

How to Win Over Temptation



David Wilkerson February 1, 1977

Temptation is an invitation or an enticement to commit an immoral act. And right now Satan is raging over the earth as a roaring lion trying to devour Christians through powerful enticements toward immorality. No one is immune and the closer you get to God, the more Satan will desire to sift you.

Sinners cannot be tempted — only true children of God! Rain cannot touch a body already under water. Sinners are already drowned in perdition. As children of Satan, they do as he dictates. They do not have to be tempted or enticed, because they are already immoral — already condemned. As slaves, they are not free to choose. They simply go from dead, to twice dead, to being "plucked up by the roots." Sinners can be teased by the devil but not tempted. Satan teases his own children into deeper and darker pits of immorality. They are already dead in their trespasses and sins and no longer fight the battles of the living. That's why our Lord tells us to rejoice when we fall into divers temptations. We are experiencing something unique only to maturing Christians.

Temptation is "training under combat conditions." It is "limited" warfare. God limits that warfare to the point of being "bearable." God is wanting combat-seasoned warriors who can testify, "I was under fire! I've been in the battle! The enemy was all around me, shooting at me, trying to kill me, but God showed me how to take it and not be afraid. I have experience now, so the next time I'll not fear."

Temptation is not a sign of weakness or a leaning toward the world. Rather, it is a graduation, a sign God trusts us. The Spirit led Jesus into the arena of temptation in the wilderness so He could learn the secret of power over all temptation. Actually, God was saying to Jesus, "Son, I have given you the spirit without measure. I have confirmed you before the world. Now I am going to permit Satan to throw at you every device he has — so you will see how powerless he is — so you will never once fear his dominion — that you may go forth preaching the kingdom with faith that Satan is defeated - that he cannot touch you in any way."

And that is why Christians are tempted today. Not to teach us something about ourselves. Not to show off the power of the devil. NO! Temptation is allowed in the saintliest of lives to teach us the limitation of Satan! To defang the devil. To expose his weakness. To reveal Satan as a scarecrow. We fear only what we do not understand.

Satan is just like the Wizard of Oz who uses all kinds of scary devices to frighten unenlightened people. What a horror show he puts on. A tinsel display of power, strength and dominion. But God knows it is all feeble noise and phoniness. Behind the stage is a weak wizard; that insignificant, powerless, bespectacled little baldheaded creature pushing buttons and pulling levers. Who in his right mind, knowing the mighty power of God, could but laugh at Satan's puny sideshow.

When we are tempted, it is God's way of saying to us — "Satan is powerless — he is not what he claims to be — he wears a false mask and shoots out fiery darts that fizzle and die in the presence of truth. But you must discover this yourself! Go into his circus! Stand up to his cheap threats — then conquer your fear of him! He will not scare you - he will not expose weakness in you! He cannot make you do anything! Instead, you will discover his weakness! You will expose him as a phony wizard! Then he will flee from you because he doesn't want you to share with anyone else the secret you have learned!"

It is not enough to say, "It is no sin to be tempted." That means absolutely nothing to those who have already yielded. The problem is not in learning how to accept temptation as an experience all Christians go through, but rather what to do to avoid giving in. The problem is how to bear up when Satan snares us in his trap! We want to know how to get the power and courage to say no, and stick with it. How to find power "not to plan" for giving in. When Satan comes in on us like a flood, there is no time to run to a secret closet for help. There may not be time to grab a Bible and seek out a few powerful promises to encourage us. There may not be a strong Christian friend around to hold us up in prayer. Suddenly, temptation is upon you and immediate decisions must be made. That makes it all the more important that Christians carry with them, at all time, the secret of "bearing up" anytime, anywhere, under any and all temptations.

Power to bear up and not yield to temptation does not come from stuffing our minds with scripture verses, or making vows and promises, or spending hours in prayer and fasting, not in surrounding ourselves with godly Christian friends and influences, nor in giving ourselves over to a great spiritual cause. These things are all commendable and normal for Christian growth. But, that is not where our victory lies.

The simple secret of bearing up under any temptation is to **BREAK THE FEAR OF SATAN'S POWER!** Fear is the only power over man Satan has. God does not give us the spirit of fear. That is of Satan only! But man is afraid of the devil. Frightened of demons. Afraid of failure. Afraid his appetites and habits can't be altered. Afraid of inner desires, that they will erupt and control his life. Afraid he is one of a thousand who may be different, innately weak, full of lust and beyond help.

Man is afraid he can't quit his sin. He credits Satan with power he doesn't have. Man cries out, "I'm hooked! I can't stop! I'm spellbound and in the devil's power! The devil makes me do it!"

Fear has torment! As long as you are afraid of the devil, you can never break the power of any temptation. That is why Satan is promoting films like "The Exorcist," "The Omen," and a barrage of movies that make people vomit and faint in fear. That is why Satan is delighted with the teaching now creeping into some churches that demons can possess Christians. Satan thrives on fear! And Christians who are afraid of the devil have little or no power to resist his enticements.

It's all based on a lie! That lie is that Satan has power to break down Christians under pressure. Not so! Jesus came to destroy all the power of the devil over blood-washed children of God. I often wondered why God allows spiritual people to be so tempted. Why doesn't God remove all temptations instead of "making a way of escape that we may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13)? The answer is simple. Once you learn how powerless Satan is — once you learn he can't make you do anything — once you learn God has all power to keep you from falling — from then on you can "bear up" under anything Satan throws at you! You can go through it without fearing you will fall!

You have heard it said — it is not a sin to be tempted! I say — it is not the greatest sin to give into temptation. The greatest of all sins is not believing God has power to deliver us and keep us from yielding again! The most important move you will ever make as a Christian — is the move you make right after you fail!

We are not delivered from temptation, but from the fear of the devil to make us yield to it. We will keep on being tempted until we come to the place of "rest" in our faith. That rest is an unshakeable confidence that God has defeated Satan, that Satan has no right or claim on us, that we will come forth as gold tried in the fire.

A double-minded person is unstable in all his ways. That is a person who believes the power is equally divided between God and Satan. That explains why "in time of temptation some fall away" (Luke 8:13). They fall back into fear. They lose sight of God's mighty power. They cower under Satan's fear mongering. Jesus taught us to pray that we not be "led into temptation." We are to watch and pray that we "enter not into temptation." The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The spirit of God in you yearns to teach you confidence in God's power but the flesh seeks to give in to fear. I believe it was fear — not weariness — that put the disciples to sleep while Jesus prayed in the garden. They had just received the news of His betrayal, that Jesus would be delivered into the hands of sinful men, that Peter would become a traitor, that they would all be offended and scattered. Suddenly, they forgot all His miracles, His mighty power to heal the sick and to raise the dead, His power to multiply loaves and fishes. They were now terrified with fear. They feared for their flesh. They feared being abandoned by the Lord. They slept the sleep of doomed men. When Jesus asks us to pray that we won't be led into temptation, He is actually saying — "Pray that you learn to trust God's power now, instead of having to go back again and again into the arena of temptation until the lesson is learned!" Pray that you will not have to be led into temptation because the lesson you would be taught has already been learned!

The Bible says God "knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation" (2 Peter 2:9). How? By putting us under fire until we come out singing. "Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Until we learn that we overcome by faith alone! Until we acknowledge, once and for all, that "for this reason God's Son was revealed, to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

You don't have to yield to temptation, but at times you may! Even the saintliest of God's people occasionally do. That is why God made special provisions for those who fail. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous..." (1 John 2:1).

Our Lord is not nearly as grieved by our yielding to temptations as He is by our not learning how to deal with it. He is more hurt by the fact we have not trusted His power to deliver. God is hurt not so much by what we do as He is by what we do not do. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, deeply grieved. Not because of the sins in that city. Not because of the alcoholism, prostitution, adultery, lying and cheating — but because He offered peace and deliverance..."but they would not!" They would not come in simple faith. They would not take Him at His word. They would not run to the shelter of His protecting wing. Their unbelief in His power made Him weep. A sinner is one who lives as one who confesses the devil has more power than God. The overcoming Christian is one whose life confesses "God has the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen!"

Some people really don't want to be free from their temptation. They flirt and play with it — a kind of spiritual brinkmanship. They know God can keep them from their sin — but deep inside they prefer to have a season of fun — a few rounds of immorality — a little taste of forbidden. They are afraid to trust God for power to overcome because they are not really sure they want out. It is too enticing! They don't want to grieve the Lord or turn their backs on His love. They want to be delivered — "after a while." A half-way deliverance "just in time." Too many today are afraid to turn it all over to the Lord because they still hunger after Satan's alluring enticement. Satan always makes yielding so convenient, so simple, so easy.

But God has the power to make us "want" to be free. He can put in us a will to overcome and power to perform that will. If Satan can put a will in man to sin, God can and does put in His children the will to overcome. Our part is to simply believe God can sanctify our will and put in us an overpowering desire to resist the devil's invitation. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Do you want power to bear up under all temptations? A way of escape? A growing strength to resist? Then quit glorifying the devil! Stop thinking he can force you to sin! He has no power to addict you to anything! Use your shield of faith! Look right into the eye of that storm of temptation and cry out, "The wicked one cometh, and toucheth me not" (1 John 5:18). Conquer your fear of the devil's power and you can forever after "bear" any temptation he send your way. Simply "commit the keeping of your faith unto him, as a faithful creator."

And, most important of all, "In nothing terrified by your adversary..." (Philippians 1:28).

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