

TEMPTATION

Temptation

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 25th June 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Luke 4:1-13

Introduction

We recently concluded our verse by verse study of Romans, and we'll next study Genesis. But this morning I want to take a moment to look at the topic of temptation. And as it happens, we'll see that we need to apply some of what we've read in Romans, and consider some of the examples that await us in Genesis — both good and bad.

We'll look at that passage X read from Luke chapter 4 in a moment, but first please turn to 1 John chapter 2:

1 John 2:15-16

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

These are big verses to wrestle with. As someone once said, *"I'm not worried about the parts of the Bible that I don't understand. I'm worried about the parts that I do understand"*.

What are we going to love? What the world tells us to? Or what God tells us too? These verses say that we can't do both. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are to be avoided. In fact verse 15 starts by saying "Love not the world" That's not a suggestion, it's an instruction. Friends, love not the world.

I have a question for you; who wants to sin? Can I get a show of hands? It's a question that none of us really want to say "I do" to, right? Yet, isn't it the case that in the moment, we actually *do* want to sin. That's a problem. That's the problem.

Proverbs 9:17 says...

Proverbs 9:17

"Stolen water is sweet, And bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

You see, sin is attractive to us. We want to do it, and we can enjoy it in the moment. We can enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. But that doesn't make it right, it doesn't make it honouring to God, and it doesn't prevent it hurting others.

Now, it's no excuse, but you are not alone in this. It's not limited to those of us here this morning. In fact, the Apostle Paul struggled too. And he describes this struggle in Romans chapter 7...

Romans 7:21-23

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

It's like we have a traitor on the inside. That when we would do good, we don't. And when we don't want to sin, we do! The struggle is real.

Paul continues...

Romans 7:24-25

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

J Vernon McGee stated our dilemma clearly. He said; *"I cannot face the temptations of this world in my own strength."* But this is where there is good news. Who will deliver us? Jesus. No-one else can, and no-one else needs to if we turn to Him.

Now, Jesus has saved us from the penalty of our sin — that's already done, once and for all. But how do you and I, today, tomorrow, and through our lives, avoid sinning more? (John says that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves).

Well, we have Jesus' example, and His Word to help us, and His Spirit living in us. And we have a relationship with Him — we can go to our God when we need help. You see, Jesus understands temptation. He understands trials. He knows what it is to be face to face with the devil, to be tempted by him, yet not sin.

In Hebrews chapter 4 we read...

Hebrews 4:15-16

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So we can go to God for help. We can go boldly. It's important to know that it's not a shameful thing to ask God for help when we are tempted — in fact it's the smart thing to do.

However, that doesn't mean we should wait until we're in a difficult spot, faced with temptation, before we do something. For Jesus has given us His example and His Word. In fact, it is in His Word that we have His example. I've previously quoted Charles Spurgeon, who had this to say, about the need to actually read the Bible...

You may take it as a rule that the Spirit of God does not usually do for us what we can do for ourselves, and that if religious knowledge is printed in a book, and we can read it, there is no necessity for the Holy Ghost to make a fresh revelation of it to us, in order to screen our laziness.

Charles Spurgeon

We have God's Word. We have it in our hands. In our language. And on our phones. With freedom to read it. We've never had such easy access to it. But *do* we read it?

Let me ask you this; how much more do you know about submersibles, the Titanic, and underwater pressure, after watching and reading the news this week? And how much more do you know of your Bible? Which did you spend more time invested in this week? And which will help you more next week? Perhaps that's a sobering thought.

We need to spend time in the Word. So let's also take a look at it now. Specifically, we're going to take a look at what the Bible has to say about Jesus experiencing temptation, and what we can learn from that. We'll go back to verse 1 of the Bible passage that was read this morning, but first I want to share an inspirational Bible verse with you...

Luke 4:7

Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

Of course, that's less inspirational if you know who said it! Because this is something that satan says in trying to tempt Jesus! I make this point, because context is so important. If you take the text out of context, all you have left is a con.

So first, let's consider where this event takes place in Jesus ministry. Jesus is baptised by John, following which we see that Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Father says "This is my son in whom I am well pleased". Jesus then returns from Jordan, and immediately is led into the wilderness. There He fasts for 40 days, faces temptation from the devil, returns to Galilee, and it is after that that He calls his disciples.

And then we read in Luke 4, verses 1-2:

Luke 4:1-2

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

The first thing we should notice, is that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. That's important for us to note, because we need to be filled with the Spirit too. You cannot face the temptations of this world in your own strength. Indeed, in Galatians 5:16 Paul concludes, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." We need the Holy Spirit. When we studied Romans chapter 8, we also saw there how critically important the Holy Spirit is in the life of a Christian.

Now, the second thing to note here is that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. So God led Him there. Did the Spirit lead him there to be tempted? No.

Jon Courson says this;

Regarding the entire arena of trials and temptations, understand this: God will allow a trial; Satan will come with a temptation. The trial may be financial; the temptation may be cocaine to escape the pressure. It's not God who brings the cocaine your way. It's not God who tempts you with pornography. No, God simply allows the trial to come. It's Satan who brings the temptation. Never, ever be mistaken on this point. The trial of our faith is to prove the faithfulness of God. It is never a temptation or an enticement to sin.

Jon Courson

So why was Jesus tempted by the devil here? Well from the devil's perspective, he knew that if Jesus sinned once, then we would have no Saviour, no hope. But I have a different question that I want us to think about — why are these temptations recorded?

This is where understanding the chronology, of where this sits in time, is important. Jesus is on his own in the wilderness. In fact, he hasn't even called his disciples at this point. That means He felt it important enough to share this with His disciples later on, and for the Holy Spirit to prompt them to write this down so you and I can read this today.

Now, also note, it says here that Jesus was forty days tempted of the devil. I don't believe it took 40 days for the devil to tempt in these 3 ways. Rather, it appears that Jesus was tempted for 40 days, but at the end of the 40 days Satan tempts with three specific things. We'll come back to that...

But first, I'd like to clarify what temptation and fasting are, and why there is a significance in the order here.

We often think of temptation in terms of standing in the chocolate aisle in Sainsbury's. But temptation is to incite or entice someone to evil. So, I don't think Jesus is concerned whether you have a single bar of Dairy Milk or not. That's not the kind of temptation we're dealing with. But if you're giving into the temptation of stealing, cheating, lying, murdering or the gluttony of eating 800 bars of Dairy Milk a year, then that's more an issue with your heart than your appetite.

Fasting is the voluntary giving up of something — typically food. If you have a fasting blood test, it usually means you can't eat for 12 hours before the test. In this case, Jesus fasted for 40 days. That might be a tough concept for us! But there are 4 people in the Bible recorded as doing this - Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Jesus. The purpose in Biblical fasting is that instead of eating, we use that time, and every moment we feel hungry or think about food, to come before the Lord in prayer, to seek His will for our lives.

Now, it might seem an understatement that at the end of verse 2, it says Jesus was hungry — yet that is exactly what He was. I've heard it said that hunger actually leaves after a few days of fasting and returns after a long fast of about 40 days or when all toxic poisons have been expelled from the body. However, at the point of hunger returning, it is because the body is now eating away at itself — it is getting weaker.

And that's key. Right here, Jesus was at a physically weak point. Perhaps at His weakest. And that's one way the devil knows he can be most successful with us. It's warfare, and the devil doesn't play fair. He doesn't know your thoughts, but he can see how you react. He can see what you react to. And he can tell when you're at your weakest point — whether that's when you're hungry, anxious, lonely or tired.

Now, as promised, let's come back to this question — why are these specific temptations recorded? Clearly Jesus knew that these 3 things are important for you and I to know.

So why these 3? Well I believe that these show the strategy of the devil. This was Satan tempting Jesus at His weakest. Satan knew the stakes — if Jesus sinned, *God* had sinned, and we could *not* be saved. He was going to give this His best shot. But his best shot didn't work. So listen up, because Jesus shows us here how you and I can avoid giving in to temptation. And I'm grateful to Jon Courson for pointing out how this correlates with what John writes in his first letter, which we read earlier...

1 John 2:15-16

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Courson adds that these temptations constitute Satan's entire game plan. He says; "Satan has only three temptations, three plays in his playbook: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. And he runs them over and over again..."

Let's look at what the devil is really trying to do here...

Luke 4:3

And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

Satan appeals to sense of entitlement and practical need. "If you be the son of God" - in other words, he's saying "You deserve this, Jesus. You're entitled to this. You deserve to be happy."

And we read: "*Command this stone that it be made bread.*" He's tempting with the physical, with something that's possible. "*Think of what you need*", he says. He is appealing to the flesh. And he'll do the same in tempting you; "*Don't you deserve this? You're a good person, you deserve some fun, some pleasure. This is good for you. It's your right. You've earned it*". It's the oldest trick in the book. He wants you to doubt what God has said, to do that which God has said you shouldn't do. Just like in the Garden of Eden where he said to Eve "*Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?*"

We are often told today that we have rights. But, Jesus laid down his rights, will you lay down yours? Will you be content with what you have? Sin often comes from a lack of contentment with what we already have. Consider Solomon; 400 wives, 700 concubines. Which sounds rather prickly. And he drifted from the Lord. Of course, we're warned in Hebrews *"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have."*

So what is it that Jesus does in response? He could have turned the desert into a bakery. Or said to satan, I'll turn you into bread! Satan is a created being. Jesus could have done *anything* to him, but rather Jesus showed us something critical in how to respond to temptation...

Luke 4:4

But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." "

It is written. Jesus quotes the Bible. Specifically Deuteronomy 8:3.

Not prayer walks, talking in tongues, casting Satan out of the building, or even singing praise songs. No, Jesus responds with the Word. He knows it, He lives it, He quotes it.

And there is no reply that satan can bring — he doesn't try to continue with this temptation, rather he switches to his next tactic.

Luke 4:5-7

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

So what is satan trying to do here?

Satan offers Jesus a *shortcut* to what He is legitimately going to get anyway. He offers an easier, quicker route. Our instant culture is not helping us with this. Instant coffee. Instant cameras. Instant messaging. On demand streaming of music and films. Microwave meals. Deliveroo and so on. We walk into our smart homes to find the kettle has already boiled, the lights are already on and music is already playing. Some companies are now offering delivery within 1-2 hours.

It's not that these things are wrong, but what's the lesson we take from it? *We can have what we want, when we want it* — we can have it now.

And satan will try and tempt us with the same when it comes to sin. But we must consider the consequence. CS Lewis defined prudence as practical common sense. Thinking of what is the likely outcome of a choice if you follow it through to its natural conclusion.

In Levi Lusko's book, *Swipe Right*, he makes a good point, that when we fail, it's often because we prioritise the instant over the eternal, or even the long term. Esau being such a clear example of this, when in Genesis 25 he sold his birthright for a stew of lentils.

So what is it that *Jesus* does in response?

Luke 4:8

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

Again, he responds with the Word. What He quotes is important too, for Jesus knows that worshipping and serving God alone is the best thing for us. It's ok to desire good things. But even a good thing can become bad. That's the basis of idolatry. We elevate sex, or money, or power or possessions as an idol. You see, money is not the root of all evil. The LOVE of money is. Money can be a great servant, but it is a cruel master.

We continue, and see satan's third strategy:

Luke 4:9-11

Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,' and, In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' "

So what is satan trying to do here? He says: God is ok with it. You can live how we want, and God will look after you. Unfortunately this is the modern message; Smile, Jesus loves you. Just the way you are. There is no need to change, He's cool with your sin. Do whatever feels good so long as you don't hurt anyone. After all, all you need is love. And we need to be relevant, as the Bible was written for a different time, a different culture...

No, no, no. What we see here is the pride of life. The Bible does not say we can do whatever we want, and God is ok with it. You may come as you are, but that's not so you can stay as you are. Jesus loves you too much to leave you like that.

But satan wants to pull you down. And he'll even quote scripture to support his cause. However when he does, he does so out of context, or omitting key information. Here, Satan quotes Psalm 91:11 which actually says, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep you in all your ways" — that is, in all God's ways. Jesus knew this and answered accordingly... So what is it that Jesus does in response?

Luke 4:12

And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, You shall not tempt the LORD your God.' "

So again, Jesus quotes scripture (specifically Deuteronomy 6:16). He uses the Bible, which Paul describes as living, powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. Jesus uses it accurately.

Again, the devil has no response to this. He has given his best shot and failed. So does he never tempt Jesus again? Let's read on...

Luke 4:13

Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

Wouldn't it be great if at the end of this the devil blew up?! Or fell down dead. Or promised never to return. But instead we read he departed for an opportune time, or for a season, as the King James version puts it. Was that a specific moment? Was it many moments? I doubt satan gave up easily. And I don't believe he will give up easily with you and I.

Where does this leave us? What do we take away from this? Temptation will come. You will be tempted. You will be tested. Now, it is not a sin to be tempted, but it is to yield to temptation.

So, how will you do? How are you doing? Each of you may struggle with different things. Of the many vices mankind is tempted with, gambling is one that does appeal to me, at all. Maybe supporting Charlton meant I never had confidence that a team I actually wanted to win, would in fact, win. But am I tempted by other sin? Yes!

So where does temptation start for each of us? Well we can sit here and try blame Satan for it all. Because he sure does tempt us. He's the father of lies - including that the grass will be greener. However, we have full responsibility for our own sin. We read in James chapter 1:

James 1:13-15

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

We are drawn of our *own* lusts. Again, I don't believe satan knows our thoughts. But he sure knows our weaknesses. Hey, even you and I can spot some of our weaknesses. But Satan is really interested in them...

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

We also need to realise that Satan is subtle — one time he is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and the next time he is an angel of light. He even comes dressed like a Christian. He even has his ministers standing in pulpits of some churches.

But you see here, we are told to resist.

James 4:7

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

And key in this is submitting to God. Knowing His will, and following that over our own desires. And we should pray that God would give us the desires of our heart — not that we would get a Ferrari, but that God would put desires for Him, and the things of Him, in our heart.

But how do we practically resist temptation? There are three things about temptation I suggest we should consider carefully.

The first is that we should **expect it**. Temptation will come - don't go looking for it! Don't put yourself in a situation where you will likely compromise. Remember that this is war, that satan is your enemy, and he'll play dirty — tempting you at your weakest point, quoting but twisting scripture, getting to you question what God has said, and making sin seem reasonable through a sense of entitlement, need, shortcut or permission. And know his strategy, his lies — that he'll say "It's good for you, you can have it now, and God is ok with it."

Second, we should **be prepared**. We need to be filled with the Spirit (Just like Jesus was). Remember we read in Romans 8:5 — *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*

We should also know our Bible, noting David's words in Psalm 119: *"Your Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You"*. The Bible is our daily bread, not cake for special occasions. Just look at the example of Israel with Manna — it was something that had to be done afresh each day.

We also need to pray in advance - not just waiting until the moment of temptation. If there is something you know is a difficult area for you. Pray. Pray when you wake up, or leave the house. Or when you know you'll be confronted with opportunity to compromise and give into temptation.

And finally, another key in being prepared is being part of a church family. Not simply going to a church. But actively being part of one so that you might be accountable to others. Of course, it's helpful to remember that God knows all that we say, think and do. But godly human accountability is important too. So have multiple people that can hold you accountable. You can't be accountable to YouTube or podcasts. So be part of a church, and fully commit to it. Indeed, don't ever move somewhere without knowing there is a Bible teaching and Bible believing church there first. Would you dare move somewhere without knowing what the schools were like for your children? Or whether there was a hospital close by? Or whether there was any employment opportunity?

Now third, both expecting temptation and having prepared for it, we need to **act wisely**. Knowing that sin occurs when temptation and opportunity conceive, we need to *flee from sin* — considering Joseph as an example who said *"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*

We need to run far from any temptation. And we need to go to the throne of grace for help in time of need, saying "Lord, I'm so very tempted to sin in this situation — but I ask for your help right now in running from it". God will answer that prayer. Remember that Jesus endured temptation and did not sin. And He is not only willing to help you, but *wants* to help you.

Application questions

This week then, I encourage you to apply what you've heard hear from God's Word. And ask yourself these questions:

- In what ways do you know satan will tempt you? What are your weaknesses?
- How are you preparing this day in reading your Bible, praying, and being accountable?
- What are you specifically going to do to flee from sin the next time you are tempted?

For the audio recording of this Bible study, and for additional studies, please see the DCF web site:



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