

“The Truth About Temptation”

(Luke 4:1-2)

Introduction

- Before we can truly understand how to successfully battle temptation (which we will, Lord willing, look at next week), it is important for us to understand the nature and function – the source and effects – of temptation. Ultimately, there are no practical solutions to spiritual problems. While spiritual disciplines have enormous benefits for our spiritual growth and faithfulness, we must not think that true holiness can be achieved by mere religious efforts. That is, we cannot defeat temptation apart from the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives. We cannot resist temptation by sheer willpower or self-discipline. Ultimately, relying solely on one’s own strength to battle temptation will lead to frustration and failure.
- By simple definition, temptation is a calling of one’s will (whether good or bad). While we typically refer to temptation in a negative sense, the New Testament words translated “*being tempted*” (Lk.4:2; *peirazō* [vb.]) and “*temptation*” (Lk.4:13; *peirasmos* [n.]) are not inherently bad. While it is often translated as “*tempted*” (e.g., 1Cor.10:13; Jms.1:13), it is also translated “*test / tested*” (Matt.16:1; 19:3; Jn.6:6; Acts 5:9; 1Cor.10:9), “*examine*” (2Cor.13:5), “*tried*” (Acts 24:6), “*trials*” (Lk.22:28; Acts 20:19; 1Pet.4:12), and even “*attempted*” (Acts 9:26; 16:7).

Temptation is not inherently sinful. As we will see, Jesus was tempted and yet He never sinned (Heb.4:15). Temptation is an invitation (summoning), an attraction (luring), or a persuasion (influencing). Temptation leads to sin when we answer its call to ungodliness. This is why, temptation and testing are so closely related – for every temptation is fundamentally a test (trial), and within every test (trial) is a temptation.

To be tested or tempted is to be placed at a crossroads, to be presented with a decision or choice. Temptation calls us to disobey God, to choose ungodliness over godliness. When tested, we are being examined to reveal (at least, in that moment) our true faith in and faithfulness to Christ. Temptation attempts to seduce us away from God, a test reveals the depth or veracity of our devotion to God.

✓ Illust: When he was in college, the famous evangelist John Wesley wrote a letter to his mother asking her to give him a clear description of sin. He perhaps wanted a list of do’s and don’ts. But Mrs. Wesley did not give him one. She gave him something much better. In response she wrote:

“Take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that this is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.”

- We see this in the very first sin recorded in Scripture (which was the very first sin).

Gen 3:1-6 ~ “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’’² And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’

⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

- The truth is that Adam and Eve’s temptation is our temptation. Just as they were tempted by evil desires so are we. In fact, generally speaking, every temptation is the same for every individual. The Bible tells us that all temptations can be categorized into three groups. That is, all sin stems from one of these three main categories:

1 John 2:15-16 ~ “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world.

1 John 2:16 ~ “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (KJV)

- 1) “*was good for food*” (Gen.3:6) or “*desires of the flesh*” (1Jn.2:16) – physical desires
- 2) “*was a delight to the eyes*” (Gen.3:6) or “*desires of the eyes*” (1Jn.2:16) – emotional desires (affections, passions); “*delight*” (good or bad sense; a longing or lust, a wish, craving or desire)
- 3) “*was to be desired to make one wise*” (Gen.3:6) or “*pride of life*” (1Jn.2:16) – intellectual/mental desires; “*desired*” (good or bad sense; to take pleasure in, desire as attractive, covet)

➤ It is helpful, in our fight against temptation, to first know what it is we are fighting against and what is at stake in the battle. Perhaps this is no more dramatically described than in the fourth chapter of Genesis.

Gen 4:6-8 ~ “The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.’ ⁸Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.”

Sin is graphically portrayed as a wild animal “*crouching*” – lying, stalking, lurking – at “*the door*” and ready to pounce. This is not harmless or playful. Pictured as a predatorial beast, sin desires to attack and devour. All Cain has to do is open the door – to answer the call, to succumb to the temptation.

Luke 22:31 ~ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [2nd per., pl.], that he might sift [*seiniazō*; take apart, thresh or “thrash”] you [2nd per., pl.] like wheat”

1 Peter 5:8 ~ “... Your adversary the devil prowls around [*peripateō*] like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour [*katapinō*; to gulp down or swallow whole].”

➤ Thankfully, while we have all been overcome by temptation, Jesus never was. In Luke 4:1-13 (and Matthew 4), we are told of a temptation battle that Jesus had with the devil (this was not the only one). This particular battle took place in a desert, at the beginning of Jesus’ three-year public ministry, where Jesus fasted for forty days. During and after those forty days, the devil tempted Jesus with every type of temptation: 1] The desires/lust of the flesh (vs.3-4; Gen. 3:6; 1Jn.2:16), 2] The desires/lust of the eyes (vs.5-8; Gen. 3:6; 1Jn.2:16), and 3] Pride of life (vs.9-12). Jesus’ temptations were real and so was His victory over temptation.

✓ Illust: “For forty days Christ was in combat with the enemy, defending himself in the power of the Holy Spirit against the fiery darts of self-pity and loneliness and fear and the pain of his fasting and the awful temptation of murmur against God like Israel did in the wilderness” (John Piper, from sermon: “Christ in Combat: Defense by the Spirit”; March 18, 1984).

➤ This morning, we are going to look predominantly at the first two verses of this passage as we seek to learn the truth about temptation.

Luke 4:1-13 ~ “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ²for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

³The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’ ⁴And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’’ ⁵And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ ⁸And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’’ ⁹And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’’ ¹²And Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’’ ¹³And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.’

➤ From Luke 4:1-2, I want to identify four characteristics concerning temptation, and four applications concerning each of these characteristics.

1. Temptation is a battle that affects everyone (vs.1a)

➤ We must not miss the startling reality found in the very first verse: “*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness*” (vs.1). This is staggering. Of all the people one would think Satan would leave alone, it would be the incarnate Son of God. What arrogance and audacity it was for Satan to think that He could tempt God’s One and Only Son. Likewise, what arrogance and audacity it would be for us to think that even though Satan tempted Jesus, he will not tempt us. The truth is, since even Jesus was tempted by Satan, we should be all the more aware and braced for the temptation that is most definitely to come our way. If Satan did not leave Jesus alone, he is certainly not going to leave us alone.

➤ We can never think that we have outgrown or outlasted the devil’s temptations. We are never too old, or too “mature”, or too strong, or too wise, to be outside of the devil’s reach. In fact, as we age there are new temptations as there are new trials. The truly mature Christian never thinks there are exempt from Satan’s attacks. Rather, they are constantly aware of the ever-present (lurking, devouring) danger of the enemy. The only time we will be free from temptation and sin is in heaven. If the devil did not spare Jesus, he will not spare you.

Application #1: No one is immune to the attacks of the devil, and no one is beyond the help of God.

➤ In the weakness and fragility of our human flesh, we are all susceptible to sin – prone to fall to the deceptions and seductions of the devil. We must never be arrogant or careless about sin.

1 Cor 10:12 ~ “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” (cf. Prov.16:18)

➤ Sin is much more than doing what we should not do, or not doing what we should do. It is much more insidious than a list of do’s and don’ts. Sin extends beyond ungodly behaviors, which are expressions of sinful thoughts and attitudes. We need to understand that on our own – in our own strength and wisdom – we are no match for wiles of the devil. But we must also understand that in the power and righteousness of Christ, we can triumph over every temptation. The devil is no match for God.

1 Cor 10:13 ~ “No temptation [peirasmos] has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted [peirazo] beyond your ability, but with the temptation [peirasmos] he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

1 John 4:4 ~ “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

Heb 2:18 ~ “For because he himself has suffered when tempted [peirazo], he is able to help those who are being tempted [peirazo].” (see Heb.4:15-16)

2 Thess 3:3 ~ “But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”

➤ Those who are truly in Christ can resist every temptation, only because they can do so by the strength and wisdom of God.

2. Temptation is allowed under God's sovereign plan and purpose (vs.1b)

➤ Perhaps more surprisingly, we read that Jesus “*was led by the Spirit*” (vs.1; “led”, *agō*) to be tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

Matt 4:1 ~ “Then Jesus was led up [*anagō*] by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

Mark 1:12 ~ “The Spirit immediately drove him out [*ekballō*; lit. to throw out] into the wilderness.”

➤ One thing is for sure, under His sovereign plan and purpose, God allowed Jesus to be tempted. The same Spirit that “*descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove*” (Lk.3:22), now led Him into the wilderness in order for Him to be tempted by the devil.

This was an all-out war ... between “*the Son of God*” (Lk.1:35) and “*the god of this world*” (2Cor.4:4); between the one who is “*Faithful and True*” (Rev.19:11) and “*the father of lies*” (Jn.8:44); between “*the King of kings*” (Rev.19:16) and “*the ruler of this world*” (Jn.14:30); between “*the light of the world*” (Jn.8:12) and “*the power of darkness*” (Lk.22:53); between “*the Holy One of God*” (Lk.4:34) and “*the evil one*” (1Jn.5:19); between “*the Lamb of God*” (Jn.1:29) and “*the ancient serpent*” (Rev.12:9); between the Savior and the devil.

This was all according to the sovereign plan and purpose of God! And, while the battle was real, it was truly no contest. For Jesus resisted every temptation and defended against all of Satan’s attacks.

➤ Why would God cause – let alone allow – Jesus to be tempted? Jesus had to be tempted – “*as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb.4:15) – so that He impute to us His righteousness as He would pay the full penalty for our unrighteousness (2Cor.5:21; Is.53:4-6; 1Pet.3:18). If He had committed even one sin, He could not be our Savior because He Himself would need a Savior.

✓ Illust: “The perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ is nowhere more evident than in the story of His confrontation with the archenemy of God, Satan. The devil assaulted Him with wave after wave of temptations, seeking to lure Him into sin and derail the plan of redemption. But Jesus defeated him, demonstrating the power He had to ‘destroy the works of the devil’ (1Jn.3:8) through His death and resurrection. His victory over Satan in the wilderness laid the groundwork for His later triumphs at Gethsemane, Calvary, and the grave. Without His victory over the devil’s temptations, Christ’s messianic credentials would not have been complete. If He was not able to defeat Satan in a head-to-head confrontation, He would not be able to redeem sinners” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke*; 4:1-13).

➤ Where would this battle take place? Geographically, this battlefield was most likely in the Judean “*wilderness*” (vs.1; *erēmos*, or desert). This was likely the most desolate and solitary place in all of Israel. The word describes an uninhabited wasteland; barren and secluded. It was noted for its hot and harsh conditions.

There Jesus would have no one to turn to except for God. No church family, Bible study group, or pastor to encourage Him. No friends or family to support Him. For forty days (almost six weeks!) Jesus was all alone – “*with the wild animals*” (Mk.1:13) – and the devil.

Application #2: God allows temptation in order to test and strengthen us.

➤ Just as God allowed Jesus to be tempted so too, in His sovereignty, He allows us to be tempted. Again, tempting and testing are almost synonymous. There is a notable distinction we must make between the two: tempting entices a person to sin whereas testing reveals what is in a person (tempting seeks to destroy us, testing seeks to grow us). While God tests us, He will never tempt us (Jms.1:13). He will, however, use our temptations as a means of testing and strengthening us.

Luke 8:13 ~ “And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing [*peirasmos*] fall away.

Matt 13:20-21 ~ “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation [*thlipsis*] or persecution [*diōgmos*] arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.”

1 Cor 3:13 ~ “each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test [*dokimazo*] what sort of work each one has done.”

2 Cor 13:5 ~ “Examine [*peirazo*] yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test [*dokimazo*] yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test [*dokimazo*]!”

James 1:2-4 ~ “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (see Rom.5:3-5)

James 1:12 ~ “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial [*peirasmos*], for when he has stood the test [*dokimos*] he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

1 Peter 4:12 ~ “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test [*peirasmos*] you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

➤ God is much more concerned about our character than He is our comfort. He will test us, and use our temptations as a means of testing, in order strengthen our faith and sanctify our lives.

3. Temptation is fully and solely a work of the devil (vs.2a)

➤ The Bible is clear that while God sovereignly uses temptation, He Himself never tempts anyone (He never leads nor entices someone to sin). God tempting us to sin would be contrary to His nature and character, and we would not be able to resist Him.

James 1:13-15 ~ “Let no one say when he is tempted [*peirazō*], ‘I am being tempted [*peirazō*] by God,’ for God cannot be tempted [*apeirastos*] with evil, and he himself tempts [*peirazō*] no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted [*peirazō*] when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

➤ This we see in Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness: Jesus was sent to the wilderness by God but “*tempted by the devil*” (vs.2). While everyone is fully culpable for their sin (it is not excuse to say, “The devil made me do it!”), the work of temptation is solely attributed to the devil. It is not only what he does, but it is who he is: “*devil*” (*diabolos*; slanderer, accuser) and “*Satan*” (*Satanas*; adversary, enemy).

Application #3: The devil uses temptation in order to discourage, defile, and (ultimately) destroy us.

➤ Jesus described the devil as “*a murderer ... a liar and the father of lies*” (Jn.8:44), and “*the ruler of this world*” (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). In the book of Genesis, Satan is designated as “*the serpent ... more crafty than any other beast*” (Gen.3:1). In the book of Revelation, Satan is designated as “*that ancient serpent ... the deceiver of the whole world*” (Rev.12:9). The apostle Paul declared that Satan was “*hindering*” his ministry (1Thess.2:18). And the apostle John stated that “*the devil has been sinning from the beginning*” (1Jn.3:8).

1 Peter 5:8 ~ “... Your adversary the devil prowls around [*peripateō*] like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour [*katapinō*; to gulp down or swallow whole].”

➤ Make no mistake, the devil wants to discourage you, defile you, and ultimately destroy you. Our flesh is the beachhead of all Satan's attacks. A defiled heart is the devil's playground, a depraved mind is the devil's workshop, and unholy hands are the devil's tools. In order to resist the temptations of the devil, we must be wholly devoted to Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit of God. People who spend little or no time in the Word; little or no time in prayer; little or no time in church; little or no time in Christian fellowship; little or no time in spiritual disciplines – and much time in the world and in worldly things – should not be surprised when the devil devours them (with seductions, deceptions, and accusations).

Contrary to popular ("Christian") thought, we are never commanded to "bind" Satan, "rebuke" Satan, pray to Satan, or advance against the kingdom of darkness. We are, however, repeatedly commanded to resist the devil and defend against his demonic attacks.

Eph 4:27 ~ "and give no opportunity to the devil."

Eph 6:11 ~ "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

James 4:7 ~ "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

1 Peter 5:8-9 ~ "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

4. Temptation is temptation because it is tempting (vs.2b)

➤ Notice that the devil tempted Jesus with "bread" (vs.3) after Jesus "*ate nothing [for forty days]*" and "*was hungry*" (vs.2). The reason it's called temptation is because it is tempting. If it were not tempting it would not be temptation. It is important to remember that we all are not tempted by the same things, which is one reason why we should not be arrogant or judgmental regarding someone else's struggles (weaknesses).

✓ Illust: On the issue of temptation being tempting, I often think of broccoli. I do not want to brag, but I have resisted the temptation to eat broccoli for decades. In fact, as far as I can remember, I have never succumbed to the temptation of broccoli. I have been resolute, faithfully saying no to broccoli all my life!

The reason? I think broccoli is disgusting (I've often said that if Adam and Eve were tempted with broccoli, we would all still be in the Garden). Therefore, I get no "credit" for resisting broccoli because it is no temptation to me at all (candy, however, is another story!).

➤ We all need to know the areas in which we are weak, the ways in which the devil can tempt us. Some temptations are related to our personalities; some temptations stem from our childhood or upbringing; some temptations simply come from sins committed in the past.

It is good to ask ourselves why we are (repeatedly) tempted by certain things. Satan may be attacking you in that area in which you are the weakest. Could it be that Satan is prying at the chink in your armor? Perhaps the areas of temptation that you struggle with are the same areas which you are not fully satisfied in Christ? It just may be that the reason you and I are tempted as we are (and not in other areas) is because those are the areas that are most tempting for us.

✓ Illust: The Puritan Pastor, Matthew Henry, put it like this: "The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hook."

➤ Satan is not omniscient, but he is cunning and crafty. He will tempt you with the very things that you find tempting. He desires to destroy you by enticing your flesh to want (desire) that which God forbids. Whether by deception or seduction, the weapon Satan uses against you will be the very weapon that can destroy you.

✓ Illust: One day a scorpion, who couldn't swim, asked a frog if he would give him a ride across the river. The frog said, "No, because you will sting me and I will die." But the scorpion insisted, "If I were to sting you while crossing the river, you would die and I would drown." Convinced, the frog let the scorpion climb on its back and took him across the river. When they got to the other side, the scorpion stung the frog with a fatal strike. Dying, the frog said, "You promised not to sting me." But the scorpion replied, "I'm a scorpion. It's in my nature. It's what I do."

[Application #4: The more we are satisfied in Christ the less we will be seduced by temptation.](#)

➤ Keep in mind, we (this side of heaven) are never exempt or immune from temptation. However, we are less apt to be tempted by sin when we are satisfied in the Savior. That is, the more we are immersed in godliness the less we will be seduced by ungodliness; the more we are captivated by holiness the less we will be captivated by unholiness; the more we love God the less we will love the world or the things of the world.

✓ Illust: From C.S. Lewis in his sermon, *The Weight of Glory*: "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mudpies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

➤ It is good to remember that the devil is "*a liar*" (Jn.8:44) and "*the deceiver*" (Rev.12:9). He offers pain disguised as pleasure, hardship masked as ease, defilement masquerading as beauty. Satan wants us to exchange the goodness and blessing of godliness, for the evil and cursing of ungodliness. He longs to have us view the holiness of God as repugnant and the commands of God as burdensome (1Jn.5:3). Satan's greatest desire is for to reject God.

➤ This is the truth about temptation. It is the bait which covers the tempter's hook. It is fantasy and not reality. It is a mirage in the desert. It is a lie.

Eph 4:22-24 ~ "... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

1 Pet 1:14-16 ~ "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

James 4:7 ~ "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Conclusion

➤ Sin is an ugly interruption in the believer's pursuit of holiness and godliness! The Christian's life is not to be characterized by sin (Rom.6:1-2). Sin no longer has complete control of their life (Rom.6:16-22). Christians are still able to sin, but they are not filled with sin or enslaved to sin. When we sin, when we fall to temptation, we ought to be quick and genuine in our confession and repentance.

I Jn 3:9-10 ~ "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: *Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God*; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."

➤ Just as an unbeliever cannot help but sin (Rom.8:7-8), a true believer cannot stay in sin. An unbeliever has no way to battle the attacks of Satan, whereas the believer possesses the Holy Spirit of God (1Jn.4:4; Eph.6:12; 2Cor.10:3).