

Lesson 4: The Internal Battle and Solution

This morning we come to the end of our series on temptation and the end of our study on *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* by John Owen. For me it has been a helpful 11 weeks; I really benefitted from our brother Kent's teaching on Indwelling Sin and Mortification, and have been helped in going through material on temptation. Maybe this would open up some of your reading horizons. This was the first time I actually read Owen, and I am glad I did. We have much to learn from saints of the past. Also, I hope that you come away from this study with a sense of knowing more of yourself, more of God, and more of how to live for His glory.

Well, we are not done yet. There's a lot to cover today so lets dive in.

Quick review: Last week we began to look at how to prevent temptation. We looked at three points regarding this:

- ***First, we are to understand the danger involved in entering into temptation.*** We must take it seriously.
- ***Second, we must pray.*** We should acknowledge our need, and then look to the Lord for grace and His sustaining power.
- ***Third, we are to watch the seasons.*** That is the seasons in which people tend to enter into temptation. These four seasons are: *outward prosperity, spiritual dullness, spiritual highs, and self-confidence*

I. Watch the Heart

This morning we continue to consider "watching". However, while watching the seasons is what I would call the external battle, we must also fight the internal battle. We must watch our heart to be aware of when temptation may strike. Owen's words here really give the thesis for this point. He says:

“Let him that would not enter into temptations labor to know his own heart, to be acquainted with his own spirit, his natural frame and temper, his lusts and corruptions, his natural, sinful, or spiritual weaknesses, that, finding where his weakness lies, he may be careful to keep at a distance from all occasions of sin.” (pg. 201)

How do we watch the heart?

➤ *Know your natural temperament as well as your peculiar lusts and corruptions*

We all have a natural personality – a natural disposition or characteristics. Some of us tend to be more gentle and mild-mannered. Others are more lively. Selfishness, irritability, and discontentment are a few characteristics that flow more easily from this disposition. There are all sorts of tests and studies out there that will try to pinpoint your personality type and label it. A lot of people find it comforting in a sense to fit themselves into a category – to have their inner feelings validated. Well, our concern is not to pinpoint personalities this morning, but simply to say that as you meet people you soon discover that we are not all the same. We have inborn natural temperaments. We also have particular lusts and corruptions attached to those temperaments. Owen says it’s vital that we understand what ours are, because each temperament, whether its calm or lively can be an advantage for temptation in different ways. And each lust has its own unique deception.

➤ *Watch against all occasions that would provoke your natural temperament and lusts*

Once we have known ourselves better, we should watch against all occasions that would provoke our inner lusts and natural temperament. This may mean we don’t hang around with a certain crowd, or we set boundaries in relationships, or we don’t go to certain places, or we order our days more intentionally, or on and on. The specifics are too many to try to mention – and I couldn’t do that anyway, that is something for you to think of, having known yourself. But the point is, because we are so

weak in ourselves in facing temptation we should proactively prevent temptation through avoidance.

Some scriptural substance for that:

Read Proverbs 4:14-15

- ***Store up gospel provisions for preventing temptation***

Avoidance will only limit opportunity for temptation to arise, it will not change our hearts. And so, we should be filling our hearts and minds with what will sustain us when we actually face temptation - thoughts of (a real sense of) the love of God in Christ. We read in Philippians:

Read Philippians 4:7

We must be guarded against the relentless assaults of the enemy. And we are told that “the peace of God” will do just that. And what is that peace? A sense of God’s love and favor in Christ. Christ has made peace between us and God, by breaking down the wall of hostility, willingly dying in our place, as our Substitute so that we could now be met with grace and love by the Father. This will guard our hearts, this will guard our minds.

- ***Be always awake, to discover temptation early***
- ***Consider the aim and tendency of the temptation***

The aim of every temptation toward evil as we learned in an earlier lesson is “the dishonor of God and the ruin of our souls.” The lusts of our own hearts rage against the Lord. So, knowing that we have these “traitors in our hearts” – these lusts – when they start to stir and attempt to seduce us, we are to in our minds turn to it and say “No! I hate it! I hate the deception of my own heart, I hate the lusts that seek to coordinate my downfall. How I long that they were violently destroyed! This temptation is my enemy! Oh, that I were delivered from its power! Oh, how it seeks not only to destroy me, but to dishonor my Lord. I will not have that!” Temptation toward evil is not to be entertained or treated politely. It is

engineered by Satan, our sworn enemy, who has the worst of intentions in mind for us. He will push hard to break our attachment to Christ.

Owen:

“the sin he [Satan] tempts you to against the law, it is not the thing he aims at; his design lies against your interest in the gospel. He would make sin but a bridge to get over to a better ground, to assault you as to your interest in Christ.” (pg. 206)

➤ ***Meet your temptation with thoughts of faith concerning Christ on the cross***

When we face temptation, we can move from our hatred for sin to faith, faith in the work of Christ at the cross. “Jesus died! He died for these very sins.” Our hatred and disgust turn into hope. This is taking the shield of faith as we see in Ephesians 6:16. I’m going to read that:

Read Ephesians 6:16

We fight the beginnings of temptation by faith – taking hold of the reality of Christ crucified, His great love shown in the immensity of what He suffered for our salvation from sin.

[PAUSE]

Question: But what if temptation surprises us and we do not catch it in time to prevent it, and we become entangled – now what?

Owen has four answers we will look at quickly.

1) *Plead with the Lord that it would leave.*

We read in 2 Corinthians 12 that this is what the Apostle Paul did:

Read 2 Corinthians 12:8

We will either be delivered from the temptation or given sufficient grace so that we will not be overcome by it.

2) *Fly to Christ, and confidently draw upon His promise to give help*

We are given a beautiful promise in Hebrews regarding the aid that Jesus gives His people in need:

Read Hebrews 4:15-16

He has been tempted, and passed every test, therefore He is able to help those who are tempted. In fact, He did this for our sake. His active obedience is our righteousness; His victory over temptation is our victory. We can confidently expect our Savior's help when we draw near to the throne of grace. This not because we deserve it, but because this is why He suffered what He suffered. The Father sent Him to purchase a people for Himself who would be growing in conformity to Christ. We need to come to Him; He *wants* us to come.

3) *Look to Him who has promised deliverance*

Consider. Ponder. Believe. These are words that are implied by "looking to the Lord." Consider His faithfulness. Remember all the ways that He has demonstrated that faithfulness in the past in your life. Remember every surge of grace. Consider the simple beautiful hope within these words:

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

God is faithful. He will not "break a bruised reed, or quench a smoldering wick" (**Matthew 12:20**). He is compassionate and kind. He does not simply watch us squirm and struggle in hopelessness. **Psalms 46:11** says:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

He graciously provides. He provides a way of escape. He empowers our endurance. Think about these things! We do not have a god who has created the world and then left it alone without caring. We don't have a god who selfishly uses his subjects to fulfill his own twisted desires. We have a God who is intimately involved with His creatures. Who knows the number of every grain of sand, of the stars in the sky, of every hair on your head. He knit you together in your mother's womb. He knows what you are going to say before a word is yet on your tongue. And this transcendent God entered into time and space – as a man. He came to save a people who egregiously broke His holy law. He redeems us, justifies us, adopts us, and makes us heirs of everything that is His. The Son now lives to make intercession for us. He works to produce in us what is best for us. He gives us joy in our journey. He is our deliverer. Consider these things. If you are a believer you have great promises from a great God. He can provide that deliverance, that way of escape in the midst of trial, in ways you never thought possible.

4) *Consider where and how the temptation made its entrance, and repair the breach*

This is damage control. Assess how the temptation might have gripped you. If you find that you were negligent or careless – make a course correction. Double up your watchfulness. Confess it before the Lord, admit again your need. And then plug up the holes – the entrances to your soul.

II. Keep the Gospel

I want to consider one more thing as our main defense against temptation. This sums up some of the strategies we have already mentioned regarding faith and looking to Jesus, but we will now give full treatment to it. The greatest remedy against temptation is to “keep the word of Christ.” And the word of Christ is the gospel.

Grappling with Owens Interpretation of Revelation 3:10

Now as we dive into this final section I want to be perfectly upfront with you. John Owen, in his treatise, uses Revelation 3:10 as the root text for his explanation about this last remedy. This treatise was originally written in 1658 and he uses the King James Version for his scripture citations. Let me read Revelation 3:10 in the KJV for reference:

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

Owen focuses in on the phrase “the word of my patience.” Now, in context this is Jesus to the church in Philadelphia, one of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. And so the “my” refers to Christ. Owen interprets this as pertaining to Christ’s patience, toward believers and unbelievers in unique ways, and he spends a little bit of time breaking that down.

Now this is what I mean by I want to be up front. I don’t believe this specific text is speaking about Christ’s patience toward us at all. I am not disagreeing with Owen’s interpretation lightly. I believe Owen was doing his best with the translation he had available.

Okay I better give some proof right? Lets read Revelation 3:10 again, this time in the ESV.

Read Revelation 3:10

“You have kept my word about patient endurance.” Every other translation I checked says basically the same thing:

- NASB: “my word of perseverance”
- NIV: “kept my command to endure patiently”
- NKJV: “kept my command to persevere”
- CSB: “kept my command to endure”

The point is: Jesus is saying the believers in Philadelphia obeyed His word. And that word or command was for them to persevere. Because of that they will be kept from the coming trial. Do you see the difference?

Is Christ patient? Absolutely! And we praise Him for it! But do I believe that is the message from this text? I really don't. I could not make it work simply because Owen said it. And so I was left with a conundrum. Owen continually refers to this ultimate remedy in fighting temptation as "keeping the word of Christ's patience." Well, here is my conclusion. I still believe that the gospel, the word of Christ, is our greatest weapon against temptation. Using some texts of scripture I'd like to submit to you why.

Scriptural Analysis for the Gospel as the Remedy for Temptation

Lets start right where we are in Revelation 3:10. We are told believers are to keep Christ's word about patient endurance. We are to persevere in faith. How do we do that? Through the power of the gospel. Who perseveres? Those who have been changed through the gospel. This is one of the precious doctrines of grace that we rejoice in as a church. The *Perseverance of the Saints*. And there are a lot of verses to back that up. I mean ALL OVER. Just three are John 6:37, Philippians 1:6, and Ephesians 1:13-14. Lets look at that last one in Ephesians.

Read Ephesians 1:13-14

When we hear the "word of truth", the word of *the* Truth, the word of Christ – the gospel – and we believe and are born again, we are then sealed with the Spirit so that we can expectantly hope for the inheritance of eternal life. The New Testament again and again shows that genuine belief in Christ transforms. And it equals us being kept believing all the way to the end. Those who find deliverance from the power of sin in the message of the gospel at first believing, will find final deliverance from the presence of sin at the end. And we can have confidence that it is that *same* gospel that is our deliverance from sin's power in our day to day lives as we live in this fallen world of temptation. The

gospel keeps us persevering, even as we are preserved by God. So, those in Philadelphia who kept Christ's word about patient endurance, by God's grace provided evidence that they were in Christ.

It is those who are true believers, who are enduring to the end, who will be given "help in time of need" like we read in Hebrews 4, and "the way of escape from temptation" that we read of in 1 Corinthians 10. Our access to God's help and deliverance in temptation is therefore the gospel. This is the only way we can persevere in faith. He enables our patient endurance.

a. What it means to "keep the gospel"

There are three things involved in keeping the word of Christ (keeping the gospel). Knowing the gospel, treasuring the gospel, and obeying the gospel/Christ.

1) Know the Gospel

In order to keep God's word in the gospel, we must know it. Lets very quickly look at three ways we should know it:

- **First, as a word of grace and mercy to save us.** According to Romans 1:16 the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."
- **Second, as a word of holiness and purity to sanctify us.** Jesus prays for his disciples in the High Priestly Prayer (John 17:17) that the Father would "sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." God's Word comes alive as we are made new through the gospel, so that we strive to live holy lives.
- **Third, as a word of consolation to support us in every situation.** Owen says:
"It gives support, relief, refreshment, satisfaction, peace, consolation, joy, boasting, glory, in every condition whatsoever." (pg. 211)

2) Treasure the Gospel

In addition to knowing what the gospel is, a great part of keeping Christ's word is treasuring the gospel we know. There is so much to treasure as we learn more and more about this good news – what God has done for the salvation of sinful people, what benefits He gives us who are utterly undeserving.

3) Obey the Gospel

We read in John 14 in that the one who loves Christ, keeps His commands. We are to live unto Christ when things are going well, but also when we face opposition for doing so.

This is what the church in Philadelphia did in Revelation 3. They knew the gospel, they treasured it, they valued and loved Christ more than temporary pleasure, and so they obeyed His command to patiently endure persecution.

Know the gospel. Treasure the gospel. Obey the gospel. This is what it means to “keep the gospel.”

III. How Keeping the Gospel Preserves from Temptation

Two considerations under this heading.

1) The Gospel includes God's promise to preserve us

We have mentioned previously some verses regarding God preserving our faith to the end in the face of temptation. One such passage is 1 Peter 1:3-6.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-6

We are being “guarded through faith” by God's power for a “salvation ready to be revealed.” Remember as we've looked at before, while this points to our future deliverance from sin's presence, it also includes our present deliverance in our experience with temptations. We have seen this in 1 Corinthians 10:13 – that God provides the way of escape in our temptations. We are guarded by God's power, and that power is seen in 4K in the gospel.

2) God preserves us as we persevere in keeping the Gospel (the word of Christ)

When we endeavor to keep the word of Christ in our lives, to live in light of the gospel, our hearts will be kept in such a state that temptations cannot maintain a firm enough grip to ultimately prevail. David prays to the Lord these words:

Read Psalm 25:20-21

He sought to walk closely with the Lord. And we are to do the same in every area of our lives. It will do us no good if we compartmentalize our lives so that parts of us we surrender and yet other parts we keep back and dabble with temptation. Jerry Bridges in his book “the Discipline of Grace” says this regarding pursuing holiness as a lifestyle:

“Commitment to the pursuit of holiness, then, is first of all a commitment to God to pursue a way of life that is pleasing to Him. In short, it is commitment to a life of obedience. Such a commitment must allow for no exceptions, no secret sins we want to hold onto, no sinful habits we are unwilling to give up. We must make it our aim not to sin.” (pg. 150-151)

He later goes on to say:

“There is no point in praying for God’s help in the face of temptation, if we have not made a commitment to obedience without exception.” (pg. 151)

This is why watching *and* praying is the double instruction of the Savior. We should pray, but we should also be diligently working, by God’s grace, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ. So we commit our way to the Lord, seeking to live close to Him in obedience.

How do we see that life of obedience lived out?

- ***First, guarding our heart against temptation by a consistent pattern of mortification***

Mortification. Killing sin. The consistent killing of our sin, over time, also kills our desire for sin. It begins to dull the intensity of temptation. As believers we “are crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20) and we echo the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:14 – “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” The temptations that we face may be full of gold and glitter, but if we have a mortified heart and crucified life, although never perfect, we will more often look past that and persevere.

➤ ***Second, guarding our heart against temptation by filling it with better things and their wonder***

Not only are we to kill sin in our hearts, but we are to replace it with something better. What we have in Christ is vastly superior to the old life, the old lies. As we consider and experience newness of life, everything else becomes worthless by comparison.

There are three things all those who keep the word of Christ, the gospel, consider that preserve us in our fight with temptation:

1. Christ Himself

To quote John Piper:

“Cultivate the capacities for pleasure in Christ. One reason lust reigns in so many is that Christ has so little appeal. We default to deceit because we have little delight in Christ.”

Consider who He is! The most magnificent Person in the universe! Pick up your Bible and see Jesus there throughout its pages. Think on His beauty and strength, His glory, His love, His power and holiness. Think on His compassion, mercy, and grace. See His authority, His faithfulness, His patience. Drink that in. Find joy in Him. And then see how those continual considerations make it hard for us to be duped by fleeting temptations. We do not want to grieve the Spirit and treat the gospel as if it were nothing to us. Christ is

superior. As we mentioned in a previous lesson, it is baffling that our consideration of Christ does not *always* stop our sinning. However, it does give us great victory that we otherwise would not have.

2. Christ's own victory over temptation

Jesus faced a barrage of temptations throughout his life on earth and yet resisted every single one. He conquered them all. And He did this on our behalf – for our sake. His active obedience is the righteousness credited to us. We have a High Priest who can truly sympathize and offer help because He suffered under temptation and yet never sinned. And so we are to live in victory, not with our heads hung as if we have no hope of deliverance. Jesus has conquered for us, He provides help to us.

3. Desiring the approval of Christ

We know the joy of having close communion with the Lord, and also the pain of being distant from Him. The believer's desire for fellowship with Christ drives their watchfulness.

It is much the same for those of us who are married. We value our spouses. My wife is my treasure. And so I fight against any temptation to devalue her, to take her for granted, to not put all my effort into strengthening our marriage, to be lazy, to be wandering. Why?

(1) Because I have considered Queenie herself. And how much I admire her and all the qualities that drew and continue to draw me to her.

(2) Because I see all the ways she resists temptation in working for my good, and for the good of our marriage. I am inspired.

(3) And because I desire closeness in our relationship, and dread distance or coldness. It is my desire for fellowship with her that drives watchfulness.

Because I love her. And so it is to a much higher degree in our relationship to Christ!

IV. Advice to be Preserved from Temptation

As we start to land this plane we want to consider some quick advice, both negative and positive.

1) **Negatively, we should take heed against leaning on deceitful assistances**

- a. **Our own understanding and reasoning.** “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.” (**Proverbs 3:5**)
- b. **Engaging intensely in fasting, prayer, and strict discipline against particular lusts.** If we are doing these things to rid ourselves of one particular temptation and yet in other areas of our lives are negligent – being given to worldliness – we should not expect deliverance from Christ.
- c. **The promise of the perseverance of the saints.** While this is a glorious truth, we should never use it as an excuse towards apathy in our walk. We must still be diligent that we not fall into daily temptation. God’s grace will sustain us – He is faithful, but we must be active in our fighting.

2) **Positively, we should seek to apply God’s word to our lives in our specific temptations**

- When we are tempted to pridefully seek popularity at the expense of holiness, we should remember (**Proverbs 16:18**)
- When we are tempted to get ahead by deception (**1 Peter 3:10**)
- When we are tempted to value safety over obedience to Christ (**Matthew 16:25**)
- When we are tempted to deny our faith for the sake of our career (**Matthew 16:26**)
- When we are tempted to retaliate in anger (**Colossians 3:8 or Proverbs 29:11**)
- When we are tempted to harbor envy (**James 3:14-16**)
- When we are tempted to look with lust (for men or women) (**Matthew 5:28**)
- When we are tempted to gossip (**Ephesians 4:29**)

These are only the negative verses, telling us of the folly of following after these temptations to sin. The Bible is full of what we positively *should* fill our hearts with instead – humility not pride, truthfulness and transparency not deception, faithfulness, courage, gentleness, peace and patience not unharnessed anger, rejoicing with others not envy or jealousy, love and appreciation not lust, edification and encouragement not gossip, kindness, self-control and on and on.

To this point let me read the Psalmist's words in Psalm 119:9-16

Read Psalm 119:9-16

His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

3) The Role of the Saints in our Fight against Temptation

I would like to add one more point and application to all we have gleaned from Owen. I cannot help but see in Scripture the pivotal role our brothers and sisters in Christ have in our fight against entering into temptation.

A couple lessons back we looked at **Hebrews 3** and the warnings against having an unbelieving heart and falling away. In **verse 13** we are instructed to:

“exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

One way we are to guard against “sin’s deceit” (which is temptation) is to exhort each other (both to encourage and warn). One of the responsibilities of each member of this church is to minister to the souls of our fellow members. We are to be speaking words of life, truth, hope, peace, joy, instruction and warning when necessary. The Lord uses our life together to aid our holiness. Let’s look at one more passage in Hebrews.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25

We see all that Christ has done in the gospel to reconcile us to God. And we are then charged with holding fast to our confession of hope, that glorious gospel.

Q: How do we hold fast the confession of our hope?

A: The answer comes in the next verses. **By faithfully living life together as believers.**

Four applications from verses 24-25 for how we are to live life together in a way that keeps us grounded in the gospel:

1. **We are to stir up one another towards love and good deeds.** And we are to continually consider ways to do this. We are to live with others in view.
2. **We are to meet together regularly.** This provides accountability as we share our lives. Marshall Segal, with *Desiring God*, writes:

“Whenever we isolate ourselves from the perspective, encouragement, and exhortations of others, we open ourselves wide to the deceitfulness of sin. And why is the deceitfulness of sin so compelling? Because Satan studies and preys on our desires. He’s a master gardener, carefully seeding selfishness, discontentment, and bitterness in just the right places. Consistent, meaningful community, however, exposes and thwarts him. It reveals just how thin and shallow his lies are, and just how far our desires can sometimes wander.”

3. **We are to encourage one another.** Our greatest encouragements in life should be coming from fellow believers whom we share our lives with. Others may flatter or offer praise about how great we are, but mature Christians will give gospel encouragement – rooted in the reality of our remnant sin and yet the immeasurable grace of God. They can remind us of a great hope that is

completely different from someone telling us to “think positive” or “send us good vibes”. But a hope that is unfading, and kept in heaven for us.

- 4. Live in light of the coming Day.** That hope will be realized on that glorious day. It is both a sober and joyous Day. Full of judgment and glory. We should live with anticipation, urgency in our task of sharing the gospel, and with a watchfulness over own souls as to our condition before God.

Look around you. If you are a believer in this room you have been given a gift of family to walk this Christian journey with.

Closing

We have considered a lot today! Through this series we have received numerous warnings from Scripture regarding the dangers of temptation. I hope you have felt the weight of those. We have also considered how to prevent entering into temptation and fight it when we are caught in it. There is so much more! Two resources I would like to commend to you in addition to Owen’s treatise *Of Temptation* are:

- 1) ***The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges**
- 2) ***Resources through Desiring God on fighting temptation, lust, and killing sin.*** I have been so thankful over the years for the ministry of John Piper and the DG staff in tackling these issues robustly. As an example, Piper’s acronym ANTHEM for fighting lust uses Owen’s work (and Scripture of course) as a basis.

So, may we be diligent in our watching and in our praying. May we be diligent in our life together as believers to aid each other in a life of holiness. And may the Lord grant us grace for every step.

I want to leave you with an encouragement from 1 Peter as we close.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9