

Tempted And Tried, We're Oft Made To Wonder . . .

How strong is the pressure on those who are tempted! The powerful influence of peers and friends to conform to their vision of acceptance is at times almost more than a Christian can bear. Though people can influence in bad ways, sources of temptation can come in other forms as well. Inanimate objects have the potential to manipulate the mind, and become a means of taking our eyes off being upright, causing us to focus too much on self-gratification. Wants and desires that influence us to live beyond our means are fuel that drives the good we seek to do completely out of sight. Other things such as circumstances and activities in our lives have the potential of being a misdirecting influence for bad actions as well. What causes such abandonment of reason, and willingness to dismiss good intentions and reasonable living?

More pointed, what is temptation? The English word appears in numerous places in the Bible. It refers to the ability a person has to be coaxed to do things that are not right. James said that one is tempted when, "he is lured and enticed by his own desire," James 1:14.

Persuasion has a big part to play in temptation. Things that seduce the mind to think in ways that distract one from the goals they have set for themselves. For instance, take the person who makes a commitment to live for Christ, and then things arise that persuade that person to be distracted in such a way as to be turned away from that goal, even for just a second. Taking one's eyes off Jesus even for a glance at any alternative, even one's self is temptation that can lead to utter destruction.

Temptation has a goal. Its success depends on its ability to get the person so distracted from their faith commitments that they choose to act in a way contrary to their trust. For instance, if your trust is in God and you are tempted by any number of things to disobey, sin will take place when the choice is made to do wrong. Temptation is the hard sell; it is the pretty picture of what could be. It is delusional in nature. It is the mirage in the desert.

Temptation is not sin. It is not wrong to be tempted. It only becomes wrong when the temptation gains its intended draw, the commitment of the act. Solomon said, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent," Proverbs 1:10. Consenting to do what you are being influenced to do is what destroys one's relationships.

The strength of temptation is built upon lies. The ability to influence the mind to think that things would be better, even for a moment, is the potency of temptation. Remember the serpent's ability to move Eve to the point where she considered that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was, ". . . good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate . . ." (Genesis 3:6), and so did her husband. What made the devil able to cause Eve to look beyond God's forbiddance of partaking of the tree and the knowledge of impending death? He was a liar! Jesus called him the father of lies, John 8:44.

No one is above temptation. Even Jesus was tempted, Matthew 4. God knew this when He made man. So, He provided an escape route for every temptation man would every experience. Man's ability to get away from being tempted is with the single greatest power he wields, his power of choice. Looking beyond the false beauty of an experience placed in the thoughts of a person to the reality of what will take place in the end gives a person his greatest opportunity to put the brakes on, so to speak, and choose a different direction. And the greatest thing is that God has promised He will help, 1 Corinthians 10:13. Temptation never has to win! Its goal never has to be achieved, and its potency can fail. Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," Philippians 4:13.

—Scott