

The Enticement of Indwelling Sin

By John Owen. Modernization by James Houston

Sin not only deceives, it also entices. People are drawn away "and enticed" (James 1:14). Sin draws the *mind* away from a duty, but it entices the *emotions*. We will consider three things:

Sin's enticement of the emotions, how sin accomplishes this, and our need to guard our affections because of this danger.

The affections are snared when they are aroused by sin. For when sin prevails, it captures the affections completely within it. Sin continually obsesses the imaginations with possessive images. The wicked "devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds," which they also practice when they are given the chance (Micah 2:1). Peter says they have "eyes full of adultery, and they cannot cease from sin" (2 Peter 2:14). Their imagination continually fills their soul with the objects of their lusts.

The apostle describes the things in the world as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). The lust of the eyes enters the soul, forcing the imagination to portray its intentions. John speaks of this as the lust of the "eyes" because it constantly represents these images to the mind and to the soul, just as our natural eyes present images of outward objects to the brain.

Indeed, the actual sight of the eyes often occasions these imaginations. Achan declared how sin had prevailed over him in Joshua 7:21. First, he *saw* the gold and the Babylonian garments, then he *coveted* them. Seeing them, he imagined their value to him, and then he fixed them in his desiring heart.

The enticement of sin is heightened when the imagination dominates over the mind. It implants vain thoughts within the mind, and delights secretly in its complacency. When we indulge with delight in thoughts of forbidden things, we commit sin, even though our will has not yet consented to perform the deed. The prophet asks, "How long will your vain thoughts lodge within you?" (Jer 4:14). All these thoughts come and go as messengers, carrying sin with them. Such thoughts inflame the imagination and entangle the affections more and more.

As we have already seen, sin always seeks to extenuate and lessen the seriousness of sin to the mind. "It is only a small offense," it says. "It will be given up shortly." With such excuses it speaks the language of a deceived heart. When there is a readiness on the part of the soul to listen to these silent voices—secret insinuations that arise from deceit—it is evident that the affections are already enticed.

When the soul willingly listens to these seductions, it has already lost its affections for Christ, and has become seduced. Sin entices like "wine when it is red, when it gives its colour in the cup, when it moves itself attractively" (Prov 23:31). But in the end, sin "bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder" (Prov 23:32).

How, then, does sin deceive to entice and to entangle the affections? First, it *makes use of the tendency of the mind*. If the mind is like a sly bird, sin will not capture it. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (Prov 1:17). But if a bird is distracted, its wings are of little use to escape from the trap. Thus does sin entice. It diverts the mind away from the danger by false reasonings and pretenses, then casts its net upon the affections to entangle them.

Second, sin takes advantage of the phases of life, and *proposes sin to be desirable*. It gilds over an object with a thousand pretenses which the imagination promotes as "the pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:25). Unless one despises these pleasures, as Moses did, one cannot escape from them. Those who live in sin, the apostle says, "live in pleasure" (James 5:5). It is pleasure because it suits the flesh to lust after them. Hence the caution, given, "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14). That is to say, do not nourish yourself with the lusts of the flesh, which sin gives to you through your thoughts or affections. He also warns us, "Fulfill not the lusts of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). When men live under the power of sin, they fulfill "the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph 2:3). When sin would entangle the soul, it prevails with the imagination to solicit the heart by painting sin as something beautiful and satisfying.

Third, it *hides the danger* associated with sin. Sin covers the hook with bait, and spreads the food over the net. It is, of course, impossible for sin to completely remove the knowledge of danger from the soul. It cannot remove the reality that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), or hide "the judgment of God, that they who commit sin are worthy of death" (Rom 1:32). But it so takes up and possesses the mind and affections with the attraction and desirability of sin, that it diverts the soul from realizing its danger.

In the account of the fall of man, Eve properly told the serpent, "If we eat or touch the fruit of that tree, we shall die" (Gen 3:3). But Satan immediately filled her mind with the beauty and usefulness of the fruit, and she quickly forgot her practical concern for the consequences of eating. Likewise, David became so caught up in his lusts that he ignored the consequences of his great sin. It is said he "despised the Lord" (2 Sam 12:9).

When sin tempts with such pressure, it uses a thousand wiles to hide the soul from the terror of the Lord. Hopes of pardon will be used to hide it. Future repentance also covers it, as well as the present insistence of lust and the particular occasion or opportunity. Sin uses many other excuses: extenuating circumstances, surprise, the balance of duties, the obsession of the imagination, and desperate resolutions. It uses a thousand such excuses.

Sin then proceeds to present arguments to the mind in order to conceive the desired sin. This we will consider in the next chapter.

Let us look now at the remedies for avoiding such deception of sin. Clearly, we need to watch our affections. The Scriptures say: "Keep your heart with all diligence" (Prov 4:23). We keep our heart in two ways.

First, we guard our affections by mortifying our members (Col 3:5). The apostle is saying, "You are to prevent the working and deceit of sin, which is in your members." He also says, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (3:2). Fixing and filling your affections with heavenly things will mortify sin.

What are the objects of such affections? They include God Himself, in His beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "altogether lovely. . . the chiefest of ten thousand" (Song 5:10,16); grace and glory; the mysteries of the gospel; and the blessings promised by the gospel. If these were the preoccupation of our affections, what scope would sin have to tempt and enter into our hearts? (See 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.)

Second, let us fix our affections on the cross of Christ. Paul says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal 6:14). When someone sets his affections upon the cross and the love of Christ, he crucifies the world as a dead and undesirable thing. The baits of sin lose their attraction and disappear. Fill your affections with the cross of Christ and you will find no room for sin. The world put Him out of a house and into a stable, when He came to save us. Let Him now turn the world out-of-doors, when He comes to sanctify us.

Remember also that the vigor of our affections toward heavenly things is apt to decline unless it is constantly looked after, exercised, directed, and warned. God speaks often in Scripture of those who lost their first love, allowing their affections to decay. Let us be jealous over our hearts to prevent such backsliding.

The Power of Temptation

It is the great duty of all believers not to enter into temptation. God indeed is able to "deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter 2:9). Yet it is our great task to use all diligence so that we do not fall into temptation. Our Savior expresses His concern for His disciples by teaching them to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matt 6:13). Since our Lord knows the power of temptation, having experienced it, He knows how vulnerable we are to it (Heb 2:18). He rewards our obedience by keeping us "in the hour of temptation" (Rev 3:10).

Let us learn more about the power of temptation in order to avoid it. Since temptation brings out many basic issues, Scripture has much to say about it. In the parable of the sower, Christ compares the seed sown on the rocky, thin soil to those who, "when they hear, receive the word with joy, but have no root, for they only believe for a while" (Luke 8:13). The preaching of the Word affects them. They believe. They make a profession. They bring forth some fruit. But how long do they continue? Christ Says, "In time of temptation they fall away" (Luke 8:13). Once tempted, they are gone forever.

Likewise, in Matthew 7:26, Jesus speaks of the parable of the "foolish man, who built his house upon the sand." But what happens to this house of professed faith? It shelters its occupant, it keeps him warm, and it stands for awhile. But when the rain descends (that is to say, when temptation comes), it falls utterly, and its fall is great. This foolish man is like Judas, who followed our Savior three years. All went well for a time. But he no sooner entered into temptation—when Satan winnowed him—than he was lost. Demas preached the gospel until the love of the world entered into his soul, and then he turned utterly aside as well.

Among the saints of God, we see the solemn power of temptation. Take Adam, "the son of God," created in the image of God, full of integrity, righteousness, and holiness (Luke 3:38). He possessed a far greater inherent stock of ability than we have, since he had never been enticed or seduced. Yet no sooner did Adam enter into temptation but he was undone, lost, and ruined, and all his posterity with him. What should we expect then, when in our temptations we must deal not only with a cunning devil, but also with a cursed world and a corrupt heart?

Abraham is called the father of the faithful for it is his faith that is recommended as the pattern to all who believe (Rom 4:11-17). Yet twice he entered into the same temptation (namely, his fear about his wife). Twice he committed sin. He dishonored God, and no doubt his soul lost its peace (See Genesis 12 and 20).

David is called "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam 13:14). Yet what a dreadful story we read of his immorality! No sooner did temptation entangle him than he plunged into adultery. Seeking deliverance by his own devices, he became all the more entangled until he lay as one dead under the power of sin and folly.

We should also mention Noah, Lot, Hezekiah, and Peter, whose temptations and falls God recorded for our own instruction. Like the inhabitants of Samaria who received the letter of Jehu, we should ask, "If two kings were not able to stand before him, how then shall we stand?" (2 Kings 10:4). For this reason the apostle urges us to exercise tenderness toward those who fall into sin. Paul writes, "Consider yourselves, lest you also be tempted"

(Gal 6:1). Seeing the power of temptation in others, let us beware, for we do not know when or how we also may be tempted. What folly it is that many should be so blind and bold, after all these and other warnings, to put themselves before temptation.

We need to examine ourselves to see our own weaknesses, and to note the power and efficacy of temptation. In ourselves, we are weakness itself. We have no strength, no power to withstand. Self-confidence produces a large part of our weakness, as it did with Peter. He who boasts that he can do anything, can in fact do nothing as he should. This is the worst form of weakness, similar to treachery. However strong a castle may be, if a treacherous party resides inside (ready to betray at the first opportunity possible), the castle cannot be kept safe from the enemy. Traitors occupy our own hearts, ready to side with every temptation and to surrender to them all.

Do not flatter yourself that you can hold out against temptation's power. Secret lusts lie lurking in your own heart which will never give up until they are either destroyed or satisfied. "Am I a dog, that I should do this thing?" asks Hazeal (2 Kings 8:13). Yes, you will be such a dog, if you are like the king of Syria. Temptation and self-interest will dehumanize you. In theory we abhor lustful thoughts, but once temptation enters our heart, all contrary reasonings are overcome and silenced.

Inadequate Safeguards Against the Power of Temptation

To be safe from such danger, we need to examine our own hearts. A man's heart is his true self. If a man is not a believer, but only a professor of the gospel, what will his heart do? Proverbs 10:20 says, "The heart of the wicked is of little worth." While outwardly it appears to have value, inwardly it is worthless. Because the sphere of temptation lies in the heart, an unbeliever cannot resist it when it comes like a flood.

No one, indeed, should trust his own heart. Proverbs 28:26 says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Peter did this when he boasted, "Although all shall forsake thee, I will not" (Mark 14:29). This was his folly, his self-confidence. The heart of a man makes such wonderful promises before temptation comes. But "the heart is deceitful" (Jer 17:9). Indeed, it is "deceitful above all things." It has a thousand shifts and treacheries, and when trial comes, temptation steals it away just as "wine and new wine take away understanding" (Hosea 4:11).

We need then to examine some of the inadequate measures we often use in our attempts to safeguard the heart in the hour of temptation.

1. The love of honor in the world.

By one's walk and profession one obtains reputation and esteem in the church. So some argue, "Can I afford to lose such a reputation in the church of God by giving way to this lust, or to that temptation, or in dealing in this or that public evil?" This seems so strong an argument that many use it as a shield against any assaults that come. They would rather die a thousand deaths than lose their reputation in the church. But what about "the third part of the stars of heaven"? (Rev 12:4). Did they not shine in the firmament? Were they not fully aware of their honor, stature, usefulness, and reputation? Yet when the dragon comes with his temptations, he casts them down to the earth. Those who have no better defenses than the love of honor are inadequately equipped to deal with temptation. Sadly, it is possible for those with great reputations to suffer destruction when their only defense lies in their own good name. If this does not keep the stars of heaven, how do you think it will keep you?

2. The fear of shame and reproach.

Not for all the world would some people bring upon themselves the shame and reproach associated with certain temptations. Their concern, however, tends to focus only upon open sins, such as the world notices and abhors. This motive proves useless when dealing with sins of conscience, or with sins of the heart. Innumerable excuses are offered to the heart when one relies on this as the predominant defense against temptation.

3. The desire not to disturb one's peace of mind,

wound one's conscience, or risk the danger of hell fire. One might think that this would act as a major safeguard to preserve people in the hour of temptation. Indeed, we should use this as a major defense, for nothing is more important than striving to maintain our peace with God. Yet several reasons indicate this motive alone is not effective.

The peace of some only provides a false sense of security made up of presumptions and false hopes. Even believers cling to this. David enjoyed this false peace until Nathan came to see him. Laodicea rested in it while on the verge of destruction. The church of Sardis also claimed this peace while she lay dying. It is only true peace in Christ that keeps us, and nothing else. Nothing that God will not preserve in the last day keeps us now. False peace acts as a broken reed, piercing the hand that leans upon it.

Even the true peace we desire to safeguard our soul may prove useless as a defense in the hour of temptation. Why? Because we are so vulnerable to excuses. "This evil is so trivial," we say. Or we argue that it is so questionable. Or we argue that it does not openly and flagrantly offend the conscience. We rationalize with such excuses while maintaining our own peace of mind. We even rationalize that others of God's people have fallen, yet kept their peace and recovered from it. Facing a thousand such arguments—set up like batteries of guns against a fort—the soul finally surrenders.

If we only focus on the one safeguard of peace, the enemy will assault us elsewhere. True, it is one piece of armor for our protection, but we are commanded to "put on the *whole* armour of God" (Eph 6:11). If we depend upon this one element of defense, temptation will enter and prevail in twenty other ways.

A man, for example, may be tempted to worldliness, unjust gain, revenge, vanity, and many other things. If he focuses his attention on this one safeguard of peace and considers himself safe, he will neglect other needs. He may neglect his private communion with God, or overlook his tendency to be sensual. In the end he may not be one whit better than if he had succumbed to the temptation that most obviously harassed him. Experience shows that this peace of mind fails, therefore, as a safeguard. There is no saint of God who does not value the peace he enjoys. Yet how many fail in the day of temptation!

4. The thought of the vileness of sinning against God.

How could we do this thing, when to sin against God is to do so against His mercies, and to wound Jesus Christ who died for us? Unfortunately, we see every day that even this is not a sure and infallible defense. No such defense exists.

Why do these motives fail us in the hour of temptation? Their sources betray their inadequacy. For they arise either from the universal and habitual disposition of our heart, or from the temptation itself. We should remain wary of such counselors.

The Power of Temptation

It is helpful to consider the power of temptation in the light of what we have just said. The power of temptation is to darken the mind, so that a person becomes unable to make right judgments about things as he did before entering into temptation. The god of this world blinds men's minds so that they do not see the glory of Christ in the gospel (2 Cor 4:4). Likewise, the very nature of every temptation darkens the heart of the person who becomes tempted. This occurs in various ways.

First, the imagination and thought can be so obsessed with some object that the mind is distracted from those things that could relieve and help it. Someone might be tempted to believe that God has forsaken him, or God hates him, so that he expresses no interest in Christ. He becomes so depressed that he feels none of the remedies suggested to him will help. Meanwhile, he becomes obsessed with the temptation that fixates him.

Temptation also darkens the mind by the tragic confusion of the inclinations of the heart. Look around you and see how readily temptation entangles people's feelings. Show me someone not occupied with hope, love, and fear (of what he should not do), and I will quickly point out his blindness. His present judgment of things will be obscured and his will weakened. Madness immediately ensues. The hatred of sin, the fear of the Lord, and the sense of Christ's love and presence depart and leave the heart a prey to the enemy.

Finally, temptation gives fuel to our lusts by inciting and provoking them, so that they are embroiled in endless turmoil. One temptation—whether it is a lust, or a warped attitude, or anything else—becomes one's whole obsession. We might cite the carnal fear of Peter, the pride of Hezekiah, the covetousness of Achan, the uncleanness of David, the worldliness of Demas, or the ambition of Diotrephes. We do not know the pride, fury, and madness of a wrong deed until we face a suitable temptation. How tragic is the life of someone whose mind is darkened, whose affections are entangled, and whose lusts are enflamed, so that his defenses break down. What hope remains for him?

We observe this power of temptation both socially and personally. Public temptations, such as those mentioned in Revelation 3:10, "try them that dwell upon the earth." They also come in a combination of persecution and seduction to test a careless generation of believers. Such public temptations take varied forms.

First, public temptations come as the result of God's judgment on those who neglect or disdain the gospel, or who, as false believers, act as traitors. God permitted Satan to seduce Ahab as a punishment (1 Kings 22:22). When the world yields to folly and false worship in their neglect of the truth, and in the barrenness of their lives, God sends "a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess 2:11). This delusion comes with a judicial purpose to those who are selfish, spiritually slothful, careless, and worldly. As well, those who do not retain God in their hearts, God gives up to a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28).

Second, some public temptations spread infectiously from those who should be godly, but who are mere professors. Christ warns, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt 24:12). When some become negligent, careless, worldly, and wanton, they corrupt others. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9). The root of bitterness that troubles a man also defiles many (Heb 12:15). Little by little some mere professors of the truth influence others for evil.

Third, public temptations, when accompanied by strong reasons and influence, are too hard to overcome. This often takes place gradually. When a colony of people move from one country to another, they soon adjust to the customs of the local inhabitants. Likewise, prosperity often makes people morally careless, and it slays the foolish and wounds the wise.

We also see the power of temptation personally. These personal temptations enter the soul by their union with lust. John speaks of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). They reside principally in the heart and not in the world. Yet they are "in the world" because the world enters into them, mixes with them,

and unites with them. By such means, temptation penetrates so deep into the heart that no antidote reaches it. It is like gangrene that mixes poison with the blood stream.

Moreover, it is important to see that in whatever part of the soul lust resides, it affects the whole person. A lust of the mind (such as ambition, or vanity, or something similar) affects everything else. Temptation draws the whole person into it.

But some will argue: "Why be so concerned about temptation? Are we not commanded to 'count it all joy when we fall into diverse temptations'?" (James 1:2). Yes, we should accept these trials. The same apostle admonishes the wealthy to "rejoice in that he is made low" (1:10). But James adds, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (1:12). While God may try us, He never entices us. Everyone is tempted by his own lusts. Let us make sure that our own weaknesses do not entice us and thus seduce us.

As well, the objection may be raised that our Savior Himself faced temptation. Is it evil to find ourselves in a similar state? Hebrews 2:17-18 makes it clear that it is advantageous to us that Christ was tempted. He uses, as the ground of great promise to His disciples, the fact that they had been with Him in His temptations (Luke 22:28). Yes, it is true that our Savior experienced temptation. But Scripture reckons His temptations among the *evils* that befell Him in the days of His flesh, coming to Him through the malice of the world and its prince. He did not deliberately cast Himself into temptation. Instead He said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt 4:7). Moreover, while Christ only had the *suffering* part of temptation, we also have the *sinning* part of it. He remained undefiled, but we become defiled.

Finally, some may argue, why should we be so careful about temptation when we have God's assurances? "God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape" (1 Cor 10:13). "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter 2:9). Yes, God has given us these assurances, but it is questionable whether God will deliver us if we willingly enter into temptation. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (Rom 6:1).

It is wrong for us to enter deliberately into temptation and to think only of the near escape of our souls. We need to regard the comfort, joy, and peace of our spirits, and to realize that we sojourn here for the honor of the gospel and the glory of God.

The Dangers of Temptation

Having surveyed the power of temptation, we now want to consider the dangers of temptation's inception. Often we wonder if we have committed a specific sin. Rather, we should ask, "Have I entered into temptation?" We enter into temptation whenever we are drawn into sin, for all sin is from temptation (see James 1:14-15). Sin is the fruit that comes only from that root. Even to be surprised or overtaken in a fault is to be tempted. The apostle says, "Consider yourself, lest you also be tempted" (Gal 6:1). Often we repent of the sins that overtake us, without realizing how temptation starts in the first place. This makes us vulnerable to fall once more into sin.

Entering into temptation occurs in various ways. It often begins in a concealed and subtle way. For example, a man begins by having a reputation for piety, or wisdom, or learning. People speak well of him. His vanity is tickled to hear it, and then his reputation affects his pride and ambition. If this continues, he begins to seek it actively, using all his energies to build up his own esteem, reputation, and self-glory. Having this secret eye to its expansion, he enters into temptation. If he does not deal with this quickly and ruthlessly, he will become a slave to lust.

This happens to many scholars. They find themselves esteemed and favored for their learning. This secretly appeals to their pride and ambition, and they begin to major on promoting their learning. While they do good things it is always with an eye on the approval of others. In the end it is all carnal, making "provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14).

It is true that God in His mercy sometimes overrules such false motives. In spite of the ambition, pride, and vanity of the servant, God comes in grace to turn him to Himself and to rob him of his Egyptian lusts. Then once more, God consecrates the tabernacle which once housed idols.

But it is not only learning which temptation subtly corrupts. Temptation makes every profession and vocation a potential snare. Some find themselves the darlings, the celebrities, the popular ones in their own circle of friends and associates. Once these thoughts enter into their hearts, temptation entangles them. Instead of seeking to gain more glory, they need to lie in the dust, out of a sense of the vileness in themselves.

Likewise, when a man knows that he likes preaching the gospel or some other work of the ministry, many things begin to work in his favor. His ability, his simple presentation of the message, his constant exposure before the public, and his success in it all, expose him to temptation. These things become fuel for temptation. Whatever we like to do tends to feed our lusts and tends to cause us to enter into temptation, whether it is initially good or bad.

A man enters into temptation whenever his lusts find an opportunity for temptation. As I have already stated, to enter into temptation is not merely to face temptation, but to become entangled by its power. It is almost impossible to escape from temptation if it appropriately meets one's lusts. If ambassadors come from the king of Babylon, Hezekiah's pride will cast him into temptation. If Hazeal is made king of Syria, his cruelty and ambition will make him rage savagely against Israel. If the priests come with their pieces of silver, Judas's covetousness will immediately operate to sell his Master.

We see many examples of this situation in our own day. How mistaken people are who think they can play over the hole of an asp and not be stung, or touch tar without being defiled, or set their clothes on fire and not be burnt. So if something in your business, your lifestyle, or your culture suits your lusts, you have already entered into temptation. If we have a propensity for unclean thoughts, ambition in high places, sexual passion, perusal of bad literature, or anything else, temptation will use various things in our society to entrap us.

Furthermore, when someone acts weak, negligent, or casual in a duty—performing it carelessly or lifelessly, without any genuine satisfaction, joy, or interest—he has already entered into the spirit that will lead him into trouble. How many we see today who have departed from warmhearted service and have become negligent, careless, and indifferent in their prayer life or in the reading of the Scriptures. For each one who escapes this peril, a hundred others will be ensnared. Then it may be too late to acknowledge, "I neglected private prayer," or "I did not meditate on God's Word," or "I did not hear what I should have listened to." Like Sardis, we maintain dead performances and duties in our spiritual life (Rev 3:1).

In the Song of Solomon, the bride acknowledges, "I sleep" (Song 5:2). Then she says, "I have put off my coat, and cannot put it on," which speaks of her reluctance to commune with her Lord (5:3). When she finally answers the door, her "beloved had withdrawn himself" (5:6). Christ had gone. Although she looks for Him, she does not find Him. This illustrates the intrinsic relationship of the new nature of the Christian and the worship of Christ. The new nature is fed, strengthened, increased, and sweetened by Christ. Our desire focuses on God, as the psalmist describes throughout Psalm 119. Yet temptation attempts to intervene and disrupt this relationship and desire.

Vigilance Against the Dangers of Temptation

How then can we be vigilant, so that we "watch and pray"? (Matt 26:41). This injunction from our Lord implies that we should maintain a clear, abiding apprehension of the great danger we face if we enter into temptation. If one is always aware of the great danger, one will always stand guard.

1. Always remember the great danger it is for anyone to enter into temptation. It is sad to find most people so careless about this. Most people think about how to avoid open sin, but they never think about the dynamics of temptation within their hearts. How readily young people mix with all sorts of company. Before they realize it, they enjoy evil company. Then it is too late to warn them about the dangers of wrong companions. Unless God snatches them in a mighty way from the jaws of destruction, they will be lost.

How many plead for their "freedom," as they call it. They argue that they can do what they like and try what they want, so they run here and there to every seducer and salesman of false opinions. And what is the result? Few go unhurt, and the majority lose their faith. Let no one fear sin without also fearing temptation. They are too closely allied to be separated. Satan has put them so close together that it is very hard to separate them. He hates not the fruit, who delights in the root.

We need a moral sensitivity to the weakness and corruption within us. We need to guard against the reality and guile of Satan. We need to recognize the evil of sin and the power of temptation to work against us. If we remain careless and cold, we shall never escape its entanglements. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the danger of the entry of temptation.

2. Realize we cannot keep ourselves from falling into temptation. But for the grace of God, we will fall into it. We have no power or wisdom to keep ourselves from entering into temptation, other than the power and wisdom of God. In all things we "are kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5). "I pray," our Savior says to the Father, "not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). In other words, Christ prays that the Father would guard us against the temptation of the world to enter into evil and sin.

Let our hearts admit, "I am poor and weak. Satan is too subtle, too cunning, too powerful; he watches constantly for advantages over my soul. The world presses in upon me with all sorts of pressures, pleas, and pretenses. My own corruption is violent, tumultuous, enticing, and entangling. As it conceives sin, it wars within me and against me. Occasions and opportunities for temptation are innumerable. No wonder I do not know how deeply involved I have been with sin. Therefore, on God alone will I rely for my keeping. I will continually look to Him."

If we commit ourselves to God in this way, three things will follow. First, we will experience the reality of the grace and compassion of God. He calls the fatherless and the helpless to rest upon Him. No soul has ever lacked God's supply when he depended upon God's invitation to trust in Him absolutely. Second, we will be conscious of our danger, and of our need for God's protection.

Third, we will act in faith on the promises of God to keep us. To believe that He will preserve us is, indeed, a means of preservation. God will certainly preserve us, and make a way of escape for us out of the temptation, should we fall. We are to pray for what God has already promised. Our requests are to be regulated by His promises and commands. Faith embraces the promises and so finds relief. This is what James 1:5-7 teaches us. What we need, we must "ask of God." But we must "ask in faith," for otherwise we will not "receive any thing of the Lord."

God has promised to keep us in all our ways. We shall be guided in such a way that we "shall not err therein" (Isa 35:8). He will lead us, guide us, and deliver us from the evil one. Base your life upon faith in such promises and expect a good and assuring life. We cannot conceive of the blessings that will ensue from this attitude of trust in the promises of Christ.

3. Resist temptation by making prayer of first importance. Praying that we enter not into temptation is a means to preserve us from it. People often talk about their wonderful experiences in maintaining this attitude of prayer, yet less than half its excellence, power, and efficacy is ever known. Whoever wishes to avoid temptation must pray. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). By doing this, our souls are set against every form of temptation.

After Paul instructs us to "put on the whole armour of God" (that we may stand and resist in the time of temptation), he adds: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication" (Eph 6:11,18). Without this attitude, we lack any real help.

Consider Paul's exhortation. "Praying always" means at all times and seasons (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:17). "With all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" implies expressing desires to God that are suited to our needs according to His will, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. "Watching thereunto" means we are never distracted from this essential stance. "With all perseverance" means this is more than a passing whim, but a permanent inclination. By doing this we will stand.

If we do not abide in prayer, we will abide in temptation. Let this be one aspect of our daily intercession: "God, preserve my soul, and keep my heart and all its ways so that I will not be entangled." When this is true in our lives, a passing temptation will not overcome us. We will remain free while others lie in bondage.

4. Christ's word of patience includes God's pledge to keep us. Christ solemnly gave this promise to the church at Philadelphia. In Revelation 3:10 He promises to keep those who keep His word from the great trial and temptation which was to come upon all the world. The fulfillment of this promise involves all three Persons of the Trinity.

The faithfulness of the Father accompanies the promise. We shall be kept in temptation because "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted" (1 Cor 10:13). "He is faithful who promised" (Heb 10:23). "He will remain faithful; he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim 2:13). When we stand under this promise, the faithfulness of God works on our behalf for our protection.

Every promise of God also contains the covenant grace of the Son. He promises, "I will keep you" (Rev 3:10). How? "By my grace that is with you" (1 Cor 15:10). Paul suffered intensely from temptation. He "besought the Lord" for help and God answered, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9). Paul could add, "I will glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The efficacy of the grace of Christ becomes evident in our preservation (Heb 2:18; 4:16).

The efficacy of the Holy Spirit accompanies God's promises, as well. He is called "the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13). This is not only because He promised the advent of Christ, but because He effectively makes good the promise within us. He preserves the soul of the one who follows these promises (Isa 59:21).

5. God preserves us as we keep the word of Christ's patience. When we keep Christ's word, we guard our heart against temptable tendencies. David prayed, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me" (Psa 25:21). God gave him a disposition that left no entry points for temptation to penetrate. In contrast, we read: "There is no peace for the wicked" (Isa 57:21). The wicked face temptation as a troubled sea, full of restlessness and storms. They have no peace. God delivers us from such troubles as we guard our heart to keep Christ's word.

Negatively, we guard our heart by mortification. The apostle James indicates that temptations arise from our own lusts (Jam 1:14). By eliminating them, we destroy the entry points for temptation. Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). To keep close to Christ is to be crucified with Him and to be dead to all the carnal desires of the world. Achan failed to mortify the lusts of his heart. When he saw "a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold," he "coveted them" first, then he "took them" (Josh 7:21). Sin seduced him. But a mortified heart and a crucified life will preserve us from these things.

Positively, we guard our heart by filling it with better concerns and values. The apostle Paul reckoned the things of the world mere loss and dung (Phil 3:8). The new is so much better. As we daily taste the gracious goodness of the Lord, all else becomes worthless in comparison. One fills his heart with these better things by maintaining three concerns.

His first concern is *Christ Himself*. The love and presence of Christ always stay with him. He knows Christ is concerned about his honor, and that His plan is to "present him holy, and unblameable, and unreprouvable in his sight" (Col 1:22). His Spirit is grieved when this work is interrupted (Eph 4:30). Because he knows Christ's intention, he avoids resisting His purposes, expressing contempt for His honor, despising His love, or trampling His gospel into the mud. Dwelling in his heart is the constraining love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14).

His second concern is *Christ's own victories over temptations*. Christ's life on earth included His triumphs over the frequent assaults of the Evil One. He resisted all, He conquered all, and He has become the Captain of salvation to those who obey Him (Heb 2:10). How can any follower of Christ deny the reality of His victory by living as a defeated Christian because of temptation in his life?

His third concern is *approval*. He has learned to enjoy the favor of Christ, to sense His love, to appreciate His acceptance, and to converse with Him. He cannot bear to become separated from Christ, as the spouse declared in Song of Solomon 3:4. Once she recognized Him, in no way would she let Him out of her sight. Never again would she lose His presence.

When a believer keeps the word of Christ's patience, it does not merely influence his concerns. It also affects the governing principles of his life.

First, he lives by faith in God (Gal 2:20). Faith works in all areas of his heart, emptying his soul of its own wisdom, understanding, and self-sufficiency, so that it may act now in the wisdom and fullness of Christ. Proverbs 3:5 gives us sound advice to guard against temptation: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not upon

thine own understanding." This is the work of faith: To trust God, and to live in such trust of Him. When a man trusts himself, "his own counsel shall cast him down" (Job 18:7). Only faith empties us of our own self-sufficiency. We should not live to ourselves and by ourselves, but only for Christ, by Christ, and in Christ.

Second, he lives with concern for others. He shows love for God's people by not causing them to stumble over his temptations. David prays in Psalm 69:6, "Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel." In other words, "Do not let me so misbehave that others, for whom I would lay down my life, should be ill spoken of, dishonored, reviled, and condemned because of my own failings." When someone preoccupies himself with the well-being of others, God saves him. In contrast, a self-centered man falls.

If God has promised that He will keep us, why do so many professors of Christianity fall into temptation? Is it not simply because they do not keep the word of Christ's patience? Because of disobedience, Paul says, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor 11:30). God chastens all those who fail to keep Christ's Word and neglect to walk closely with Him.

It would take too long to cite all the ways professors of Christianity fail to keep Christ's Word. We can simply summarize four ways they often fail. First, they conform to the world when Christ would redeem us from its delights and promiscuous compliances. Second, they neglect the duties which Christ has enjoined upon us to fulfill, from personal meditation on the one hand to public duties on the other. Third, they strive and disagree among themselves, despising each other and acting indifferent to the bond of communion between saints. Fourth, they make selfishness the end of life. When these traits characterize people, then the word of Christ's patience is fruitless among them, and God will not keep them from temptation.

Final Exhortations

If we want God to preserve us in the hour of temptation, we will take heed against anything that would distract us from keeping the word of Christ's patience. The following cautions will help us.

First, do not trust your own advice, understanding, and reasoning. Second, even if you discipline yourself earnestly (by prayer, fasting, and other such measures) to safeguard against a particular lust, you will still fail if you neglect such other matters as worldliness, compliance, looseness of living, or moral negligence. Third, while it is God's purpose to give the saints security, perseverance, and preservation from general apostasy, yet we must never use this as an excuse to abuse some other aspect of our walk with God. Many relieve their consciences with "cheap grace," only to find their perplexities intensified in other areas of life.

In addition, seek to determine the relevance of God's word to the particular context of your temptations. First, when you encounter the cult of celebrities, observe from His word how God overturns the values of human popularity. Second, consider the ways God sees things differently from the world. If you do so, you will be content to remain unnoticed by the world. Third, notice how God emphasizes faith and prayer. Esteem them better than all the strength and councils of men. Fourth, seek to recover God's ordinances and institutions from the carnal administrations that are under the bondage of men's lusts. Bring them forth in the beauty and power of the Holy Spirit.

The nature of worldliness is to neglect the word of Christ's patience. It slights God's people and judges them by the standards of the world. It relies on human counsel and understanding. It allows unsanctified people to walk in God's temple and to trample His ordinances. In all these ways let us remain watchful. Let us keep the word of Christ's patience if we cherish our safety. In this frame of mind, plead with the Lord Jesus Christ, in the light of His promises, to help you in your need. Approach Him as your merciful High Priest.

If you visited a hospital and asked how each patient fell ill, no doubt each would reply, "It was by this or that circumstance that I contracted the disease." After hearing them, would it not make you much more careful not to fall into their circumstances?

Or if you went to a prison, you might ask different criminals how they received their sentence. Would you not be warned that sin leads to certain judgment? "Can a man take fire into his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt?"

Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" (Prov 6:27-28). Do we only realize the invincible power of temptation once it captures us? **We conclude with three warnings.**

First, if you ignore temptation, even though our Savior commands us to be vigilant as the only safeguard against it, then remember Peter. Perhaps you have been fortunate so far to escape trouble in spite of your carelessness. But wake up, and thank God for His gentleness and patience with you.

Second, remember that you are always under the scrutiny of Christ, the great Captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10). He has enjoined us to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation (Matt 26:41). As He saw the gathering storm, He alerted His disciples with this warning. Does not His reproof grieve you? Or are you unafraid to hear His thunder against you for your neglect? (Rev 3:2).

Third, realize that if you neglect this duty and then fall into temptation—which assuredly you will do—God may also bring heavy affliction upon you. He may even bring judgment, as evidence of His anger. You will not consider this warning mere empty words when it actually happens to you. Then what woe will betide you if you are not found full of godly sorrow.

Let us keep our spirits unentangled by avoiding all appearance of evil, and all the ways that lead there. Guard yourself especially in your social contacts and your occupations, which all contain pitfalls to entrap us.

Excerpts taken from the abridged edition of *Sin & Temptation*
Printed by Permission Multnomah Press
