evil is implied in the subject of these temptations.

Temptation therefore, in the scriptural sense, has possibilities of holiness as well as of sin. Experience shows, it is one thing to be tempted, another thing to fail or fall. We do not usually think of it this way, but we may rejoice in being tempted—since in temptation, by conquering it, we may achieve a greater spiritual maturity.

We should not deceive ourselves into thinking that, because by the grace of God we may become more virtuous through temptation, all temptation is equally innocent and virtuous. It is obvious in the case of Jesus that, through His Spirit, His resistance to temptation was under God's influence. Jesus did not seek temptation, nor did He fear; neither should the people of His church.

It is not guaranteed that we will escape such pounding of faith entirely, but by obedience and faith, temptation is resisted, and good character is built. But, the trials that try our faith through hardship, affliction, and trouble, are much tougher to deal with than trials of temptation. The apostle James knew this and tries to encourage us with these words.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

The biblical idea of temptation is not primarily of seduction, as in modern usage, but of putting us to the test. This may be done for God's benevolent purpose of proving our quality, as well as Satan's aim of showing up our weaknesses or trapping us into wrong action. 'Tempt' in the Bible is synonymous with 'test' in this non-restrictive general sense.

I Peter 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

The root meaning of temptation is that it tests us. Our response determines our identity, our uniqueness, and our distinctiveness from the world and in the family of God.

The ingredients that converge in a full-fledged temptation are fixed. The two principle actors are a tempter (whose main trait is subtlety) and a victim of temptation (who is often gullible or weak-willed). The tempter almost always targets the weaker areas of an individual. The action consists of three main elements:

1. A process of manipulation by which the tempter allures the victim to do a forbidden or wrong thing,
2. The process by which the victim deals with the allurements (usually first resisting but then gradually succumbing),
3. The final closure, where the intended victim either thwarts the tempter, or gives in to the wrong action.

God has inspired the Bible to contain many temptations that end in victory for the tempter. This reveals the true orientation of human nature and how easily it gives in to the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, and to the pride of life.

Satan is called the tempter in I Thessalonians 3:5. Paul was concerned that "...the tempter had tempted..." the Thessalonian brethren.

Satan is the great author of persecution. In a time of persecution—or of trial of any kind—he tries to tempt us to turn from the truth, and to abandon God's way of life. This is no surprise to those who have been in God's church for any length of time. In persecution, we are tempted to abandon our loyalty and dedication to God, in order to avoid suffering. Satan knows no human being likes suffering, at least no human being would admit that unless they were a masochist or a sadist.

In afflictions of other kinds, Satan often tempts the sufferer to murmur and complain; to accuse God of harshness or partiality, and to vent anger giving a false witness that God does not support His people in our time of temptation, trial and testing.

Satan attacked Job's character as being hypocritical and not real, because of God's protection and blessings. But the real attack was on God.

Job 1:6-10 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

Satan has a point there, in that if we have everything we need, if we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is providing everything, then have we really seen it our own selves that we will stand firm in adversity if God brings a trial on us? Do we see a reason why God has to bring trials upon us or allow them to occur to us?

Job 1:11-12 "But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and

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he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the LOORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the LOORD.

We are familiar with this story and that is exactly what Job did.

God described Job as a unique servant. God said there was no one like him. He was a pure and devout man, who had become even stronger as a result of the testing.

The accuser insinuated that Job's allegiance was hypocritical. Satan argued that if only God would remove the protective hedge that He had placed around Job, this devout servant would probably curse God to His face. Satan was pretty sure of this.

When Job did not falter in his loyalty to God, Satan attacked his health. But, in reality, the attack was not only on Job, but more so it was on God's sovereignty.

Job 2:1-10 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LOORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LOORD. And the LOORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LOORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." Then the LOORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."

Satan had a cause or reason for doing it—to discredit God. God was definitely accomplishing His own cause and purpose. In Job 1:9 Satan used the same word to accuse Job of having an ulterior purpose for serving God. He said, '*Does Job fear God for nothing?*' Then God used the same word here in verse 3 where He says, '*you incited me against him, to destroy him without cause*'. 'Without cause' is the same word or phrase that Satan used for 'nothing' in Job 1:9

God taunted the accuser with the counter-accusation that Satan himself is the one who wants to see injustice done, the very thing that he was accusing Job of. 'Without cause' means there was no immediate sinfulness in Job that called for punishment.

Job 2:4-10 So Satan answered the LOORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all

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that a man has he will give for his life. "But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the LOORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the LOORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

This is the goal that we are all trying to achieve in temptations and trials that come our way to have such a wonderful attitude. Satan had wasted his time and that is exactly what we should be to Satan—a waste of time, as we resist temptation.

The attack was on God through Job, and the only way the accuser could be proven false was through Job. This also served to show Job where he stood in relation to God. So Satan was given limited, but gradually increased, access to Job—first to his possessions, then to his family, and finally to his health.

But, through it all the primary purpose of Job's suffering, unknown to him, (and many times in our suffering and temptations it is unknown to us what is being accomplished) was so that he would stand before human and angelic beings as a true witness of the saving power of God. In a short phrase, it was to glorify God.

In all times of temptation, affliction, and trial—as well as in prosperity, we know that "the tempter" is not far off, and we should be on guard against his deceit, because although his primary and ultimate aim is to attack God's sovereignty, he sees our weaknesses as an open door to his goal.

James 4:7 "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil [the tempter] and he will flee from you."

We are to resist and oppose Satan in whatever way he may approach us, whether by allurements, by flattering promises, by the attractions of the world, by temptation, or by threats. He makes his way like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He wins his victories by cunning, deception, and threatening, rather than by truth and courage. He has all of the demented and perverse ways of finding our weaknesses and tempting us.

The most well-known instance of temptation in the Bible is the one that precedes the initial faithlessness of Adam and Eve. Despite its brevity, it contains all the essential ingredients of a successful temptation by the tempter.

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; "but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

The tempter's subtlety consisted of his casting light on God's prohibition of the forbidden tree in the form of an incredulous question (verse 1), contradicting God's predicted punishment for disobedience of the law (verse 4) and giving the woman a reason for desiring the forbidden fruit (verse 5).

In the process of Eve's gradual weakening, she amplified the original prohibition beyond what God said when, in verse 3, she said "nor shall you touch it." And, she also produced three impeccable reasons in verse 6 for eating the forbidden fruit as she contemplated the possibility of doing so. The record there says that the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes and it was a tree desirable to make one wise—something that every human being wants

Adam and Eve's succumbing to the temptation is recorded with a matter-of-factness that makes us cringe. Verse 6 says, "She took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate." The simplistic way that this is stated indicates their casualness to the temptation, desire and sin. This was the first Laodicean type of action. The Laodicean attitude is "ho-hum" toward temptation. They are not looking for it, they are not looking to resist it because it is not that important. Many of the temptations that come their way are in grey areas, or at least that is the way they categorize them.

The New Testament counterpart of this Old Testament temptation illustration, typical for the New Testament and a balance to the temptation of Adam and Eve, is Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-12. Christ, the

second Adam, undid what the first Adam did, thus thwarting Satan.

In II Timothy 1:7, Paul explains part of the reason Jesus Christ was able to resist Satan's temptations. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Jesus fought all His battles and won, because He had a full measure of God's Spirit. He had the power that was needed. He was able to resist every temptation, because he saw that giving in was a rejection of God's sovereignty. Therefore, giving in to temptation is a pie in the face or mud in the eye to God.

Three times Satan tried to tempt Jesus into sinning against God, disqualifying himself as savior of the world. But Jesus rejected Satan's lures and thus qualified to replace Satan as ruler of the world at His own second coming.

The confrontation between Jesus and Satan was a total success for Jesus. He had fasted and prayed and was filled with the knowledge of the scriptures, and was well armed for the enticements and attractions that were put before Him. Jesus knew the enemy was not just Satan, but also the fleshly pulls of His own body.

In Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, God inspired Paul to write,

II Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Just as Jesus Christ needed the spiritual presence of the Father to assist Him with His struggles, we need His help to capture every wrong thought before it leads us into sin. He can, and will, help us to defy the temptation to sin, if we stay spiritually close to God. That puts a great responsibility on each and every one of us to do Bible study, and to pray and fast.

In Satan's temptation of Christ, the usual ingredients are present, including a subtle tempter who can quote scripture to his own purpose. We see many false prophets, teachers and ministers doing that. This had a happy ending because Jesus remained close to God, and never lost sight of God's sovereignty.

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How can a sinless person really be tempted at all? We cannot be drawn to an object unless the object seems desirable to us. Look at each temptation of Christ. In each case the appeal was a real appeal to a perfectly innocent natural instinct or appetite. Obviously that is what Satan uses against God's people in His church more often than not.

In the first temptation, it was to hunger; in the second, it was to faith; and in the third, it was to power as a means of establishing righteousness. In each case, Jesus felt the tug and pull of the natural instinct. We know how insistent the demand of hunger is on the Day of Atonement. Christ had fasted for forty days, so how great was that temptation to Him? He was definitely hungry and thirsty.

It was not that He was physically unable to sin, but that He is so pure that He was able not to sin. Titus 1:15 says, "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled." The defiled and unbelieving have little or no resistance to temptation. So purity is a primary factor in resisting temptation.

Christ had a great aim which helped Him resist temptation. If we share in that great aim having the hope of being like Him when He appears, we will also be committed to keeping ourselves from sin. We aim to be like Him in purity and righteousness. It is the pure in heart who will see God and who will be with God.

I John 3:1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The term "purifies himself" means the same thing as 'makes himself holy.' That is, we who are under the influence of this hope of being like the Savior, put forth effort in struggling against sin, and in overcoming our human nature, which is necessary to make us pure.

To be successful in our efforts to resist temptation, we are dependent on divine aid; but our effort is essentially connected with success. The hope of being like Christ, and of being allowed to dwell with him, will lead us to earnest efforts to become holy.

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John's statement "just as He is pure" has tremendous ramifications for us. 'Just as' means the 'same kind' of purity, to the 'same degree.' That is, the tendency of such a hope is to make us holy now, though we may be imperfect.

The ultimate effect is to make us 'perfectly' holy as spirit beings in the Kingdom of God.

In this present life, we do not actually attain as perfect a purity as Christ has now as a spirit being. All that the apostle John is implying is that those who have this hope in them aim at the same purity—at the same holiness, and will ultimately acquire it.

I Peter 1:15, 16 says, "as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."

A true Christian does not habitually and willfully sin. But we know that we sometimes do. Not as a way of life, but out of weakness in the flesh. So we know human beings cannot attain a state of sinless perfection on earth. John's statement in verse 3 proves three things:

1. It proves that the tendency, or the influence of this hope, is to make the Christian pure.
2. It proves that all who cherish it will aim to become as holy as Jesus Christ.
3. It proves that this goal of purity will be accomplished.

Jesus has real sympathy toward us in our quest for purity because:

It is not those who fall at the first assault that feel the full force of temptation, but those who, like Jesus, resist it through long years to the end. And,

Only the victors can help the vanquished; only they, who have felt the dreadful assault and yet stand firm, can give the help needed by the fallen.

All human beings—with exception of Jesus Christ—are sinners. To explain this, Paul reflects back to the first man Adam to affirm that what he did has affected the whole of mankind, involving everyone in sin and death. The apostle Paul contrasted the death in Adam who did not resist temptation, with life in Christ who did resist temptation. Notice what Christ accomplish by resisting temptation.

Romans 5:12-21 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over

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those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

By Jesus Christ resisting Satan's temptations, compared to Adam not resisting the temptations, we have the author of eternal life.

If we were to put the thought of this passage into one sentence it would be something like this:

By the sin of Adam all human beings became sinners and were alienated from God; by the righteousness of Jesus Christ all human beings can become righteous and restored to a right relationship with God.

In I Corinthians 15:21, 22 Paul states this same thought when he said, "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

Let us look at some specific areas of temptation common to human beings.

In Christ's resistance of full-fledged temptations administered by an aggressive tempter who orchestrated the temptation, we can find where the common pattern is for the victim to be tempted by circumstances and inner desires, rather than an external agent of temptation.

Sexual temptation is one example of this type of temptation. It does not seem that Bathsheba had to make a play for David in order to be the occasion of his sexual temptation; the beauty of her nude body was enough to set the dynamics of inner temptation in motion for the sexually aroused David. However, it may be, in this case, that she knew exactly what she was doing and therefore was an external agent of temptation.

So, in this incident, David could have been tempted by an internally produced desire within himself and been tempted by Bathsheba as the external agent. Which came first? The Bible does not say. But either David could have seen Bathsheba and desired her from his own inward desires or Bathsheba could have set him up by going out there in that situation stimulating his desires.

An antidote to such behavior is faithfulness in marriage. Paul gives advice to the Corinthian brethren, knowing that they lived in a sexually promiscuous culture, as we do today. Paul's principles of marriage are designed to counter sexual immorality.

I Corinthians 7:1-5 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

What Paul is warning us against is the temptations that came to David that were both from the inner desires, as well as the external agents, of temptation. So obviously Satan takes advantage of areas in which we lack self-control. As Paul says there, Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self control.

We are being warned that giving in to temptation is a lack of self-control, a letting go—a letting down of one's guard. The person who allows the sinfulness of the world to ensnare him, and who allows himself to be caught in the non-Christian activities of society, has one basic problem: he degenerates for lack of self-discipline—he dies or will die for lack of self-control.

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Every human being has the power to choose. In this great conflict between good and evil, human choice exists and is in fact the universal human test. No one is forced to succumb to temptation. People choose to do so. Temptations that are successfully resisted, such as David's resistance to the suggestion that he put an end to the king who tormented him, prove that people have a power of choice when confronting temptation. Although David gave in to some temptations there were other temptations that he was successful in resisting and from those he grew immensely.

In contrast, our society labels weak character and lack of self-discipline as disease. Doctors prescribe drugs and cut and slice people to treat the effect instead of the cause. Most of the time the cause is that they gave in to temptation. We see that especially with food and drink.

God is not the cause of temptation He is the solution to it. He should be called upon to receive help to resist. Thankfully, we in God's church have access to His help, if we choose to use it. We have to be aware that temptation is constantly bombarding us almost every second of every day.

Eventually, the overwhelming evidence of God's working behind the scenes will be manifested, showing that He does not cause His own to be tempted, nor does He allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.

I Corinthians 10:12-13 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

God allows temptation as a way of purifying us, in contrast, Satan uses it to defile us. God controls the temptations of His saints and He will provide a way out, not to avoid temptation, but to meet it successfully and to stand firm under it. This is testing as permitted by God.

The largest number of self-tempted characters in the Bible are of those who find the appeals of materialism irresistible and who accordingly succumb to greed.

Lot was tempted to choose the material prosperity, represented by the well-watered Jordan Valley, at the price of spiritual compromise.

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The list of biblical characters tempted by the greed for money and goods includes:

- Achan.
- Ahab in the story of Naboth's vineyard.
- The rich young ruler who went away sorrowful because he had great possessions when Jesus told him that the cost of being a disciple would be to sell all that he had and give it to the poor.
- The rich farmer of Jesus' parable who succumbed to the temptation to lay up treasure for himself instead of being "rich toward God".
- Judas in his betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.
- Ananias and Sapphira who lied about the amount that they received from the property that they sold.

Given people's readiness to succumb to the temptation of materialistic greed, it is no wonder Paul warned that some in the Church were so greedy that it made them stray from the faith. Members who do not tithe are in this category. If you are not tithing, you are robbing God and you are showing materialistic greed.

I Timothy 6:9-10 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

What are the unique dangers involved in the love of money? William Barclay does a good job of expressing the dangers with five points

1. The desire for money tends to be a thirst that is insatiable. There is a Roman proverbial saying that wealth is like sea water; so far from quenching a man's thirst, it intensifies it. The more he gets, the more he wants.
2. The desire for wealth is founded on an illusion. It is founded on the desire for security; but wealth cannot buy security. It cannot buy health, nor real love; and it cannot preserve from sorrow and from death. The security which is founded on material things is foredoomed to failure.
3. The desire for money tends to make a man selfish. If he is driven by the desire for wealth, it is nothing to him that someone has to lose in order that he may gain. The desire for wealth fixes a man's thoughts upon himself, and others become merely means or obstacles in the path to his own enrichment. True,

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that need not happen; but in fact it often does.

4. Although the desire for wealth is based on the desire for security, it ends in nothing but anxiety. The more a man has to keep, the more he has to lose and, the tendency is for him to be haunted by the risk of loss.
5. The love of money may easily lead a man into wrong ways of getting it, and therefore, in the end, into pain and remorse. That is true even physically. He may so drive his body in his passion to get, that he ruins his health. He may discover too late what damage his desire has done to others and be saddled with remorse.

I thought he did a very good job of summarizing those and putting it into clear language.

Ambition can also tempt the controllers (some are husbands and some are bosses) who are greedy for power and leadership.

- King Saul was tempted to secure his position by remaining popular with his followers when they wanted to spare the best of the spoils instead of following the command of God.
- Absalom, impressed with his own rating in popularity polls, was tempted to rebel against his father and grab the kingship for himself.
- Herod Agrippa 1 was tempted to arrogance resulting from excessive pride when he threw on his royal robes and accepted the acclaim of the people to be "a god, and not a man."

The temptation to a ruler's pride reaches its apex in Ezekiel's description of the self-temptation and fall of the king of Tyre in chapters 27 and 28 of Ezekiel, where the imagery represents Satan's original temptation and fall.

Sometimes, something as automatic as the urge for self-preservation can tempt a person to do something wrong. Peter's denial of Jesus is a good example. Despite his best intentions, Peter's impulse to save himself lead him to deny Jesus his loyalty three times.

False worship also tempts people. Temptation to idolatry is a major problem in Old Testament history. The New Testament counterpart is apostasy—falling away from true Christianity into various forms of false doctrine and lifestyle.

In the book of Psalms, wicked oppressors are often said to be tempted to think that God

either does not see what they do or will not intervene.

Psalm 10:3-4 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

In short, they are tempted to a delusion, for it turns out that God does see them and is willing to intervene. But they have chosen to reject God and to resist and reject His help.

Psalm 10:8-15 He sits in the lurking places of the villages; In the secret places he murders the innocent; His eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless. He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; He lies in wait to catch the poor; He catches the poor when he draws him into his net. So he crouches, he lies low, That the helpless may fall by his strength. He has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see." Arise, O LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble. Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, "You will not require an account." But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, To repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man; Seek out his wickedness until You find none.

We see there that God is very aware of what is going on but He is waiting until the proper time for judgment. The wicked claim that God has forgotten, that God will not call them to account for their evil deeds, and that no trouble will overtake them. The psalmist asks with amazement "why" and "how" the wicked dare to revile God and imagine that God does not see evil. It is beyond us how they can turn such a deaf ear to the Creator. He answers his own question, calming his feelings of disturbance and anxiety at the presence of evil. After all, God does see their evil exploits.

The book of Proverbs is an ever-expanding picture of threats to the godly life. We read between the lines that the young person addressed in the book faces a more or less constant series of temptations—to cast his lot with the violent; to not heed his father's instruction, to choose folly rather than wisdom, to give in to sexual allurements of "loose women;" to be lazy instead of industrious; to grab ill-gotten gain; to engage in dishonest business practices; to be quick-tempered and quarrelsome; to become a glutton and a drunk. All of these are mentioned in the book of Proverbs as being temptations and many times the young man is shown as failing them.

The constant theme of Proverbs is to "choose this, not that". For example, Proverbs 14:17 says, "A quick tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated."

In resisting temptation it is a matter of choosing purity, rather than defilement. It is a choice that we each have

From the many examples of temptation in the Bible we can piece together the dynamics of how it works.

Temptation exists in the first place because the moral and spiritual world is such that a great battle between good and evil is raging at every moment. For people living in an evil world, life at every moment is a crisis in which a person's allegiance is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan and evil.

The enemy is within, as the epistle of James makes explicit. Temptation is the enticement of a person to commit sin by offering some seeming advantage. The sources of temptation are Satan, the world, and human nature. We are exposed to them in all situations, in all places, and all of the time. The nearest approach to a definition of the process of temptation from within is given to us by James, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

In James 1, the apostle James, the pastor of the headquarters church in Jerusalem, provides some insight into the process toward sin beginning with temptation.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Temptation here is from the Greek word noun "*peirasmos*" which can refer to trials or tests with a beneficial purpose or effect or it can refer to trials or tests designed to lead to wrong doing. As I said at the beginning of the sermon the word temptation and tempt have a neutral meaning. It depends on the reaction of the person who is being tempted. Temptation of itself is not sin. It must be accepted before it results in sin. Temptation is a forerunner of sin. It warns that the potential for sin is not far away. We should look at temptations as being a warning that is blaring and that the sirens go off.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Jesus Christ was tempted as we are, but He remained sinless. God cannot be successfully tempted. In Him there is not the slightest moral corruption to which temptation may appeal. Temptation does not proceed from God. God tests and approves us while we endure temptation. Those temptations are from other sources.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Temptation is an appeal to think or do something contrary to God's law. We are drawn away from truth and virtue. We are drawn away from God's standard of righteousness. Therefore it becomes an issue to God's sovereignty. Are we going to resist temptation, therefore submitting to God's sovereignty or are we going to take the bait and reject the sovereignty of God? It is a very crucial decision that we have to make.

Desire, in this context, is a force of attraction in the wrong direction. We long for it, crave it, covet it, and want it. Desire is something that can be nourished or stifled. We can control and even eliminate it if we deal with it immediately.

But, we can allow our thoughts to follow certain tracks, and our steps to take us into certain places and our eyes to linger on certain things; and as a result stimulate desire from within us. If we encourage desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence. Desire becomes an action.

The source of many temptations lie within us. We are tempted by our own wrong desire. We are enticed or attracted when we are offered hope of reward or pleasure (food, drink, and entertainment). Our hope of being like Jesus Christ should replace our hope of physical pleasure.

The verbs "drawn away" and "enticed" in verse 14 are taken from the activities of fishing and hunting. The word "enticed" usually describes the drawing of fish out of its original retreat. We are lured, as fish are with bait. We call the bait on the end of a fishing line—A LURE! That is exactly what it does and that is exactly what Satan uses.

James pictures our desire first, as attracting our attention and persuading us to approach the wrong thing, and second, as luring us by means of bait to yield to the temptation.

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James changes his description from a snare to conception and birth in verse 15.

James 1:15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Notice the reference in verse 15 to the growth of a person from foetus to adult—from complete innocence to corruption by the world and by Satan.

First, temptation comes then, desire, like a mother, conceives and "gives birth to sin." Then sin, the child of desire, develops until it is full-grown and ready to produce offspring. When sin is full-grown it has become a way of life and gives birth to death. Sin brings forth death.

You are very familiar with what Paul says in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death." This is the same meaning as 'sin brings forth death'.

"Brings forth" in verse 15 is an animal phrase for "birth." It means that sin "spawns" death. Conquered by desire, man becomes less than a man and sinks to the level of a beast.

A brief summary of James 1:13-15 shows that temptation begins the process toward sin, that ends in death.

Verse 13 - God does not tempt us.

Verse 14 - We are drawn away by our own desires and enticed by Satan and the world.

Verse 15 - Desire gives birth to sin—sin brings forth death

The process is: Temptation leads to desire. Desire leads to sin. Sin results in death! It all seems so simple on paper, but it requires God's help in resisting temptation in real life.

Temptation often comes through deception!

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

It is a given that there is deception involved. In Matthew 26, Christ admonished the disciples concerning temptation when He went to pray in Gethsemane during His final night with them before His crucifixion.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

We are cautioned by Jesus to watch and pray against yielding to the pressure of temptation by our own carelessness or disobedience; in all such cases God provides the way of escape. Temptation of itself is not sin. It must be entered into and accepted before it results in sin.

God does not expect us to resist temptation by ourselves. He understands and sympathizes with our weaknesses.

Hebrews 4:15 "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Jesus was tempted in the same way that we are tempted, or by reason of His likeness to us. Though He did not sin, life was not easy for Him. We see that in the examples of what He had to bear under. His sinlessness was an earned sinlessness as He won victory after victory in the constant battle with temptation. It seems that one of the temptations that He may have had that is not actually stated (but I am sure it was constant temptation to Him) was to keep from getting overly angry at the Pharisees and their idiotic questions and traps that they put before Him. But He did not, He held his tongue and He kept His mind pure.

Holiness is possible only under conditions that make it necessary to meet, resist and triumph over temptation. Therefore, Jesus Himself became our Great High Priest in that, being tempted in all points as we are, He never once yielded, but fought and triumphed.

Temptation is not sin, because Christ was tempted as we are, yet remained sinless. Temptation only turns into sin when and as the suggestion of evil is accepted and yielded to. We have a choice.

God allows temptation as a way of purifying us. But, Satan uses it to entice us into sin defiling us. As it helped to purify Christ so also it helps to purify us. It has a major

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purpose in our Christian development.

When we are tempted, God will help. He will provide a way out, not to avoid temptation, but to meet it successfully and to stand firm under it. This is testing as permitted and controlled by God.

The goal of life itself is linked to trial, temptation and testing. God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able. He wants us to endure temptation and receive the crown of life. If we have a humble attitude He will make sure that we are able to resist and He will be able to complete and perfect us.

The most effective antidote is to capture every wrong thought before it leads us into sin. God will help us to overcome the temptations that lead to sin, if we stay close to Him spiritually as Jesus Christ did and do our part to resist as Jesus Christ did.

The stakes involved in temptation are not small but monumental. The biblical imagery associated with succumbing to temptation is overwhelming in its destructiveness. Quite often the result of giving in is literal or figurative death.

The picture in Proverbs 7 is an appropriate summary:

Proverbs 7:21-23 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, With her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life.

For us to stand afar and read this about this individual he seems stupid or dumb but who is to say that we would not be in the same boat if we did not have God's Holy Spirit

Proverbs 76:24-27 Now therefore, listen to me, my children; Pay attention to the words of my mouth: Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths; For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, Descending to the chambers of death.

Despite all the external circumstances and agents that elbow their way into a person's consciousness and summon toward evil, they do not cause anyone to give in to

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temptation; they merely provide the occasion for moral choice. Choose this, not that!

The antidote therefore is to guard one's inner heart and mind.

Proverbs 4:23-27 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil.

We are told there that we are to capture every thought ahead of time and that we have to be ready for the temptations that come. We have to prepare for them, and we have to understand and see, and have revealed to us, what those temptations may be. In this instruction for righteousness, the parts of the body that are used are those involved with expression and action. First, the "heart" that is the mind must be guarded diligently because it is the wellspring of life. The heart is the starting point of the activities of life; it determines the course of an individual's life. Temptations can be resisted only if we have the right course in mind.

Temptation is an enticement or invitation to sin, with the implied promise of greater good to be derived from following the way of disobedience. Our minds have to be pre-set to have a tendency toward obedience and goodness. Satan, the supreme tempter is able to play upon our weaknesses. He knows where they are.

But, Jesus Christ directs us to resist temptation no matter what the source may be. He promises purity and holiness to those who do. He also directs us to pray for deliverance from exposure to temptation and from surrender to it. God will not allow us to encounter temptation beyond our Spirit-given ability to resist.

Peter states succinctly that we have God's help.

II Peter 2:9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

Temptation is used as a form of testing and proving. The context is the covenant relationship of mutual love and faithfulness between God and His people. God tested Israel to prove the true nature of her faithfulness to Him. His purpose is not to induce us to sin but to confirm our faith, in our minds as well as in His.

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As in the case of Job, Satan can serve God's positive purpose even though Satan's negative purpose was to test God's sovereignty. Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was God's testing of Adam's faith and Satan's attack on God's sovereignty.

In the temptation of Jesus, Satan tried to entice Jesus to forsake God's sovereignty and His commitment to God's way of life. Jesus, however, proved to be a loyal Son. He did not tempt God the Father, as did ancient Israel, because He lives "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God". Having resisted satanic temptation Himself, Jesus Christ is able to comfort and aid us when we are tempted in similar ways. We have that promise.

An important aspect of our true and faithful witness of God's sovereignty, and to His way of life, is how well we resist temptation. So, I leave you with one question: How well are you passing the test that temptation brings?