

Shepherding the Tempted

Any situation on the outside or frame of heart on the inside which inclines a person toward sins of omission or commission because of a light sense of God's holiness and our obligation to him.

TYPES OF TEMPTATION

1. General "worldliness": This is usually not seen as an actual "backsliding" into an obvious sin. Rather it is a "sleepiness" of soul in which the status, pleasures, comforts and cares of the world appear solid, vivid, and affecting, while the truths of the Scripture become abstractions, they don't grip the heart. Forms: a) workaholism and over-absorption in one's career, b) an over love of leisure and avocation, c) materialism, d) an overconcern with relationships, popularity, social status, d) emotional dependence on a person or group, e) anxiety and worry. Note: excessive worry is just a worldly mindset under stress (see Matthew 6--Jesus links worldliness and anxiety.)
2. Specific sin-traps. They may be sensual sins (sexual lust, other physical appetites), they may be emotional sins (bitterness, envy) or social sins (mistreatment of someone).

STAGES OF TEMPTATION

1. Entering

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Matt.26:41. Entering is not the same as being tempted. Jesus was tempted. It is no crime to have an escaped criminal to knock on your door to ask you if you will harbor him. But if you invite him in and entertain him while he makes his case and listen to him to consider it, you have actually begun to "harbor" him. *You have entered into temptation not when you begin to do the sin, nor even when you plan to do it, but as soon as the sin loses its ugliness and repulsiveness to you. As soon as you can behold it without disgust, you have entered into temptation.* It begins the moment you even ponder the possibility. (Note: Eve's exaggeration--"neither shall you touch it" shows that *sin does not begin with disobedience but with resentful, self-pitying obedience.* cf. obedience of the elder brother in Luke 15.)

2. Arguing

The second stage of temptation comes when the sin begins to make its case and argue with you. You weigh the arguments (usually very quickly and semi-consciously). It is critical that the Christian learn to argue *against* the sin, but never *with* the sin. Fill the mind with the guilt of the sin (what grief this will cause God and how terrible it will be to contradict the very purpose of Christ's death for you). Not so much the danger of the sin (all the consequences that could occur). By arguing *with* the sin, you treat it as an option and thus you have already cast God off the throne in your life.

3. Threatening

If you let it get past the second stage, the sin will begin to threaten you. You will be told you can't be happy without this or it is too hard to resist. When you get to this point, you may need to open a window or put your foot in the fire (like Puddlelum the Marshwiggles) or call someone up. You are half drunk and about to be unable to realize it. Do something drastic and godly. Go to a Christian friend.

VARIETIES OF TEMPTATION ENTRANCES, ARGUMENTS, AND THREATS.

See Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, John Flavel, *A Saint Indeed: or A Keeping of the Heart*.

SATANIC DEVICE

By showing you the short-term sweetness of sin (the bait) and hiding the long-term misery and dangers (the hook).

By getting you to rationalize sin as virtue.

By getting you to minimize the evil of a sin.

By showing you the sins of the Christian leaders, hiding from you their repentance and grief.

By stressing the mercy and forgiveness of God, and playing down his holiness and righteousness.

By persuading the soul that repentance is always easy. You can have God AND this sin.

By showing you how the immoral prosper and seem devoid of misery; or the misery of the godly.

By getting you to over confidently live where sin can happen.

By getting you to compare yourself with feel those who are less controlled and moral.

SELF-TALK

"It'll feel so good"

"I'm not really greedy, just thrifty!
Not really nosy, just concerned!
Not alcoholic, sociable!"

"Who does it really hurt? Who will know?"

"He did it! Nobody is really that pure!"

"God won't condemn me--he will understand."

"God will have to forgive me."

"What good does all my self-control do?"

"I can handle this."

"As things go, I do very well! Why bad about this?"

HELPING THOSE IN TEMPTATION

1. Conditions

Determine if "undernourishment" and "mishandled trials" are the occasions for the temptation. Apply basic discipleship and mentoring.

2. Develop an accountability system

Regular prayer and support is necessary. Let the accountability be pretty detailed. Journal whether the day has been even an "entering" day or up to an "arguing" day or a "threatening" day, etc. Remember, to be tempted is NOT a sin!

3. Answer temptation with Scripture

Identify the Satanic devices being used and find arguments and Scripture that fortifies the person against each particular one. Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus answered temptation through a mastery of the Scripture. Every temptation is false reasoning, a lie. Expose each lie by mentally replacing it with the coordinate truth:

1. *"This is the only way I can be happy."* Prov. 10:2; 13:15. The way of disobedience is empty and fulfilling. Obedience is hard but disobedience is harder. Gal. 6:7. Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; you reap what you sow. Job 20:12 - wickedness is

sweet in the mouth but poison in the stomach. Heb.11:24- sin is only a passing pleasure.

2. "I can handle it." Eccles. 10:13- Remember that sin grows on us by degrees. What starts as a little foolishness can end in madness. Psalm 137:9- "Little" sins must be killed before they grow up to kill you. Gen.4:17- Sin wants to destroy you, but you can master it.
3. "I can always repent later; God will have to forgive." Heb.3:13- Don't say, "I can always repent--forgiveness is easy", because sin hardens your heart and each sin makes it harder to feel sorrow for sin. Sin is the suicidal action of the will back against itself. Sin leads to hardening--a loss of peace, a loss of tender power, a loss of sensitivity. Prov.5:22- sin destroys self-control.
4. "I can't help it; no one knows how overwhelming this is." I Cor. 10:13; Romans 6:6-14. Sin can no longer force itself on us. God prevents temptations from being too much for us. But we must will to prevent sin (6:12)
5. "I don't know how it happens to me." Joshua 7:19-21; II Sam. 11:1--12:13; Genesis 3:1-6. Notice how temptation begins by "looking", then by thinking about it (Achan weighed the plunder!), then by coveting it, then by stealing it, and then by hiding it. If at any point he had broken the chain of sin he would have escaped. I Cor. 6:18. Flee immorality. Be careful to completely avoid any places or situations that begin the chain.
6. "I know God loves me anyway." I Cor.6:19- you are not your own, you are bought with the blood of Christ and belong to God. You must not presume on his grace and love! Will you defile the heart that Christ died to cleanse? As my sin makes God's grace more wonderful, so God's grace makes my sin more hateful. The more God blesses me, and the longer he continues to give me grace, the more horrendous and heinous my sin becomes. If your friend commits adultery, that is bad; if your wife commits adultery, that is terrible! The more you love someone, the more grievous the sin is. So the fact that God loves you so much is no license to sin, indeed his love has the opposite force. Romans 6:1- "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!"

4. Replace the lust
with the Gospel

Remember that temptation is "shadowed" often by accusation and vice versa. In other words, persons who cannot break temptation *have believed the BIG LIE that God does not care and will not really give them what they need.* So we make idol covenants--we are sure that created things will give us security and power. They are false "righteousnesses". Unless we remember the gospel and the grace of Christ, temptation may not be overcome. *Therefore, do not try to help a person overcome temptation by beating them over the head with the law.* i.e. "If you keep doing that, you may rot in hell." That, by the way, is true! A person who persists in sin, regardless of what he or she professes, cannot be sure of regeneration and salvation, and on the last day may be revealed to be a hypocrite who never truly believed. But a "legal" approach does not help trapped Christians out of temptation. (I use the legal approach and the threat of eternal judgement only on those who show themselves to be very hard and who make me doubt the validity of their faith.)

Instead, help the tempted Christian by "taking their lust to the gospel". The classic example from John Owen's *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*:

"Look upon Him you have pierced. Say to thy soul, 'What have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled on! Is this the return I make to the Father for his love, to the Son for his blood, to the Holy Spirit for his grace? Do I thus repay the Lord? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, that the lovely Spirit of God has chosen to dwell in? And what can I say to the

dear Lord Jesus? How can I hold my head up before him? Do I account my intimacy with him of so little value, that for the sake of this sin I have scarce left him any room in my heart? How shall I escape if I neglect so great a salvation? Have I, through infinite cost to Christ, now obtained access to the countenance and presence of the Father that I might now provoke him to his very face? Was my soul washed and straightened up by God to make room for new defilements? Shall I now work to endeavor to frustrate the very end goal of all the mighty sufferings and torments and death of Jesus Christ? Shall I daily cause grief in the heart of that Spirit within me whereby I am sealed until the day of redemption?' Friends, entertain thy heart daily with such treatises. See if it can stand hard before this aggravation. If this makes it not melt in some measure, I fear thy case is dangerous."

A Christian must resist temptation by remembering her/his status in Christ. Col.2:15-- When Christ triumphed on the cross, he defeated and disarmed the evil forces that once enslaved us. If you are a Christian, he's defeated them for you. You don't have to listen to them any more. You are free. Augustine one day resisted the advances of a former mistress from his pre-Christian days. She said, "Don't you recognize me? Augustine, it's me!" Augustine retorted, "I know, but it's not *me!*" I'm a new creation. I am in Christ. I am not my own. I am bought with a price.

TRANSITION NOTE FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER: Often, temptation leads to accusation and accusation leads to temptation! So they appear together, but sometimes it is possible and helpful to distinguish which one was prior.