

“The Devil’s Schemes: Temptation”
Ephesians 6:10-13

January 28, 2018

SI: We’re spending 12 weeks or so looking in depth at a few verses at the end of Ephesians, chapter 6 verses 10-20.

Paul ends his letter with this passage to make the point that everything he has said about living the Christian life has a context.

The context is warfare.

The Devil and demonic forces are shooting at you and trying to bring you down in all the areas and relationships where you are trying to live as a Christian.

Paul tell us to be aware of that conflict and take a stand against the Devil’s schemes. That’s what we’re focusing on, the Devil’s schemes.

INTRO: Last Sunday after church a child came up to me and said:

Pastor Andrew, I have a question. Jesus says we should love our enemies.

So should we love the Devil? He’s our enemy.

I said . . . uh, ask your Sunday school teacher.

I told her loving your enemies means loving other people.

That’s what Jesus meant when told us to pray for those who persecute us.

But we’re not supposed to love the Devil and demons because they are not people, they’re not our fellow human beings.

That seemed to please the little theologian and off she went off to Sunday school.

But over the week I’ve been thinking about her question.

It’s not that we shouldn’t love the Devil because he’s an angelic being rather than a human being—we shouldn’t love him because he’s irredeemable.

He’s filled with malice and rage against God that will never change.

He’ll continue to rage against God for all eternity in the lake of fire.

He’s evil personified and God hates evil and expects us to hate evil too.

The Devil is irredeemable but people can be redeemed.

Wicked people can be touched and changed by the good news of Christ.

We all have! So we should pray that other people will too.

Love hopes all things.

Even the worst person is not entirely responsible for the condition he is in.

Yes, he’s morally responsible but he’s also blinded and enslaved by Satan.

Jesus looked at the people who were standing around the cross jeering and said:

Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Why didn’t they know? One reason was they were blinded by Satan.

Paul says in 2 Cor 4 that the god of this age has blinded minds of unbelievers. One of the main tactics Satan uses to blind unbelievers is by tempting them to sin. Their sins become an enslaving and blinding force. Satan wants to keep them from repenting so they die guilty and go to hell forever.

So why does he tempt believers?

Satan can't blind us. The Holy Spirit has opened our eyes.

We know the truth about God and Christ and heaven and eternity.

He can't rob us of our salvation.

Even if we do fall to temptation we don't fall from grace, can't fall from grace.

What does he get out of it?

Let me read Thomas Brooks' quote again.

“Though [Satan] can never rob a believer of his crown, yet such is his malice and envy, that he will leave no stone unturned, no means unattempted, to rob them of their comfort and peace, to make their life a burden and a hell unto them, to cause them to spend their days in sorrow and mourning, in sighing and complaining, in doubting and questioning.”

He tempts because he wants to rob you of your experience of God's grace.

It not only gives him malicious pleasure, it also makes you ineffective and unproductive in your Christian life.

If you fall into sin and that keeps you from being salt and light to unbelievers around you, that makes the Devil's job easier keeping them blind and guilty.

We saw last week that the Devil often uses temptation on Christians as the first punch in a one-two combination.

If he can tempt you to sin, then he'll try to follow up by hitting you with the lie of accusation—you're no Christian, God won't forgive someone like you.

And that just robs you more of your experience of God's grace.

So temptation is one of the key schemes of the Devil, it's a favorite lie of his that we need to understand in order to resist. So let's look at it under three headings.

1. Source
2. Variations
3. Resistance

MP#1 Source

When I was a boy I'm sure my parents were careful who I played with and at whose house I would spend the night.

But I had a friend named Thomas who slipped under their radar.

He was bad, he did bad things, he urged me to do bad things—and I did. One time he broke the windshield of a parked car with a brick.

He told me. This car is not supposed to be parked here.

We need to break all the windows. Help me. Get that other brick. And I did. I helped him smash every window in that car.

The weird thing was that his mother found out about it but he was not punished and she never even told my parents.

The worst thing I did at Thomas' urging was mock a handicapped man.

There was this man in his neighborhood who had some kind of spastic condition.

He rode a big adult tricycle.

Once he came riding by and Thomas shouted: Come on!

He ran down to the sidewalk and started twitching and jerking his body and laughing hysterically. He said: Come on, do it, it's funny! And I did.

Ten year old boys can be evil. Have you ever read *The Lord of the Flies*?

There are three sources of temptation that work in coordination.

One source of temptation is what the Bible calls the world.

The world means people under the influence of sin.

That would include individuals as well as human systems—philosophies, values, cultures, neighborhoods, families—all of those can tempt us.

My parents taught me good morals. Taught me to respect property and people.

But 1 Cor 15 says: Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals.

I don't think on my own I would have done those things I did with Thomas.

And he might not have done them if his parents had disciplined him.

Their value system or lack thereof opened a door of temptation to their son.

So other people and world systems and values are a source of temptation.

Another source is our own evil desire. What the Bible sometimes calls the flesh.

James 1: Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own evil desire.

Even as Christians, we still have the remains of the old nature, the old self.

There are evil desires still inside born again Christians that can tempt us.

Often the evil desire is not so much for the sinful act itself but for something deeper, a deeper idol that stand in opposition to God.

As I think about what I did with Thomas, I don't think the evil desire in my heart

was vandalism and mockery—it was a craving for human approval. My heart wanted the approval of a bad person more than the approval of God. Approval, power, control, pleasure—we've talked about these before.

The third source of temptation is the Devil. He's called the tempter.

He uses all the demonic forces under his control,

The spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places as Paul calls them.

There's a natural phenomenon called a rogue wave.

It happens when several ocean swells that are traveling at different speeds are perfectly coordinated.

So for just a short time, an incredibly high and steep wave forms.

There have been records of ships on average seas, and then suddenly there is a 60 or 80 foot wave. Ships have been sunk.

There are times we are tempted by the world, times tempted by our sinful flesh—and then there is a supernatural phenomenon when the Devil is able to coordinate those temptations and add his own lies.

Suddenly you're facing the spiritual equivalent of a rogue wave.

When it comes to temptations from the world, the Bible recognizes that we can't leave the world. Can't make a biblical case for monasticism.

But the Bible does tell us to do certain things to blunt the influence of the world.

Proverbs, for example, stresses over and over danger of bad companions and the positive influence of good companions. Tells us to avoid certain people.

When it comes to temptations of the flesh, Bible urges us to know ourselves.

Guard our hearts, take every thought captive, that sort of thing.

We are to learn to recognize temptations that come from within.

And there are also passages like this one in Ephesians that tell us to recognize

and give special attention to temptations from the Devil. Peter, resist the Devil.

In our church tradition, in the Presbyterian and Reformed world, we focus mostly on the flesh when it comes to temptation and second the world. The Devil last.

As I said a few weeks ago, there are other church traditions that have different emphases.

Our Pentecostal brethren I think put these three sources of temptation in reverse order from us—Devil, world, flesh.

So I think it's valuable for us to consider temptation from this demonic angle.

MP#2 Variations

The Devil's primary weapon is the lie.

Jesus said Satan is a liar and the father of lies, when he lies he speaks his native language.

Somehow, he communicates those lies to us.

How he does it, theologians speculate.

Does he just arrange situations and place things before us, knowing what will likely appeal to the evil desires of our sinful nature?

Or does he actually insinuate and implant lies into our minds and thoughts?

I think that's what he does. He gets it into our minds and thoughts somehow.

Last week we looked at accusation. The basic lie of accusation is:

What you've done is so bad God won't forgive you. You're beyond God's grace. The basic lie of temptation is the opposite. This sin is not so bad.

That basic lie comes in many variations and subtleties.

I want to refer again to the book by Thomas Brooks, written in 1652,

Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices

He lists and dissects twelve variations of temptation.

Let me just mention seven of them.

1. Satan shows the bait and hides the hook.

He gets you to focus on the short term pleasures of sin and to ignore the long term miseries that it causes. This was the strategy he used in the very first temptation. You will not die if you eat the fruit, you will be like God.

When he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, this was strategy in last temptation.

Showed him all the glories of kingdoms of the world.

It's the oldest variation of temptation and still effective.

2. By getting you to rationalize sin as a virtue.

I'm not stingy, I'm financially responsible.

I'm not nosy, I'm concerned.

I'm not an alcoholic, I'm sociable.

What's interesting about this variation that it shows what I mentioned a moment ago, the interaction with our sinful nature. This involves self talk, defending self.

3. By showing you the sins of Christian leaders.

Why is it always such a big news item when a prominent pastor has a moral failure?

There's a demonic element. It plays into a lie. If he did it, then nobody's perfect.

4. Overemphasizing the mercy of God.

God will forgive me. That's his job. God's never angry at you.
The way Thomas Brooks says it is presenting God as made up all of mercy.
His holiness and hatred of sin ignored.
The Devil can use theological arguments.

5. Making you bitter over suffering.

I've suffered, I deserve this. Nobody knows what I deal with. I deserve this.

Nobody should be expected to live with what I live with.

Frequently a lie believed by Christians in positions of prominence and leadership.

Nobody knows how I've suffered and sacrificed for the church. Pressure under.

6. Causing Christians to compare themselves to bad people.

This little pet sin of mine is not nearly as bad as the things really bad people do.

Thomas Brooks quotes the Pharisee in Luke 18:

Thank God not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, this tax collector.

7. Comparing one part of your life to another.

I'm doing so much good. I'm so generous. I'd give you the shirt off my back.

I'm a good dad. I'm a good husband.

So it's ok if I have this other area of life where I may not be perfect.

Pastor I know had a church member who used his very generous financial contributions as an excuse for a particular sin in his life.

I don't expect you to remember all those.

I mostly gave you that long list to point out Satan will keep trying until he finds one that works for you. Some of these won't work on you.

Or maybe they would when you were younger, but now they don't.

With life-experience you've seen other people taking the bait, missing the hook.

So you are quick to see the long-term misery for short term pleasure.

But, maybe with age and the passing of years you've suffered.

And you don't realize that Satan has used that to lodge a little seed of bitterness.

And you're becoming more harsh and unkind and you assert that's your prerogative because of your age.

Satan never stops tempting. So let's consider last point . . .

MP#3 Resistance

Paul says, stand firm against the Devil's schemes.

Peter says, Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.

What does that mean? What exactly are you supposed to do?

If you survey the books on spiritual warfare, whenever they get to this topic of resisting the Devil's temptations they inevitably turn to Matt 4.

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

One old English Puritan, Richard Gilpin said you can't really understand Ephesians 6 if you don't read Matthew 4.

And all the good books say that resistance boils down to you doing two things.

If you don't do these things, then the Devil will usually beat you.

First, you have to become personally aware of the top one or two sins that you are susceptible to, the sins you are drawn to, the ones that cause the problems and grief in your life. That's usually easy.

The harder part is that you also have to identify the situations, occasions, circumstances, thought-patterns, self-talk that draw you toward that sin.

Let's say your problematic sins are worry and the love of money—those often go together. And they can ruin your joy and your experience of God's grace.

And let's say the situation or occasion when it's the worst is when you check the mail and find a stack of bills. That's when faith goes right out the window.

Or maybe it's bitterness and holding-grudges—that's triggered by a particular memory or the sight of a particular person.

For you it might be laziness, touchiness, pessimism, dissatisfaction, covetousness, abusiveness, procrastination, or something else. What is it, what prompts it?

Here's what you have to do with that information.

You have to ask God to make you aware of the very moment the temptation starts, and you have to personally determine to do the same.

Because most of the time, you're well into the temptation or sin before realize it.

A word or a sight prompts a thought before you know it you're pressing the rewind button and replaying thoughts of revenge and self-pity that feel so good.

Jesus says: Watch and pray so you will not fall into temptation.

Not wrong to be tempted, but you have to recognize it immediately. First thing. And then when you do, you have to be ready with the second thing.

Second thing is to use God's word against the temptation and the Devil.

Here's where Matthew 4 is so powerful.

How did Jesus Christ meet each of Satan's temptations?

He answered him each time with Scripture.

We don't have time to examine all three.

In all of them, the Devil was trying to get Jesus to violate God's direction for his Messianic calling. To do things his way instead of God's way.

But each time Jesus had Scripture ready.

That's what you have to do. You don't have to know the whole Bible, just a few key verses that speak to and address the one or two top temptations you face.

Say for you it's worry and the love of money.

Temptation is when you get that stack of bills.

How about this: Hebrews 13:5

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Now let me add one more detail.

Some of the great Christians who have written on this subject say that when it comes to this second step, when you pull out that Scripture, you should not only use it to encourage and strengthen yourself, you should use it to rebuke the Devil.

You pray to God: Lord, help me believe this word of yours. True. With me.

You rebuke the Devil: Satan, you're a liar. I reject your temptation to worry.

I reject your temptation to be bitter and hateful. Leave me.

And this might sound strange, but some Christian writers on the subject say that you should rebuke the Devil out loud.

"Our Savior met the devil in his wilderness testing and dealt with him. While it was a genuine testing for our Master, it was also an example for us. We can hardly go wrong following the example of our Lord Jesus: "Satan, begone! For it is written."

Probably few Christian leaders in the past 500 years greater than Martin Luther.

This was his consistent practice. Verbalize his resistance to the Devil.

But crucial part bringing God's word to bear. Passage you know meets temptation.

One more thing. You're going to fail. I'm going to fail.

But Jesus didn't fail.

He's not just an example for us in Matthew 4, he's our Second Adam.

He passed the test that Adam failed. And through faith in him we get that victory.

His perfect victory over temptation, his perfect resistance in the wilderness is credited to us. God views us through his Son Jesus.

When you get to heaven, your failures will be covered by Christ—

but your resistance, all the times you resisted temptation, and resisted the Devil,

God's going to notice that too—and he's going to say, well done.

So don't be discouraged when you fail, don't think you're beyond God's grace.

That's another lie of the Devil.

Confess your sin, repent, turn, stand up—find that word of God that speaks to your heart, and have at it again. Keep fighting the good fight of faith.