

Lesson 2: Our Duty to Fight

In our last lesson we defined the nature of temptation and looked at what it means to “enter into temptation” and what it means for temptation to be in its hour. We used our theme text of Matthew 26:41 to guide us, and we will continue to use that text throughout. Today, we will look at our duty as believers regarding temptation.

I. Our Great Duty

We have examined how the devil uses all advantages available to him in order to destroy our soul. Entering into temptation is a dangerous and deadly path. We do have Scriptures that give us hope that being ensnared does not necessarily mean our destruction. These include most notably **1 Corinthians 10:13**:

“No 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.”

However, even with this hope of deliverance, Owen wants to stress this main point – which is the thesis for our lesson today:

“It is the great duty of all believers to use all diligence in the ways of Christ’s appointment, that they fall not into temptation.”

Let’s consider two reasons for taking on this great duty:

- 1) For one, *Christ Himself, through his instruction to his disciples, instructs us to watch and pray that we not enter into temptation.*** This is seen in our theme text Matthew 26:41 as well as in the Lord’s prayer with the line *“and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”* Jesus knows the power of temptation, having experienced and withstood all that came against Him.

He also knows our frame and how weak we are, as we see in **Psalm 103:14** (I like how the NASB reads):

“For He Himself knows our form; He is mindful that we are nothing but dust.”

2) In addition, we see the way that **obedience is rewarded** in Revelation 3:10:

Read Revelation 3:10

Those who “keep His word...” He will “keep [...] from the hour of trial (temptation).

➤ **Extended Exposition on why we are to fight against entering into temptation**

Now, to this point of joining together “our great duty” and obedience I would add one more extended thought. I’d like to look at some interrelated passages of Scripture, so if you would follow with me in your Bibles, hopefully I can tie together what I’m trying to say.

We read 1 Corinthians 10:13 passage just a bit ago. If you’ll turn to 1 Corinthians 10; earlier on in the chapter we read of the various sins of the Israelites in the wilderness.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-10

There was idolatry (v.7), sexual immorality (v.8), putting Christ to the test (v.9), and grumbling (v.10).

The fact that these things happened and were recorded are said to be as an example and instruction for us (v.11), so that we would not fall into the same trap. They are warnings so that (according to verse 6)

“we might not desire evil as they did.” Now, stick with me. We looked a little bit last week at the famous passage on temptation found in James 1. Let’s return there briefly. Here is what verses 14 and 15 of

James 1 say:

Read James 1:14-15

Note two things:

1) People are enticed by their desire when they enter into temptations to evil.

2) Desire fully realized leads to sin and evil, which results in death (we know this from Paul's other writings as well; I'm thinking from Romans – the wages of sin is death).

So in 1 Corinthians Paul urges his readers to heed the example of the Israelites, so that we would not have that desire for evil that leads to death. We see the way the Israelites' "desire for evil" led to actual death. I mean verse 8 of 1 Corinthians 10 says "twenty-three thousand fell in a single day", verse 9 "destroyed by serpents", and verse 10 "destroyed by the Destroyer." The big point is -- don't fall for the lie that sin has no consequences. Don't play around with worldly desire – it's ultimate end is death.

Don't be caught unaware. As we move down to verse 12 we see the application. **Verse 12:**

"Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Be prepared. Heed the warning!

And then, in verse 13, we get this burst of hope in the midst of the warning.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

Your temptation is not unique, beyond the scope of help. God is able to control the scale of the temptation; not letting it overpower you. He is able and willing to provide a way of escape so that we might endure. Hallelujah, praise His name!

So, at this point we might sit back and say, "ok, well, God's got me anyway. He said He would make a way of escape and deliver me." We might be tempted to just sing the "Doxology" and go home. But then, in the next verse Paul drops this - saying:

*"Therefore my beloved, **flee from idolatry.**" (v.14)*

Paul wants us active. He wants us fighting. He wants us proving the fact that we are in Christ. Fleeing from temptation is an evidence we are seeking Christ.

Let's consider one more scripture here – Hebrews 3. Starting in verse 7, the writer describes the Israelites as rebelling and hardening their hearts in the day of trial and testing in the wilderness. Let's read verses 7-14:

Read Hebrews 3:7-14

In verse 10 God says about them: “they always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.” The disposition that Israel exhibited, and which we are warned against, is summed up in verse 12 as “an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” and as being “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” in verse 13. All of these descriptors are not ones for God's people: rebellious, hard hearted, going astray, not knowing God's ways, not entering His rest, having an evil unbelieving heart, falling away from the living God, hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

What is the application? Verse 13:

“exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today”” – that none of us would find ourselves with such a disposition, with a hardened heart.

Take care against such a heart, exhort one another to persevere in faith. What is the application – exhort each other, be diligent in fighting temptation.

What is the goal? Assurance. We see this in **verse 14**:

“For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”

Genuine faith is enduring faith. And that is the point of the hope statement back in 1 Corinthians 10:13.

- Those who enter into temptation and yet are delivered and endure are those who are God's.
- Those who hold their original confidence through temptation are those who are God's.
- Those who flee from idolatry are those who are God's.
- Those who aim for obedience are those who are God's.

We must never think of 1 Corinthians 10:13 as a reason not to wholeheartedly wage war against sin and temptation -- as the text says "to flee." Hebrews 3 and 4 repeatedly speak of the Israelites' failure to enter God's rest stemming from their disobedience and unbelief. **Hebrews 4:11** says:

"Let us strive therefore to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."

We learn two things from this:

- 1) ***The Christian life is one of striving.*** Active not passive. So, as Owen says, we are to "use all diligence" not to enter into temptation.
- 2) ***Obedience is the mark of a believer*** and, although never perfect, it proves the work God has already done in the person enabling them to endure temptation rather than fall away

We really feel the weight of our imperfection and wandering when we come to passages like this. We know that we are not always faithful like we should be. There are times when our hearts feel distant and cold rather than warmed by the glow of God's goodness. We can feel discouraged. But, all of this is not meant to serve as a weight for our back, but as a liberating truth. We will always find chambers in our hearts that are darker than we desire, and that we wish we could snap our fingers and change. However, be encouraged that progress is what we are after, not perfection.

Queenie and I watched a movie version of "The Pilgrims Progress" this week, and I was just struck again with how relatable it is. How much it speaks to real experience. Christian took a number of wrong turns and got off the path. Even after he got rid of the load of sin he carried, he still found himself in Doubting

Castle and lured into a trap by flattery. However, there was evident *progress*. And he clung to the hope of the book, that the King of the Celestial City was telling him the truth. So we too, though sometimes slowly or clumsily, make our way in a pattern of obedience enabled by the Spirit and by His grace.

Assurance is gained by:

1) *Progress not Perfection*

2) *Looking to Jesus, Our Righteousness*

The first two verses in Hebrews 12 really tie these things together:

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

Isn't it wonderful to know that Jesus is perfectly righteous and endured every temptation without spot or wrinkle? He is our righteousness. Real quickly I want to point out something that I hope stirs admiration in your heart for Christ.

Let's turn back to Hebrews 3 for just a second. We see a stark contrast in Hebrews 3 between Israel and Jesus. Specifically I want to look at verses 8-9.

Read Hebrews 3:8-9

The Israelites were tested/tempted in the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus, evoking that earlier wilderness wandering, was tempted intensely 40 days in the wilderness. The Israelites are said to have "put God to the test" – this was one of their many sins. One of the many ways they fell under temptation. On the other hand, Jesus stands up to one of the devil's temptations and says in Matthew 4:7 –

"Again it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

This is just one of the many, many ways that Jesus triumphed where Israel failed, and where frankly we have all failed. Jesus is superior and that's what Hebrews is telling us - as recently Pastor Jones preached.

But the beautiful thing is, not only is Christ superior, but He has brought us into the family of God through His supremacy. Where we could not, Jesus did. And did so on the behalf of all of us who would ever trust in Him. He is our victory over temptation, our victory over sin, our righteousness, our elder brother, and Savior. He is our all and we can always come to Him.

a. **General Issues of Entering into Temptation**

Alright, moving forward. Now, let's draw a distinction between two kinds of people facing temptation. We have somewhat done this with our exposition, but we'll clarify it a bit.

- 1) First, we have the person who professes faith in Christ and yet when temptation comes they are swept away.

Jesus describes this in his parable of the sower. Luke 8:13 says:

Read Luke 8:13

This is not saving faith, it is not supernaturally wrought faith. And this kind of response to the gospel does not stand in the face of temptation. It does not have the guarantee of the Spirit's preservation upon it. Here's what Owen says regarding this:

"Men who have attended on the preaching of the gospel, been affected and delighted with it, that have made profession of it, and have been looked on, it may be, as believers, and thus have continued for some years – no sooner does temptation befall them that has vigor and permanency in it, but they are turned out of the way and are gone forever. They fall to hate the word they have delighted in, despise the professors of it, and are hardened by sin." (pg. 169)

Mere professors of faith will crumble under temptation. For these, entering into temptation is entrance into apostasy.

2) Second, we have the true believer. They will persevere, but this does not mean that they come out of entanglement in temptation without scars. Even the greatest of saints experienced falls in their run ins with temptation. Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Peter and the list could go on and on. The failures of these men are recorded for our instruction, that we would learn and be on guard. No one is immune from the schemes of the devil, the attractions of the world, and the fallen corruption of our own hearts. The point is not to look down on these men as though we are much more spiritual and could never fall. We are to show tenderness and follow the instruction in Galatians 6:1 for restoring the fallen sibling in Christ:

Read Galatians 6:1

We are to restore with gentleness, but also keep watch. Here is Owen:

“In nothing does the folly of the hearts of men show itself more openly, in the days wherein we live, than in this cursed boldness, after so many warnings from God, and so many sad experiences every day under their eyes, of running into and putting themselves upon temptations. Any society, any company, any conditions of outward advantages, without once weighing what their strength, or what the concern of their poor souls is, they are ready for. Though they go over the dead and the slain that in those ways and paths but even now fell down before them, yet they will go on without regard or trembling.” (pg. 170)

But now that we’ve looked at the two kinds of people, let’s consider ourselves personally in regards to temptation.

b. Considering Ourselves

Four points as we consider ourselves:

1) We are Weak

We must always bear this in mind when fighting temptation. Owen:

“Confidence of any strength in us is one great part of our weakness; it was so in Peter. He that says he can do anything, can do nothing as he should.” (pg. 171)

We must be aware of our frail frame which trembles under pressure. It is good to have resolve and to be confident of our disposition of heart before God. However, Owen notes that “we have traitors in our hearts” that seek to undo us when temptation arises. When the heat of the moment comes we may find that we have desires that rise up in our souls that were not before recognized. Peter is an example. He had great confidence in his love and devotion for Jesus. He says in **Matthew 26:33**,

“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”

But, when the temptation to deny Him came – Peter found other desires for comfort, safety, freedom from conflict/pain overrode his devotion. We are not to trust even our own hearts when it comes to temptation. Our heart can sometimes deceive us, telling us that we are in good spiritual shape, or that we would never fall into such a grievous sin. We must have confidence in Christ but not in ourselves. We are weak.

2) Our Natural Strategies for Fighting Temptation are Insufficient

There are motivations that we as human beings use to fight temptation, but all of them ultimately prove inadequate to stand up against the fiercest temptations. Let's look at four motivations:

1. Love of honor in the world and the church

Reputation. This is a strong defense for most of us. We shudder at the thought of throwing away our reputation that we have built in the church. Thinking logically there would be no way we would give that up for a fleeting temptation and lust. However, are there not tragically too many stories of ministers and church members committing grievous sin – falling under the power of temptation. Surely, they

considered their reputation at some point. But, the desire to be thought well of by others was not enough to curb the desire toward sin. It will not be enough for us either.

2. Fear of shame and reproach

Closely related, we would not want to bring shame upon ourselves due to falling under public temptations. We would not want to face public discipline. However, this motivation tends to only apply to open and what we might call “flagrant” sins. Sins that are public, that others can see. It provides no help in dealing with sins of the heart and mind. And as those sins of the heart and mind grow, eventually the desire for them overwhelms any fear of shame.

3. The desire not to disturb one’s peace of mind or conscience or risk the danger of hell

This is a strong defense, but still with holes and insufficient. We should seek to maintain our peace with God – it is a worthy goal. However, there are a couple reasons why this motivation by itself is inadequate.

First, the peace we try to preserve might be a false peace. It is possible to have a conscience at peace, yet not be resting in Christ. This will not preserve us at the judgment.

Second, even if we are seeking to safeguard true peace, we may rationalize in the time of temptation. We think, “this thing is so small. It’s not a big deal. It’s a conscience issue – it’s my judgment call to make, not a flagrant sin. I dare not be legalistic in the matter. And besides, other Christians have done it and maintained their peace and seem to be doing fine with God. Or they’ve fallen and been able to get up and keep going. So it will be with me.” These rationalizations ultimately lead to the soul giving in.

Third, if we focus on maintaining our peace only, it leaves other avenues available for Satan to seduce. If we focus on sins such as revenge, dishonesty, and worldliness that disturb our conscience and yet neglect communing with God and striving for purity in the heart we have done no better than if we had

succumbed to the sin that seemed more obvious. We may safeguard our peace in external areas and yet sin in ways that we do not even acknowledge break our peace with God.

4. *The vileness of sinning against God*

When we think of how horrid it is to sin against such amazing love and mercy, it would be unthinkable to continue and enter into temptation. How could we wound Christ again and again, who died our souls to save? And yet can we not say by experience that this thought is not sufficient in itself to stop us from sinning. How mind boggling that temptation is so deceptive and dangerous, that this consideration will not cause us to always recoil in horror.

3) *The Power of Temptation: Public and Private*

Temptation has the power to *darken the mind* such that we are blinded to any light that could give us hope. It occupies our mind solely with the object of desire, so that we are distracted from those things which would bring deliverance. For example, a person might become obsessed with the thought that God has forsaken them or does not love them. This could so cloud their mind in depression that they are unable to see the light of truth regarding God's disposition towards us in Christ. Clarity of mind will have been disrupted. And this is true regarding other types of temptations as well. Our clarity of mind can be derailed.

This impacts our judgment in making decisions and acting on the will. It will be obscured. And in the heat of the moment, temptation will fuel our wrong passions and desires to a fever pitch. All of this, as we've already said, is dangerous territory.

The power of temptation is seen both publically and privately. Lets consider two things about ***public temptations:***

- 1) Public temptations often are a result of God's judgment on those who neglect and push back against the gospel or on those who are false converts. In outright rebellion or hypocrisy, a love for unrighteousness rather than truth brings God's judgment. Lets read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. This speaks of the coming "lawless one" and grand deception, but deception of this kind happens every day -- even now.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

In this case, the "strong delusion" sent by God in this temptation confirms the hardness of their heart. It is a judgment upon them who have already shut out God from their lives through their love of unrighteousness. We see this same idea in Romans 1. Verse 28:

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."

All of this is seen publically.

- 2) Public temptations can influence others in a negative way. Temptation entered into and sin indulged in by someone who claims to be a Christian and yet inwardly is dead can be disastrous. It is damaging to the individual who is deceiving himself or sought to deceive others in his pretense of godliness, but also for those who look on. They see no remorse. No repentance. They see a person respected becoming careless (or they may say care-free) in regards to daily holiness, and something stirs perhaps in their hearts that this could be their path too, and it would be alright. The writer of Hebrews warns about this in Hebrews 12:14-15:

Read Hebrews 12:14-15

"Many become defiled." Public temptations have the potential to influence others away from God and into sin.

A couple of quick properties of *private temptations*:

- They are internal rather than external, existing in the heart, given fuel by personal lusts and yet not untouched by the influence of the world. This mixture builds up inside and goes deep into the inner being, the part of a person that they don't speak to others about – the temptation taking a deeper and deeper hold. This makes fighting against it very difficult.
- Internal lusts permeate the whole being. We cannot compartmentalize temptation into one corner of our soul. What affects our minds, affects our whole person.

4) The Effect and End of Temptation on Us

Plain and simple – Satan's goal and sin's goal with every temptation is "the dishonor of God and the ruin of our souls."

May we guard against such an assault upon ourselves and the name of our Lord. And we'll start to look at the strategies for battling temptation next week. Thank you for sticking with me; I know this is a sober and sometimes somewhat somber study, but I pray that you also got some hope and encouragement from it. We have a real enemy. We face real dangers on every side and within. And yet we have a very real Savior who has paid for every sin and promised to see His people through to the end.