

COPING WITH TEMPTATION

Virgil Warren, PhD

INTRODUCTION

A. One of the first things in the Bible is Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve. The first thing in Christ's life after his baptism by John was his temptation by Satan as he was entering upon his role as Messiah. Note three parallel biblical segments:

Genesis 3:6	good for food	delight to eyes	make a person wise
Jesus' temptation	stones to bread	kingdoms of world	cast yourself down
1 John 2:16	lust of flesh	lust of eyes	pride of life

B. Different usages of the term *temptation*

1. Test
2. Lure (objective)
3. Be drawn (subjective)

C. God allows temptation.

1. Not something that happens because matters are out of control
2. Not something to destroy us but to let us grow in ways we would not grow without the challenge of opposition
3. Not able to blame God for it; we take responsibility for temptation

I. SOURCES OF TEMPTATION TO SIN

The sources of sin are sufficient to yield the practical result that everybody sins: Romans 3:23.

A. Bodily drives

There is nothing wrong with the drives themselves, but we are tempted to fulfill them in excess or in the wrong way.

B. Social existence

1. Sinful example
2. Misunderstood good example
3. Social pressure
4. Social reinforcement

In the cases of bodily drives and social existence, previous failure compounds the pull of present temptation.

C. Ignorance

1. Lack of knowledge
2. Viewpoint of consciousness

We see the world from our own eyes without thinking how it looks from another person's perspective; so we act without thinking—or perhaps believing—our actions affect others that they do.

3. God's invisibility

With all these sources of temptation, we can be sure that we all fall from time to time.

II. PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

James 1:12-15

Temptation . . .

- A. comes from us as well as to us.

SUBJECTIVE COMPONENT

Much of what temptation is we bring to the temptation situation.

Beauty (and lust) is in the eye of the beholder; hence, it is not just what is there, but how we look at it.

Temptation is temptation because of the certain inclination we feel toward what the lure calls on us to do.

- B. gets worse the more we yield to it.

LAW OF DIMISHING RETURNS

Yielding to temptation increases the power of temptations.

Instead of increasing satisfaction, it increases desire.

- C. occurs in the interaction of all aspects of ourselves and our associations.

LAW OF INTERDEPENDENCY

When we yield to one kind of temptation, we tend to yield to others. The weakening of the will becomes a generalized habit.

- D. exchanges the welfare of everyone for the welfare of myself.
- E. exchanges the eternal for the temporary/immediate.
- F. exchanges the intangible for the tangible.
- } Appeals to what we can see most easily

Inappropriate ways of dealing with temptation

asceticism: deprivation and abuse of the body (Stoicism)

antinomianism: satiation of the body (hedonism)

Both derive from Greek dualism.

III. COUNTERACTING TEMPTATION TO SIN

PRIMARY FORMULA: PREVENTION

Dealing with the problem ahead of time.

Dealing with the problem before we get in its “force field.”

Prevention is easier than cure.

A. Practicing avoidance (Proverbs 4:14-15)

To prove ourselves strong, we mistakenly see how close we can get. To minimize differences from the world, we can try too hard to get into the world’s mix. We try to stay as close as we can to the unchristian things around us because we do not want to be noticed, singled out, to stick out in the eyes of peers. Sometimes we want to try to get in on a little of the fun without getting hurt by the consequences.

Removing ourselves.

Removing the temptation.

1. Staying away from evil people: 1 Corinthians **15:33** (Proverbs **1:15**; **4:14-15**)
2. Staying out of situations we cannot handle or function in ethically: John **18:12-24** (Luke **22:54-62**): “*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers*” (2 Corinthians **6:14**).
3. Making a covenant with our eyes: Job **31:1**
4. Not pursuing goals that implicate us in unwholesome activities: 1 Timothy **6:9**.

Using space and time to control the impact of temptation.

B. Substituting alternatives

Sin has many characteristics of habit;

overcoming sin is comparable to breaking a habit;
the best way to break a habit is to substitute an alternative.

1. Meeting the drives of the body in acceptable ways

God has not given us any needs that he has not also given us wholesome ways to provide for.

- a. Sex drive: 1 Corinthians 7:2
- b. Hunger: Genesis 3

2. Keeping busy

The idle mind is the devil's workshop: 1 Timothy 5:13-15.

Not having enough to do can degenerate into seeking pleasure to make life interesting.

C. Building strength

1. Practicing the spiritual exercises.

Prepare the inner man for temptation from the outside.

- a. Prayer: Matthew 26:41; 6:13; Luke 11:4
- b. Bible reading (for conviction and devotion)
- c. Fasting (for desensitizing drives)
- d. Meditation
- e. Communion
- f. Fellowship: Hebrews 10:24-25

These collectively increase God-consciousness.

"Practice the presence" (Hebrews 4:16). "Temptations lose their power when you are near."

2. Trusting God

God is allowing this for our growth: 1 Corinthians 10:13.

3. Remembering who we are

We wear the name of Christ.
Joseph and Potiphar's wife: Genesis 39:6-9.

4. Considering consequences.

Doing an action tends toward its recurrence.

- a. Remembering that sin has consequences
 - (1) adds the pull of past failure on the power of present lure (Hebrews 4:15) so temptation returns sooner, easier, and more forcefully.
 - (2) hardens the heart (Hebrews 3:13)
 - (3) Thinking what a sin destroys: family, our own body/mind
- b. Remembering the effects of righteousness
 - (1) *“Resist the devil and he will flee.”* (James 4:7).
Getting started is half the battle.
 - (2) Breaking the habit of living by impulses
 - (3) Opting for delayed gratification

5. Practicing the exercise of the will

Fasting, for example, provides an opportunity for using the will in a tangible, down-to-earth experience.

Discipline does not mean not doing what we want to do or doing what we do not want to do; instead, it means taking charge of our life. It means, for example, not being led around by our stomach.

Exercising the will meets the “call to decision”; it means authentic existence.

Doing shapes wanting shapes willing shapes doing.

Physical exercise strengthens our resolve not to let the body tell us what to do and how hard to work.

6. Rewarding ourselves when we overcome sin

We can use a kind of behavior modification technique on ourselves.

7. Involving other people

Not only in fellowship that strengthens, but in having them monitor us:
Hebrews 3:13; 10:24.

8. Consolidating our problems by doing everything “as to the Lord”

Dealing collectively rather than individually,
All our difficulties directly relate to the Lordship of Christ.

9. Recognizing our responsibility to help other people

We help ourselves indirectly by helping others.