

Foundations: Bible Truths for Christian Growth

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The life of the Christian is filled with temptation.

Every believer experiences a constant battle: to sin or not to sin. Thankfully, God has promised forgiveness for those who sin and later confess it. Yet, focusing on confession of sin instead of purity from sin is dangerous—like building a hospital at a cliff's bottom rather than a guardrail at its top. God's desire for you is that you "not sin" (1 John 2:1).

Let's work on making that idea a reality.

The Need for Holiness

1 Thessalonians 4:1–7 is a key passage regarding your lifestyle as a Christian. In it, you are told...

- To please God (v. 1);
- That your holiness (“sanctification”) is God’s will (v. 3);
- To use your body (“vessel”) in a way that is holy and honorable (v. 4);
- That your lifestyle and purity should not be like the unsaved (v. 5);
- That God has called you unto holiness (v. 7).

The Tragedy of Sin!

Most Christians take temptation lightly because they take sin lightly. The late English pastor D. Martin Lloyd-Jones laments, *“There is no doubt whatever that an inadequate view of sin is the chief cause of a lack of holiness and sanctification, and indeed of most of the false teaching with respect to sanctification.”*³⁰ Why is sin so tragic?

- It offends God (Psalm 51:17).
- It grieves God (Ephesians 4:30).
- It breaks your fellowship with God (Psalm 66:18).
- It destroys the life of the believer (James 1:15). As Robert Leighton said in the 1600’s, *“The way of sin is downhill; a man cannot stop whenever he wishes.”*³¹

Is God concerned about holiness? YES! In the words of **1 Peter 1:15–16**, He has called you to be holy in every area of your lifestyle (or “behavior”). According to verse 16 (which quotes **Leviticus 19:2**), how holy does God require you to be? _____

Though living a life that is set apart from sin is considered “quaint” or “puritanical” by many, it is demanded by God. You are to be perpetually “lay aside” sin (**Ephesians 4:22**) and “put on” righteousness and holiness (**Ephesians 4:24**). Yet, it is inevitable that you will be tempted to sin. What exactly is temptation and—more importantly—how do we deal with it? How can we be holy?

³⁰ *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p.244.

³¹ Quoted by J.C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1996), p. 11.

Understanding Temptation

Scripture speaks of two different kinds of *temptation*, both of which are addressed in **James 1**. The first, which is discussed in **James 1:2–5**, can best be defined as a *trial* or *difficult situation*. (The word for “testing” in verse 3 is translated as *trial* in a parallel passage in **1 Peter 1:6–7**.)

The second kind of temptation is seen in **James 1:12–15**. The Greek word (*peirazo*) is the same as in verse 2, but the meaning is very different. It is best defined by one of the last words in **James 1:14**: “enticed.” The Greek word for entice literally means *to bait*. Explain how that picture assists you in understanding the nature of temptation. _____

(This second kind of temptation has become the standard meaning of the word in modern English and is the primary focus of this study.)

Both senses of temptation are presented in Scripture as tests intended to *prove* and *improve* one’s character. Can you clearly differentiate between the two types of temptation? Do so, and give examples of each.

Reasons for Temptation

For centuries—even millennia—people have discussed a perplexing question: *Why would God allow temptation?* God certainly could have created Adam and Eve without the possibility of sinning.

Why did God allow temptation? As strange as it sounds, temptation brings with it many benefits.

1. Temptation offers a test of love.

Could God have created mankind without temptation or the choice of succumbing to it? Theoretically, yes. But such creatures would not be moral—they would be *amoral*. They would be robots whose so-called love would be involuntary. There can be no genuine love without the freedom to choose. Love includes both a positive choice (reception) and a negative choice (rejection). How does **Psalm 97:10** demonstrate that fact? _____

“Forsaking all others...”

A common part of a traditional wedding ceremony is the groom’s vow to his bride. His promise includes the statement that he will, *“forsaking all others, keep...only to her.”* Why? Because love demands separation. No bride would be content to be the first among many loves.

In loving her, he is required to forsake all others.

So it is with your relationship with God: your love for Him requires you to forsake sin.

Because He desires an intimate relationship with man, God allows him the opportunity to prove his love by rejecting temptation. Using the word *temptation*, explain Jesus’ test of love in **John 14:15** *“If you love Me, _____.”*

and **John 14:23** *“If anyone loves Me, _____.”*

This brings us to our second reason for temptation:

2. Temptation offers an opportunity for obedience.

We typically think of temptation in a negative sense, as an opportunity to sin. Yet, it is just as true that temptation is an opportunity *not* to sin—to obey!

Job offers a tremendous example of the privilege of being tempted? *Privilege?* You bet! Read **Job 1:1–12** and explain why being tempted is a privilege.

Notice that Job experienced both senses of temptation. He suffered tremendous trials, including loss of his family, possessions and health. Throughout those trials he was also enticed to sin, most notably in **Job 2:9**. Job passed both tests. What was his response to trials and enticement in **Job 1:21–22**? _____

Job maintained his integrity. Yet, only Jesus endured temptation without a single compromise. **Hebrews 4:15** says of Christ that He “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” The biblical account of Christ’s temptations is given in **Matthew 4** and will be discussed later. Jesus glorified God through His temptations in a way that would have been impossible had He not been tempted. Though He was tempted, what amazing statement did he make in **John 8:29**?

(Notice that being tempted is not a sin in itself. Even Jesus was tempted!)

3. Temptation offers an opportunity for maturity.

James 1:2 commands believers to rejoice when they encounter temptations (difficulties and the temptation to sin which usually accompany them).

Although the command to rejoice seems strange, what is the reason given in **James 1:3–4**? _____

Difficulties are used by the Lord to bring spiritual progress, described as “endurance” in verse 3 and “perfect” and “complete” in verse 4. As was mentioned earlier, trials are not intended merely to prove you, but also to *improve* you. Like a chisel in the hand of a gifted sculptor, so God uses temptation to shape your character. Painful? Yes. Worthwhile? Absolutely.

Romans 8:28 promises that God causes *all* things—even trials and enticements—to work together for your good if you are a believer who loves God. Verse 29 then goes on to describe exactly what your “good” is. Using **Romans 8:29**, finish this statement: *God’s desire for me is* _____

God accomplished His goal of proving and improving Job through temptation. Read **Job 23:10**. Job viewed the furnace of difficulty as an opportunity for refinement!

4. Temptation offers an opportunity for reward.

Read **James 1:12**. What promise is given to those who successfully endure temptation? _____

At first glance, temptation seems to be an absolute negative. Yet, believers are able to *benefit* from temptation. It provides a test of love and opportunities for obedience, maturity and reward, none of which could be realized without it. Hence, temptation exists not because of God’s negligence, but because of His goodness.

Recognizing Temptation

If you are to successfully endure temptation, it is essential that you understand from where it comes. Scripture teaches that there are basically three sources of temptation: the flesh, the world and the Devil. These three are often referred to as the three enemies of the believer.

1. Enemy #1—The Flesh

The response of many people to their sin is “The Devil made me do it.” Yet, Scripture teaches that not all temptation is from without. When it comes to temptation, you are “your own worst enemy.” Read **James 1:13–15**. Verse 13 teaches that _____ is *not* the source of temptation.

According to verse 14, where does temptation come from? Restate the verse in your own words. _____

Scripture teaches that every person that has existed (with the exception of Jesus Christ) was born with a *sin nature* (also referred to in the Bible as *the old man* and *the flesh*). In plain speech, that means that we are not sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners. Scripture’s description of humans is not flattering. How are we described in

Jeremiah 17:9?

*(The theological term used for this teaching is **total depravity**. It means that every part of our nature is ridden with sin.)*

What did David say regarding his birth in **Psalm 51:5**?

(The circumstance of his birth was not sinful—his mother was not an adulteress. Rather, he is saying that he was a sinner by nature—even in the womb.)

Biblical teaching here goes directly against the current of modern thought. Whereas sociologists and psychiatrists may teach that you are basically good, Scripture teaches that you are “desperately sick.” Even the godliest of men is sinful to the core. Read **Romans 7:14–25**. What did the Apostle Paul say about himself in **Romans 7:14, 18, and 24**?

Notice two things: first, Paul was a *saved man*, yet he acknowledged his sinful heart and inability to do right. Second, he defined his *flesh* as “sin which dwells in me” (v. 17 and 20). Every person—the Christian included—has a sinful nature which is bent on doing wrong.

*“God, harden me against myself,
The coward with pathetic voice
Who craves for ease and rest and joy.
Myself, arch–traitor to myself,
My hollowest friend,
My deadliest foe,
My clog, whatever road I go.”*

Christina G. Rossetti³²

³² “Who Shall Deliver Me” from *Poems of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 1918), pp. 87–88.

Galatians 5:16–26 describes a battle which rages inside of you. Two combatants are engaged in a constant struggle to determine which will control you. Who are they? _____

The Christian has two natures, and he will until he is with Christ in heaven. The first is *the flesh*. When was that received? _____

What are some of the “works” typical of someone controlled by the flesh (**Galatians 5:19–21**)? _____

The second nature within the Christian is *spiritual*. It is the result of his being born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When was the spiritual nature received? _____

What are the “fruits” typical of someone controlled by the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:22–23**)? _____

Although some churches and theologians teach otherwise, Scripture is clear that the battle between your flesh and the Spirit will continue until your death. Hence, you had better learn how to win it. What does **1 John 1:8** and **10** say about someone who claims to be *above sin*? _____

(The teaching that Christians can attain perfection in this life comes under many names: complete sanctification, “zap” theology and living “above sin” are among them. Whatever the title, the teaching is erroneous.)

Finally, it is essential that you understand the progressive nature of your flesh's temptation. Achan directly disobeyed God by taking spoil from the city of Jericho following a victory which God had provided. What four steps did he take in succumbing to his flesh (**Joshua 7:21**)?

"I _____" "I _____"
"and (I) _____ them"
"they are (I) _____."

2. Enemy #2—The Devil or Satan

The second tempter revealed in Scripture is Satan. Although Satan is often pictured as wearing red pajamas and carrying a pitchfork, the Bible teaches that those who make light of him do so to their own hurt. How is Satan described in **2 Corinthians 11:14**? _____

John 8:44b describes Satan in two ways. What are they? "*He was a _____ . . . he is a _____.*" What instruction do these descriptions provide regarding his temptation?

Deceiver and Destroyer

John 8:44 pictures Satan as both a deceiver (liar) and destroyer (murderer). Similarly, 1 Peter 5:8 compares him to a lion. He uses his cunning and stealth to deceive, and his sole intent is to "devour" you. In Romans 7:11, Scripture teaches that all temptation is an attempt to do the same thing: deceive and destroy you. No wonder Peter warns you to be "sober and alert." Satan detests you!

Thankfully, although Satan is powerful, he is not all-powerful. Restate **1 John 4:4** in your own words.

The first instance of Satan functioning as a tempter is recorded in **Genesis 3:1–8**. Read it and answer the following questions:

What word describes the serpent (Satan) in verse 1?

Notice Satan's tactics. He first *questioned God's Word* ("has God said?" v. 1b), then blatantly *contradicted God's Word* ("You surely will not die!" v. 4), and finally *attacked God's character* ("For God knows" v. 5). Rather than resisting Satan, Eve conversed with Him, sinned and was punished.

Conversely, Jesus Christ successfully endured Satan's temptation in **Matthew 4:1–11**.

What can we learn about the timing of Satan's temptation from verse 2? _____

What is the essence of all of Satan's temptations (v. 9)? _____

3. Enemy #3—The World

The third enemy of the believer is called *the world*. The term "world" (*aion*) refers to the system of values and beliefs of unsaved men that is controlled by Satan and is anti-God. According to **Romans 12:2**, what is the world trying to do to believers?

*Notice in **Romans 12:2** that the world is trying to press you into its mold. Therefore, what do you have to do in order to "be conformed?" Nothing!*

The world is described in more detail in **1 John 2:15–16**. What command is given in verse 15? _____

What does disobedience to that command indicate, according to verse 15? _____

Verse 16 specifically lists three “lusts” that characterize the world. What are they? _____

Satan effectively uses these three lusts to tempt you. Notice how he used them against Eve in **Genesis 3:6**.

Lust of the flesh	She saw that the fruit was good for food
Lust of the eyes	She saw that it was pleasant to the eyes
Pride of life	She saw that it was desired to make one wise

Notice the same appeals in Satan’s temptation of Jesus in **Matthew 4:1–11**.

Lust of the flesh	“Command that these stones be made bread.”
Lust of the eyes	“Look at these kingdoms...I will give you all.”
Pride of life	“Cast thyself down...the angels will save you.”

You are in a perpetual battle with your three enemies: the flesh, the devil and the world. The stakes in this battle are high.

According to **James 1:15**, what are the consequences of yielding to the flesh? _____ “*gives birth to*” _____ which “*brings forth*” _____.

What are the consequences of yielding to Satan (1 Peter 5:8)? _____

What are the consequences of yielding to the world (James 4:4)? _____

Resisting Temptation

Do you get the sense that your tempters are extremely strong and dangerous? You should! However, our God is not only strong—He is omnipotent (all-powerful)! Since God has commanded you to be holy and resist temptation, He has also provided a way. As a Christian, you no longer *have* to sin! How is God described in 1 Corinthians 10:13?

Although you may feel that your struggle with temptation is hopeless, Scripture does offer encouragement. There is hope! Your struggle is not unique. Rather, it is “common to man.” What two promises does God make regarding temptation in 1 Corinthians 10:13b? _____

The “ways of escape” that God has provided are many.

1. The Holy Spirit

Your most important defense against temptation is God Himself. Remember, if you’ve trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, the Holy Spirit lives in you (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). As we mentioned earlier,

He constantly battles your flesh. The two are fighting over control of you. You must decide whose prompting you will listen to and obey: your flesh or the Spirit.

What promise does **Galatians 5:16** make to those who consistently submit to and fellowship with the Spirit?

In addition to keeping you from sin, the Holy Spirit is actively changing you into the image of Christ (**2 Corinthians 3:18**).

2. Scripture

Another important protector from temptation is the Bible. In **Ephesians 6:17** it is called “the sword of the Spirit.” It is essential in your battle with temptation. Notice how Jesus Christ used Scripture to fend off Satan’s three temptations in **Matthew 4**. What phrase did He repeat each time he responded to Satan’s temptation (v. 4, 7, 10)? _____

Quoting Scripture is vital to enduring temptation. It is especially helpful to memorize passages which deal with your particular sin habits and temptations. Some of those habits and the Scripture passages that address them are listed at the end of this study. You cannot quote what you don’t know, so you had better get busy!

3. Prayer

A third defense against temptation is prayer. For what did Jesus command prayer in **Matthew 6:13** and **Matthew 26:41**? _____

Notice your “partnership” with God. You are commanded to resist and flee temptation, and you must. Yet, you are continually in need of His grace to “deliver you from evil.” Thus, the Christian life is a perfect balance of *diligent dependence*.

4. Fear of God

Yet another defense against temptation is a proper fear of God. You may be confused by the term *fear*. Why would you *fear* your own Father? In Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, the “fear of God” is best defined as a *great awe and reverence* for God. Yet, it also includes a *dread of displeasing Him* and even a *dread of sin’s consequences*. Although God is both Father and Friend to the Christian, He is still the holy God of creation who cannot tolerate sin. He is to be feared.

Joseph demonstrated a proper fear of the Lord when he was tempted to commit adultery with his employer’s wife. According to his words in **Genesis 39:9**, what was his reason for refusing? _____

Remember, every sin is a sin *against God*. That realization should motivate obedience! Restate **Proverbs 16:6b** in your own words. _____

5. Fleeing feet

Joseph's fear of God resulted in what we might call "fleeing feet". Read **Genesis 39:12** and describe Joseph's defense against temptation. _____

Romans 13:14 commands you not to make "provision for the flesh." In other words, don't give your flesh

"There are several good protections against temptation, but the surest is cowardice."

Mark Twain ³³

an opportunity to sin. Stay away from the place of temptation. For example, a recovering alcoholic should not sit in a bar praying for deliverance from temptation—he should stay out of bars! Have a healthy respect for your own tendency to sin,

and take the necessary precautions to avoid the opportunity!

6. Accountability

Yet another important defense against sin is accountability. While many Christians try to be "The Lone Ranger", it is wise to find a close Christian friend who can help you resist temptation, both by praying for you and by checking up on you. What benefit does **Ecclesiastes 4:9–10** describe that makes *two better than one*? _____

Praise God for providing these many "ways of escape." Remember, you do not have to yield to temptation. You can now be the servant of God rather than sin (**Romans 6:18, 22**). However, there will be times when

³³ *Following the Equator* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Co., 1898).

you do yield to temptation and sin. Chapter 3 focused on maintaining and restoring your fellowship with God, so reviewing it now would be helpful.

A final look at **1 John 2:1–2** should also be an encouragement. What is God’s desire for you, according to **1 John 2:1a**? _____

Thankfully, there is also a “plan B.” What is your hope for the times you do sin (**1 John 2:1b–2**)?

*(“Advocate” = someone who comes alongside to help or defend;
“Propitiation” = satisfaction; appeasement)*

God has provided a way of forgiveness and restoration. However, sin is a great grief to Him, and it should be the same to you. You would do well to take heed to Christ’s words to a sinful woman: “Go. From now on, sin no more” (**John 8:11b**).

Scripture Memory

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Specific Passages

Take time to memorize a few passages that address specific temptations you have. See the next page for a brief list of temptations and some helpful passages. Use a bible concordance (a word index to the Bible) for a more detailed list of topics and corresponding passages. Often a good study Bible will have a concordance appended to the end of it.

Passages for particular temptations:

Anger—Romans 12:19; Ephesians 4:26, 31–32; James 1:19–20

Authority—Proverbs 1:8–9; 13:1; Romans 13:1–2; Ephesians 6:1–2

Bitterness / Forgiveness—Ephesians 4:31–32

Entertainment (TV, videos, etc.)—Psalm 101:3; Prov. 14:9; Eph. 5:16

Friends—Proverbs 13:20; Proverbs 27:17; Psalm 1:1

Gluttony—Proverbs 23:20–21; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20; 9:27

Laziness—Proverbs 13:4; 20:4; Rom. 12:11; 2 Thess. 3:10

Materialism—Luke 12:15; 1 Timothy 6:6–10; Philippians 4:11

Music—Ephesians 5:19; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:16

Pornography—Job 31:1; Psalm 101:3; Matthew 5:28

Pride—Proverbs 16:5; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5–6

Sexual Purity—Ephesians 5:3–4; 1 Thes. 4:3–7; Hebrews 13:4

Smoking / Drugs / Alcohol—Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; Eph. 5:18

Sinful thoughts—Psalm 19:14; 2 Cor. 10:5; Philippians 4:8

Tongue—Psalm 19:14; Proverbs 21:23; Col. 4:6; James 1:26

Worry—Matthew 6:30–31; Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7

Check Your Progress

What are the three most significant lessons that you have learned in this Bible study? Why are they important?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Answer the following questions to measure your understanding of temptation:

1. What are 4 “tragic results of sin”? (p. 139)

2. How do you demonstrate your love for Christ?
(pp.141–142) _____

3. What are your three enemies and tempters?
(p. 144–148) _____

4. Define and describe what the Bible calls your
“flesh.” (pp. 144–147) _____

5. Who is it that “battles” your flesh? (p. 146)

6. Describe Satan's appearance and tactics?
(pp. 147-148) _____

7. What is "the world"? (p. 148) _____

8. What 3 "lusts" will your 3 enemies use to tempt
you? (p. 149) _____

9. What are the 6 "ways of escape" described in this
study? (p. 150-153) _____

10. Check off the following verses only when you can
say them from memory:

1 Corinthians
10:13

Two verses that deal
with your particular
temptation

Do you believe that you know this material well
enough to teach it to someone else? _____ If not,
review it until you do!