

Dealing with Temptation

This week we begin a new series entitled “Living in the World.” Leonard Ravenhill once said, “The most amazing thing God ever did was to take an unholy man in an unholy world, make him holy, and put him back in an unholy world and keep him holy in it.” That is exactly what has happened to all of us who follow Jesus—we have been made holy, and we are being kept holy in an unholy world.

One of the first things we face while living in this world is how to deal with temptation. We usually laugh about temptation, like Mae West: “I generally avoid temptation, unless I can’t resist it.” The Bible, however, presents temptation in a very different light: it is the most powerful tool of the one who hates us and desires to destroy us, Satan himself.

Temptation is simply an enticement to sin with a (false) promise for greater good. The one who foists these temptations upon us is both relentless and ruthless. We know from experience that falling into temptation has very destructive consequences. John Owen, in his book, *Of Temptation*, teaches that falling into temptation defiles our conscience, disquiets our peace, weakens our obedience, and clouds our vision of God.

In today’s text, Paul gives some amazingly helpful counsel on dealing with temptation. Paul is warning the Corinthians against the temptation of idolatry and then he says:

I Corinthians 10:12-13

¹²Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall ¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

In his commentary on this text, Matthew Henry says that Paul gives us a word of caution and a word of comfort. Let us consider those two things:

1. Don’t trust your unreliable self. (v.12)

A. Some think they can stand, but Paul says this is an illusion. All we need to do is consider Peter’s experience when he said to the Lord that although everyone else would leave, he never would, and then a few hours later he denied Jesus!

B. Take heed. Paul teaches us that rather than being presumptuous about our moral strength; we need to be very careful. We can do that by abiding by five principles:

Know yourself. If David had known himself better, he would not have gone to the top of his palace to look out over the women bathing, and he would have avoided some terrible consequences.

Fill your heart with the love of God. We do this through the Word and prayer. This was obviously what Joseph was doing when he fled from the temptation of Potiphar’s wife.

Take measure. Joseph did this by avoiding Potiphars wife and not listening to her.

Keep good friends. Peter discovered this when his friend and fellow apostle corrected him as shown in Galatians 2.

Repair the breach. We can see that Paul says to the Corinthians, “...flee from idolatry...” in verse 14. When we experience weakness, we should make the appropriate corrections in our lives.

2. Do trust your reliable Savior. (v.13)

A. God, in His faithfulness, limits our temptation. Our temptations are not uncommon to other people, especially Christ, and, secondly, they are not beyond our ability to handle. It is wonderful to know that all of our temptations have been filtered by the Lord so that we will not be overwhelmed.

B. God provides for His tempted children by always allowing a way of escape and by giving us strength for endurance. It is good to know that we are never inevitably trapped by any sin or temptation, but that God will always provide for us. The way in which He especially provides for us is in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ, who Himself faced the evil one in the wilderness.

It was in that wilderness that Jesus accomplished what the Israelites failed to accomplish in their 40 years in the wilderness: He triumphed over the evil one so that now He can comfort us and strengthen us in our temptations (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15).

This is how God keeps us holy in an unholy world. Praise be to His name!

Discussion Questions

- 1) Describe Satan's typical tactics in temptation.

- 2) Review the practical points given on how we can deal with temptation.

- 3) Why does Jesus' victory in the wilderness against the evil one secure our victory against him as well?

Extra Reading

HELPFUL BOOKS

Overcoming Sin and Temptation

by John Owen

A modern language translation of three classic short works by John Owen on fighting sin.