

OH, WHY DO I FACE SO MUCH TEMPTATION?

Introduction:

Seneca cried, "Oh, that a hand would come down from heaven and deliver me from my setting sin!" His plea has been echoed throughout the centuries, we have all wished for that same miracle.

Sinful habits begin innocently enough, but if we do not master them, they will surely master us. We have all experienced the cycle: enjoy a forbidden pleasure, feel guilty, determine never to do it again, take pride in brief moments of self-control, then fail once more. Each time we repeat the pattern of defeat the ruts are cut a bit deeper, the cords of sin pull tighter.

We easily excuse our behavior! We say, "*Well, we are just human!*" We become pessimistic, even defiant, and self-protective, and soon find ourselves victimized by a sin that refuses to budge. This behavior pattern becomes so familiar that eventually we don't even want to change -- it is too difficult we feel. Then it is easy to settle into an uneasy smugness, we come to feel at home in our anger, lust, covetousness, worry, gluttony, laziness, bitterness, and selfishness -- except for our small and occasional efforts at correction. Sometimes we feel convicted, after some sermon, or some event, but it never lasts very long. We don't want to face what we truly have become.

By now you would say with me that we have been experiencing the *two steps forward, and three steps backward routine*. Despite my sincere attempts at yielding myself to God, I retained certain weaknesses (sins is a more honest word) that I concluded I would simply have to live with. After all, *no one is perfect!* But I knew my private failure was no credit to Christ, who won the victory on the Cross for me. Through many failures and a few victories, I have discovered that the most persistent sin can be dislodged, I can have victory.

Imagine a city that is constantly being attacked at a vulnerable point along one of its walls. The enemy habitually exploits the same weakness with startling, and continued success. Don't you think that the inhabitants would rebuild the defective fortification in preparation for the next assault? Yet countless Christians repeatedly succumb to the same temptations, the same failures without a constructive program for victory. Why accept defeat or failure as a way of life? God has a different plan! For He has given us a message of deliverance and hope. Applying biblical principles takes time and discipline but steady progress can take place, we can change, long established and sinful behavior patterns can be replaced by wholesome attitudes and actions.

Why so much temptation?

"Why is lust so powerful" asked Burt, who was crushed by the weight of his guilt. He had fallen into sexual sin. *"How can I trust myself. I don't want to live an immoral life. I promised myself I wouldn't do this, but here I am again."*

1. Why is temptation so attractive, unrelenting, and powerful?
2. Why doesn't God adjust the degree of our temptations so that we would not fail?
3. Why doesn't God just remove us from temptation -- take our sinful nature away, free us from the weight of temptation, and passions, etc. ?

I. WHAT DO WE WISH?

A. That Satan would be BANNED!

Our thoughts could be:

Why doesn't God just eliminate the devil? In fact, if He had done that at the time of creation, then chances are Adam and Eve would never have plunged humanity into sin. Since Adam and Eve were free-moral agents, why didn't God give them the opportunity to choose without any outside interference from Satan? Maybe Adam and Eve did not know about Satan's existence and were unprepared for temptation. If God had only barred Satan from the garden, Adam and Eve would not have been inclined to disobey God.

The presence of the devil in the Garden and his activity on our planet tips the scales in favor of evil choices. I'm not saying we have to follow his sinister suggestions, but if he were banned from the earth, we could resist temptation much easier and maybe Adam and Eve would never have sinned in the first place.

Much of the evil in the world, including our own struggles can be traced to the interference of unseen, evil spiritual forces. If God were to have annihilate the devil, or at least confined him to the pit, or some other planet, then we would not have our struggles with sins, failures and all that goes with it. Our battles could have been minimized at least and we would have been more inclined to resist the enticement of sin.

Why doesn't God just remove Satan, we may well ask?

B. That our passions would be dampened!

Surely if God would dull the arrows of temptation that harass us from the inside -- we would not sin so readily. Where does sin come from? (James 1:14) You and I were born with a sin nature which combines response to outward stimuli with its inner twisted passions of greed, selfishness, anger, rebellion, and lust.

Every honest Christian admits to being overcome by one or more of these desires from time to time in his spiritual pilgrimage. Surely, God who made all things, could have lessened our passions just a bit, we could then be more victorious and a credit to our Savior. Our struggle is clearly seen in Paul's words in Romans 7:15.

The Church reformer, John Knox wrote these words before he died: *"Now, after many battles, I find nothing in me but vanity and corruption. For in quietness I am negligent, in trouble impatient, tending to desperation; pride and ambition assault me on the one part, covetousness and malice trouble me on the other; briefly, Oh Lord, the affections of the flesh do almost suppress the operation of Thy Spirit."* If this man of God had such struggles, is there hope for any of us?

C. That our opportunities to sin would be changed!

Even if God did not banish the devil or dull our sinful passions and appetites, couldn't He have guided us away from the places of temptation?

Didn't David sin with Bathsheba because she happened to be taking a bath next door while the king was resting on the rooftop? It seems that God could have arranged for her to take her bath two hours earlier, or an hour later. Surely a sovereign God would have no difficulty changing our schedules, causing things to happen differently so His finite creatures would be less apt to sin.

Didn't Achan sin because he saw a Babylonian garment left unattended after the siege of Jericho? Didn't Abraham lie because there was a famine in the land and he feared for his life. Didn't Samson divulge his secret because of his attraction to the charming Delilah?

Consider:

1. God does not shield us from circumstances that provoke us to sin.
2. Remember it was the Holy Spirit who led Christ into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
3. In the Lord's prayer Jesus taught the disciples to pray "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*" Matt. 16:13

We are to ask God to preserve us from situations where we might be vulnerable to sin. Yet we must admit, God does lead us into circumstances that potentially could provoke us to sin!

4. God does not cause us to sin; nor does He tempt us as Satan does. James 1:13
5. We can never blame God for what we do. If we sin, it is because of our own choices, our sinful nature. Therefore we are responsible.
6. But God does test us; He also allows Satan to tempt us. Quite unintentionally on our part (at times), we can find ourselves in situations that are an outward stimulus to sin.

What about the more subtle sins of the mind? Yes, Christ taught that evil originates in the heart, but many of our struggles with evil thoughts are provoked by our environment. All around us are stimuli which draws out the worst in us. Without taking us out of the world, God could lead us to circumstances less conducive to evil passions, covetousness, and anger. But God has not shielded us from the places or power of cruel temptation. Satan has access to our lives; our sin nature is unrestricted, and often without warning we find ourselves in situations that contribute to outward or secret sin.

II. WHY WE ARE TEMPTED?

A. As a Test of Loyalty.

1. God has a purpose in allowing us to be tempted. To begin with, let's remember that temptation, with all its frightful possibilities for failure, is God's method of testing our loyalties.
2. We cannot say that we love someone until we have had to make some hard choices on his or her behalf.
3. We cannot say that we love God unless we've said NO to persistent temptation.

Abraham is an example of this: God asked him to slay his favorite son -- Isaac. Likely, he was strongly tempted to say NO to God. The altar he built was probably the most carefully constructed one ever made. As he worked, he surely thought of numerous reasons why he should disobey God: Like, Isaac was needed to fulfill God's promise; Sarah would never understand, and above all, how could a merciful God expect a man to slay his own beloved son?

We know how the story ended! Abraham passed the test; the angel of the Lord prevented him from stabbing his son. God's evaluation: "*Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.*" Gen. 22:12

4. How do you know that Abraham loved God? Because he chose to say YES when all the powers of hell and the passions of his soul were crying, NO. The fierce temptation gave Abraham a striking opportunity to prove his love for the Almighty God.

What about the woman who seemingly cannot resist falling in love with another man? How about the alcoholic tempted by his friends to revert back to his old habits? How about the young man surrounded by the wrong crowd?

Why doesn't God shield us from these circumstances? He is allowing us the luxury of difficult choices so that we can prove our love for Him. These are our opportunities to choose God rather than the world.

Do you and I love God? What happens when we are faced with the tough decision such as whether we will satisfy our passions, sinful desires, or control them? Our response to temptations is an accurate barometer of our love for God. One of the first steps in handling temptation is to see it as an opportunity to test our loyalties. *Each temptation leaves us better or worse; neutrality is impossible.*

B. To Transform Our Lives.

1. A second reason God does not make our choices easier is because *temptation is His character development curriculum.*
Sinful habits are a millstone about our necks, a blotch on our lives, a cord around our hearts.
2. Our temptations, struggles, and yes, even our sins are used by God to help us climb the ladder of spiritual maturity.
3. He desires to build us-- to make us better, godly, righteous, desiring a holy life. If you see your sinful struggles only as a liability, you will never learn all that God wants to teach you through them.

WHY doesn't God exterminate the devil.? Admittedly, the presence of wicked spirits in the world does make our choices more difficult. But think of what such agonizing choices mean to God. We prove our love for God when we say **yes** to Him, even when the deck appears to be stacked against us.

What it boils down to is this: *do we value the pleasures of the world OR those that come from God?* The opportunities for sin that pop up around us, the sinful nature within us, and the demonic forces around us gives us numerous opportunities to answer that question.

4. Character is formed in the storms of life.
5. God wants to do something more beautiful in your life than simply give you victory over sin -- *He wants to replace that sin with the positive qualities of a fruitful life.*

Temptation is God's magnifying glass; it shows us how much work He has left to do in our lives. When Israel was in the wilderness God allowed them to become hungry and thirsty. On one occasion they were without water for three days. They became disappointed with their slow pace of travel; they were impatient with Moses's long time on the mountain.

Why didn't God meet their expectations? Listen -- Deut 8:2b *God did all this "that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."* **There is the reason!**

6. God allowed the Israelites to suffer temptation to test their loyalties and to bring out their latent sinfulness. Temptation brings out the best or the worst in us. Israel did not realize how rebellious they were until they got hungry. Temptation brings the impurities to the surface. Then God begins the siphoning process!

C. To Give Us Strength for Our Weaknesses.

(Rom. 5:20; II Cor 12:9a. 10a; Eph. 6:10--- 13)

1. God uses our temptation, and our sins to show us His grace and power.
2. The depressing effect of sin is offset by the good news of God's grace.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was given so that he would remain humble. Perhaps it was a temptation he struggled to resist. He asked God three times for deliverance, but--God said, "***My grace is sufficient for you...***" (II Cor. 12:9a).

Paul therefore boasted about his weakness, knowing that it provided an opportunity for God's power to rest upon him. -- vs. 10b.

If you are beset by an especially obstinate sin, you may be on the verge of seeing God's grace displayed in your life. Although you may now be preoccupied with your struggle, you may soon be preoccupied with your God.

3. Think about that particular sin of yours -- the one that won't move off center stage of your life. Maybe it is an obvious one, like drunkenness, gluttony, sexual misconduct, or maybe a private sin -- one of the mind -- pride, anxiety, fear, or bitterness, or impure thoughts. Maybe your imagination would make an x-rated movies look censored? Or maybe you have a personality quirk, a feeling of deep seated inferiority, or uncontrollable temper?
4. Whatever it is God can deliver you from that sin. You and He can track it down and exterminate it; Sin need not have dominion over you.
5. You can be sure God will never take from you something that is good.
6. Rather, when you are ready, He will remove the evil and replace it with something far better.
7. He will tear down your fortress so that He can build a palace in its place.

Are you ready for such a transformation?