

Temptation

Introduction:

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to God three times and asked the cup to pass from Him. Before He prayed He told His disciples to sit and pray. The disciples did not pray, however, but fell asleep. Jesus woke them and told them to pray, but they fell asleep again. Jesus told Peter, “*So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*”¹

Jesus's words perfectly summarize the universal human understanding and experience of temptation. Temptations pry open our defenses and slip in through weaknesses *in the flesh*. Our spirits are perfectly willing to serve God, but our flesh makes us weak. This is key: No one is tempted through their spirit to practice the fruit of the Spirit. Temptation comes through the flesh. One may be tempted to practice the fruit of the Spirit for ulterior motives, such as pride, money or power, but even in these cases it is still one's flesh that is tempted, not one's spirit.

Temptation is also incredibly difficult (if not impossible) to endure for prolonged periods of time. Paul wrote to Timothy to *flee* youthful passions/lusts². He did not tell Timothy to wait around his temptations until the feeling passed. He did not tell Timothy that it was OK to get close to the temptation as long as he did not act upon it. Paul told Timothy to flee, just as Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife when she tried to seduce him.³ Most, if not all, human beings will succumb to temptation if they are around what tempts them for too long. Even Jesus had angels minister to Him after being tempted by Satan.⁴ This is what Jesus meant when He said, “*The spirit indeed is willing,*

1 Mark 14:37-38.

2 Timothy 2:22.

3 Genesis 39:11-12.

4 Matthew 4:11.

but the flesh is weak.”

Everyone will be tempted numerous times over the course of a lifetime. However, this idea is not to be used as an excuse to indulge in temptations. This is also not an excuse to behave in such a way that might tempt others. Jesus addressed these when He said: “*Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!*”⁵ Because temptations are moments when we are tempted to sin, we will look at the nature of sin in this study. When we better understand God's view of sin, the necessity of withstanding temptation becomes that much clearer. So what can we learn about temptations? And what do we know about sin?

Questions for discussion:

1. Have you ever been tempted in a way that didn't involve the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life? Are we only tempted to be selfish?
2. Is a little bit of sin OK? If not, why not?
3. Are temptations the same in all cultures, or are people tempted uniquely in each culture?
4. Why is it so difficult to endure temptation without giving in to it?

Happiness vs. Pleasure:

Temptation is a reality that is acknowledged even in secular cultures and lingo. A character who has done *the wrong thing* and must deal with the consequences in *the right way* is the plot to many movies and TV shows. The movie *The Box* by Richard Kelly (based on the short story by Richard Matheson) is a good example of this. It is a movie about a young couple who are offered 1 million dollars if they simply push a button in a box. However, someone they do not know will die if the button is pushed. They then must deal with the temptation of pushing the button and deal with the consequences of pushing it.

There is a universal understanding that there are wrong things to do that we want to do, and that

5 Matthew 18:7.

there are times when these wrong things are easier to withstand doing than at other times. As human beings we understand that there are things that are right to do and things that are wrong to do – and sometimes the wrong things to do are *pleasurable*. Here we must note the difference between *happiness* and *pleasure*, especially in the context of our culture and recent generations.

Sin may bring pleasure, but it never brings happiness. These words are often confused. Many people today claim: “Just do what makes you happy,” when what they are really saying is: “Just do what brings you pleasure.” Happiness and pleasure are not the same thing. We are tempted toward *pleasure*, not toward *happiness*. This is an especially noteworthy subject in our culture because newer generations in our culture are unique in this way: *One's identity is placed in one's pleasures*. For example, a person who finds pleasure in homosexual behavior will claim, “I *am* a homosexual.” It is not simply a pleasure but an identity. A person who finds pleasure in playing video games will claim, “I *am* a gamer.” A person who finds pleasure in art will claim, “I *am* an artist.” A person who finds pleasure in drunkenness and debauchery will claim, “I *am* a partier.”

This is *not* true of every culture over every period of time. This is not a universal truth that every person must accept. In fact, it is not totally true of every generation in our own culture. Much of the world finds identity within their family, occupation and/or religion. For much of human history and cultures, human beings have looked *outward* in order to find identity, whereas now many of our young people are taught to look *inward*.

As Christians, our identities are not to be in our pleasures but in Christ. This is important to understand as Christians in America today because a Christian in our culture will be far more susceptible to temptation if they follow along with the world in the line of thinking that our pleasures are our identities. In fact, this line of thinking erases the concept of temptation – a universally known and experienced phenomenon – in the first place and instead makes everything permissible in our chaotic pursuit of happiness through pleasures. It is a false worldview because it is a worldview that

treats the truth of temptation as if it were a lie. Any way of seeing the world and living in it that treats the truth as a lie is a false worldview. By claiming that our pleasures are our truest identities, this allows for pursuing temptations without any stigma. Thus, by doing away with the concept of temptation in the first place, many people in our culture are accepting a worldview that is a lie about the human experience. In this case Dostoevsky's words in his book *The Brothers Karamazov* were prophetic: “*If there is no God, then everything is permitted.*”

Happiness and pleasure are not the same thing. These two concepts must be separated. This is not to say that all pleasures are sinful. All sins, however, seem pleasurable. At least, they do before those who sin must deal with the consequences of sin. The identities of Christians are not to be in our pleasures, but in Christ. If our identities are in our pleasures, then we will become slaves to our pleasures. But if our identities are in Christ, then we will become slaves to Christ. The lie of the world is that there is such a thing as total freedom. Jesus correctly said: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money [or Mammon – the deification of wealth].”⁶ We can replace the word “money” with any other pursuit in this life apart from God. Jesus's words get straight to the point: **There is no such thing as not serving.** Everyone is serving a master of some kind. When we give in to temptation, we are serving a master that will take everything from us – including our souls – and give us nothing in return. When we are tempted, it may seem as if we are simply *pushing a button in a box* in the moment. But the consequences are far greater than we often understand.

Questions for discussion:

1. How would you define happiness? How would you define pleasure?
2. Why do you think the pursuit of pleasure plays such a large role in our lives?
3. What's the difference between *the right thing* and *the wrong thing*? Why is one right and why

6 Matthew 6:24.

is one wrong?

4. What is the danger of placing our identities in something other than Christ? How do our identities shape who we become?

5. What are ways you have searched for your own identity?

The nature of sin:

In order to understand why we are to resist temptation, we must first examine what it is that we are tempted to do: Sin. Sin is cosmic treason, wrote R. C. Sproul in his book *The Holiness of God*. It is not simply a violation of the laws of men, but it is a deliberate subordination of, and attack on, God. It is partaking of something that is an enemy of God. In fact, God sent Jesus to free us from the bondage of sin. We are not to turn back to that from which we have been freed.

Sin plays one of the most prominent roles in why we experience the world as we do. Through Adam, sin came into the world and infected human beings created by God.⁷ God through Jesus overcame sin and conquered death.⁸ There will be a final judgment during which Jesus will round up the devil, his angels and all human beings who have followed them and remain unclean because of sin and will cast them into a place called hell, which was ***not*** created for the purpose of sending wicked people there but was prepared for the devil and his angels.⁹ (In fact, in these verses we read that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels yet heaven was prepared for people.)

Sin, then, and those who follow sin, are enemies of God. Sin is a participation in lawlessness. Lawlessness is the place where the laws of God ***are not***. Lawlessness is the place where the devil and his angels – the enemies of God – ***are***. Those who choose to go to the place where God and His laws ***are not*** but the devil and his angels ***are*** will ultimately be given their choice when they are cast away from God for all eternity and delivered to the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

7 Romans 5:12.

8 2 Timothy 1:8-10.

9 Matthew 25:41.

This is what we mean when we say that sin is being in allegiance with an enemy of God. Sin has been overcome by Jesus and will be done away with when the time of this age is complete. When we are tempted to sin, we are tempted to become an enemy of God, who *has already won* the final battle over sin. This ultimate enemy of God that will be done away with, sin, is what is luring us through temptation to it to be done away with it. Temptations are the avenues through which sin entices us toward, and traps us in, the place where God is not. This is why withstanding temptation is so important.

As we look at the nature of sin, we will look in the following sections on two major facts: 1. That sin is described in Scripture as a kind of uncleanness; 2. That sin is directed against God.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do you view sin? What is sin to you?
2. How do you view “lawlessness”?
3. Is there a danger in culturally doing away with the ideas of temptation and sin?
4. Have you ever felt “trapped” by sin?
5. Is hell a just punishment for sin?

Sin is uncleanness:

Sin is portrayed in Scripture as causing things to become *unclean* and *corrupted*. Before the Deluge we read: “*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.*”¹⁰ The Law of Moses clearly establishes this concept. The Law identified what contaminated and corrupted the people – from identifying house molds to skin diseases to unclean animals. It is true that many of the animals described can cause actual illnesses if improperly prepared and it is true that it is biologically unhealthy to be around mold in a home. However, despite what many naturalists claim,

¹⁰ Genesis 6:11-12.

this is not the main point of the Law. The Law certainly kept the people from becoming sick, but keeping people from becoming sick expressed a far greater truth: That a violation of God's Law brings sin and violates one's holiness, while keeping God's Law keeps one from becoming contaminated with sin and keeps one holy.¹¹ People who were unclean were separated and sent outside the cities, and were prevented from going near the temple and worshiping God. The Law, then, revealed what contaminated holiness, separated a person from God's people, and even kept people from worshiping God. This is one of the reasons why withstanding temptation is so important: Engaging temptations and sinning separates us from God's people and from God Himself. It corrupts us and makes us unclean.

This is probably best expressed in the life of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was commanded by God to bear the punishment of Israel and Judah because of their sins. Ezekiel was commanded to lie down on his side for 390 days for the punishment of Israel and 40 days on his other side for the punishment of Judah. The only thing Ezekiel was commanded to eat was a bread made with specific ingredients and baked in a specific way. After describing the ingredients and procedure for making the dough, God's gives Ezekiel instructions for baking the bread.¹²

God views sin as unclean, defiling, corrupting and disgusting. When we are tempted, we may think that a little bit of sin is OK, or we may feel like sin is pleasurable. But this is not how God sees it, which means this is not the truth of sin. In order to understand the uncleanness of sin, we must view it truthfully: Like eating bread baked on human dung – ***except worse***.

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you think of when you hear the word “unclean”? What about the word “holy”?
2. Is it a little easier to see the necessity of fleeing temptation?
3. Do you think Ezekiel's friends and family wanted to be close to him while he had to eat this bread? Do you think they thought his uncleanness might contaminate them even though they

¹¹ Leviticus 20:25-26.

¹² Ezekiel 4:12-15.

loved him? Do you think God will allow sin into His presence even if He loves sinners?

4. How can something so unclean and disgusting seem so pleasurable?

5. How can what happened to Ezekiel help you practically deal with temptations today?

Sin is directed toward God:

Temptations to sin are real. They are actual experiences of human beings that cannot be denied. If there is no right or wrong, then there is no temptation. Temptation, then, is evidence for a greater objective moral law that is higher than human thinking and human achievement. If there is a moral law that is above our thinking and above our ability to achieve – a concrete standard to which we hold people, but a standard which no one can achieve – then we could not have considered it in the first place. Thus moral law is evidence for the existence of a supernatural Designer. Sin should be understood in that it is the transgression of God's moral law. Temptation is when the pleasure of stepping outside of God's moral law – sinning – is interpreted as appealing, pleasurable and/or even beneficial.

Because the moral law is created by God, overstepping it, violating it and choosing lawlessness (the place of the enemies of God) is a direct attack on God. It is true that sinning is harmful to ourselves and harmful to our friends and family. However, it is first and foremost directed toward God.

Consider the following sets of verses:

We read that sin is “against” God.¹³ It is directed toward God maliciously and intentionally.

We also read that God avenges sin.¹⁴ God avenges Himself on sin. If sin were not directed toward God, then God would have no reason to avenge Himself. But sin is directed toward God.

The passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah are concerning God's people who have sinned against Him. They are not concerning Israel's enemies, such as the Philistines. The people of Sodom and Israel

¹³ Genesis 13:13; Exodus 10:16; Judges 10:10; Luke 5:18.

¹⁴ Isaiah 1:24; Jeremiah 5:29; Jeremiah 9:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8.

during the time of the judges who sinned “against” God were morally corrupt. They were not on top of rooftops shouting blasphemous words to God or launching weapons in the air in order to attack God. They were habitual sinners regularly enjoying the pleasures of sin. They pursued and served wickedness rather than pursuing and serving God. Though sinners may think that murder or theft or lying or adultery or any other sin is only directed toward one or a few people, this is not true. Sin is directed toward God. Just as those who have fed and clothed the poor have fed and clothed God,¹⁵ so, too, those who have sinned against human beings and against themselves have sinned against God.

This is also why sin is often referred to as rebellion.¹⁶ The question then becomes: *Against whom are we rebelling?* The fact that we rebel against God through sin means that our sin is directed toward God. It is an open attack and a provocation directed toward the Creator of the universe.

Rebellion, by the way, can **only** be a choice. No one can truly rebel without choosing to rebel. Just as no one is coerced into rebellion against their will, no one is ultimately coerced into sin against their will. Sin is a choice that is easier to choose during a time of temptation.

Sin is directed against God. When we sin, we sin against God. When we rebel, we rebel against God. And God has every right to avenge Himself on us for siding with His enemy and attacking Him so deliberately.

Questions for discussion:

1. Has anyone ever sinned against you? How did it make you feel?
2. What does it mean to avenge something? Do you think God is just to avenge Himself for sin?
3. What is rebellion? How do we rebel against God?
4. Why is it wrong to sin against God? Why is it wrong to sin against another human being?

Is there such thing as a sin that does not hurt anyone?

5. Is it possible not to be an enemy of God and not to be an enemy of the devil?

¹⁵ Matthew 25:31-46.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 9:7; 1 Samuel 15:23; Isaiah 30:9; Hosea 7:13.

The consequences of sin:

All actions have consequences – both good consequences and bad ones. Sin is no different. Sin has consequences.¹⁷ Even sins that have been forgiven have lasting effects. Some of sin's consequences are physical.¹⁸ Some of sin's consequences are psychological.¹⁹ God promises to forgive sins so that we will not experience eternal separation from God, but He never promises to take away all the immediate consequences of sin, including the physical and/or psychological effects of sin.

Sin *always* bears consequences. *There is not one single example or verse in Scripture that teaches that a person can get away with their sin without penalty.* There are examples of people punished by God for their sin.²⁰ There are examples of people punishing themselves for their sin.²¹ There are examples of people humbling themselves before God and being forgiven.²² There is *no* example of someone not acknowledging their sin and getting away with it as if nothing happened. In fact, one of the surest ways a person will continue to repeat their sinful behavior is if they try to hide it and not deal with the consequences. If we hide our sins from one another and continue in them, then we continue to condemn ourselves before God, from whom nothing is hidden.²³ God's view of sin is that it *must* be acknowledged and punished, even if God Himself must take on the punishment.²⁴

When we are tempted, the consequences of sin are either downplayed or forgotten altogether. In a moment of temptation, sin becomes *not so bad* for this very reason. Temptation, then, bears a certain amount of self-justification, just as anger does. A person who is angry always feels their anger is justified in the moment they are angry. A person in temptation may begin to feel that their sinning is justified in the moment they are tempted. As we look into temptation and what temptation leads to

17 1 Timothy 5:24-25.

18 2 Samuel 12:13-14.

19 Psalm 38:3-8.

20 Numbers 20:10-13.

21 Matthew 27:3-5.

22 2 Chronicles 33:10-13.

23 Mark 4:21-23; Hebrews 4:11-13.

24 Ezekiel 16:58-63.

(sin), let us consider some of the consequences of sin.

Questions for discussion:

1. Is it wrong for God to punish sin? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think the Bible consistently portrays sin as deserving of punishment? What is the Biblical worldview of sin and does this fit into the fact that sin is punished by God?
3. Why do you think it's easier to sin while we're being tempted? How/Why do we justify sin during temptation but not at other times?
4. Why is it wrong to hide sin? What are some of the dangers?
5. Why do you think God forgives us but still makes us go through the physical and psychological consequences of sin? How can we get through these consequences?

Guilt:

One of the immediate consequences of sin is a guilty conscience.²⁵ A guilty conscience is frowned upon in our culture, and in Scripture it is something that must be addressed. In our culture it is often seen as cruel, unnatural and a weakness that must be overcome. As with anything in this world, when God is taken out of the picture, then guilt is impossible to understand or even to endure. Listed below are two articles which shed light on how our society views guilt, both in the academic arena and in popular culture.

In an article of Psychology Today titled *The Definitive Guide to Guilt*, the author Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Ph. D., writes: *“Like other emotions, there is no one explanation for guilt. The traditional Freudian view is that guilt resides under the surface veneer of our behavior.”* In a self-help article on MSN.com titled *C'mon Already: Here Are 22 Things You Can Do to Stop Feeling Guilty All the Time*, we read such suggestions as: #3 – Keep A Guilt Journal; #4 – Give Yourself A True Retreat (*“A vacation is hardly a vacation if you spend the entire time thinking about what productive things you*

²⁵ 2 Samuel 24:10-15.

'should' be doing instead."); #5 – Prioritize Yourself (*"Looking out for yourself isn't selfish – it's healthy. Realize that sometimes putting yourself first is truly the best option."*); #8 – Realize You Weren't Necessarily Wrong; #9 – Forgive Yourself; #11 – Look Ahead, Not Behind; #13 – Ignore The Guilt Trip (*"At the end of the day, you're the only one accountable for your actions."*); #17 – Remember: Moderation Is OK (*"Quit feeling guilty over your indulgences. Red wine can help your heart, dark chocolate is full of antioxidants, and popcorn is packed with fiber. A little treat won't kill you (and probably won't add 10 pounds), so give yourself permission to enjoy those little luxuries."*) – #18 – Set Aside Time To Feel Guilty (*"Take five minutes to let those guilty feelings come to you. Now either remedy that problem (give your mom a call, or carve out time for the gym), or take it as a lived-and-learned lesson and forgive yourself."*); #22 – Repeat A Mantra (*"If you start feeling like you aren't worthy of your success, hang a sign that says, 'I deserve this' by your desk. If you start feeling like a fake for what you've achieved, repeat the saying 15 times and remember all the hard work that got you there."*)

As we see, in our culture guilt is misunderstood and often confused with other behaviors and emotions. With #22 we read of guilt involved in success or with #17 the guilt of eating chocolate. This is not the same guilt that results from succumbing to temptation and sinning (unless they are clear violations of one's conscience). But the remedies offered for dealing with these kinds of guilt are the same remedies offered for dealing with guilt resulting from sin (as in #9). It is in this line of thinking where the great danger lies. It is not a matter of us keeping a guilt journal in order to get to the root of our guilt, or a matter of us forgiving ourselves and moving on, it is a matter of trusting that God has forgiven us and turning to Him with repentant and sorrowful hearts after we have sinned.

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you think about our culture's view of guilt? Is it what we read in Scripture? Why or why not?

2. How do you think these articles compare with passages referring to guilt?²⁶
3. Are the previous passages referring to the same kinds of guilt as the articles? Is there more than one kind of guilt?
4. How can we be people who don't condemn ourselves in what we approve?²⁷
5. How would you define guilt? Is there such a thing as feeling unnecessarily guilty?

Death:

In Genesis 2:17 we read, “*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'*” We know that God did not kill Adam and Eve immediately after eating the fruit, but that God cast them out of the garden. There are a few thoughts concerning this.

One is that Adam and Eve suffered a spiritual death because they sinned. Sin in Scripture is regularly synonymous with death. This is true that those who sin are dead and that Jesus brings the sinners back to life, as Paul elaborates in Colossians 2:13-14.

Another is that sin brought physical death in the world. We read in Genesis 3:22-24 that God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden lest they ate of the tree of life and live forever. It is commonly assumed that Adam and Eve would have lived eternally in Eden if they had not sinned. Because sin is synonymous with death, this appears to be the case, but this is speculation.

One last view is discussed by R.C. Sproul in his book *The Holiness of God*. He argues that, while they may have died spiritually, they were deserving of physical death, and that God's decision to drive the two out of Eden was an act of mercy. Sproul writes that sin is a forfeiture of one's life.

While it is certainly true that Adam and Eve experienced spiritual death, Sproul's point is an

²⁶ Ezra 9:6; Jeremiah 2:22; Psalm 51:1-3.

²⁷ Romans 14:22.

accurate one. Sin is a forfeiture of one's life. This is corroborated by the law of Moses. In the law of Moses, the penalty for accidental and unintentional sins was a sacrifice of some kind, depending on the situation and circumstances.²⁸ The penalty for things such as adultery and murder, however, was to be cut-off from the people of Israel/death (these two penalties are often the same thing in Scripture).²⁹ There was no place for sacrifice in these cases. God's view is clear: **When we sin, we give up our right to life.** Every moment we live after we sin is an act of mercy of God.

This is why the sacrifice of Jesus is so powerful and incredible. Even the sins for which there was no atonement under the Law and were deserving of death find forgiveness in the blood of Christ. When we understand this, the necessity of withstanding temptation becomes clearer. Continuing in sin and giving into temptation is to repeatedly give up one's life and to presume on God's grace to allow one to keep living. How could God be anything but wrathful if we continue forfeiting our own lives and flaunting God's mercy in His face?

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you think about Adam and Eve? Did God fulfill His promise that they would die?
2. Why do you think death/life – sin/righteousness are such pervasive themes in Scripture?
3. Why are we so afraid of physical death? If sin is worse than physical death, then why do we take sin so lightly? How can we reorient our thinking to put sin in perspective?
4. How do you think we should behave if we've given up our right to live? Is God in a position to ask anything of us, or are there certain things He shouldn't be allowed to ask us?
5. Does God have a right to be angry with us if we continue in sin after He's forgiven us?

Separation from God:

It is misleading to put the subject of “separation from God” in a category different than “death”

²⁸ Leviticus 5:14-19.

²⁹ Leviticus 18:28-30; 20:9-14; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Exodus 21:16; 31:14.

because dying and being separated from God are synonymous in Scripture.³⁰ We see this even in our lives. When someone dies, we who are living are separated from the spirit of that person. No amount of research or technology will ever allow us to be able to get to a person's spirit after they die while we are living here on earth. We cannot get to them no matter how hard we try.

In the same way, those who are caught up in sin are dead and separated from God. However, God has the power to get to them: Through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. But God will not force anyone to come to Him. To those who prefer to be dead/enslaved by sin/separated from God in this life, God will give them their choice in the next life. To those who are made alive by God through faith in this life – who want to be with God in this life – God will give them their choice in the next life.

The other side of this is when we understand that, in the same way we cannot get to those who are dead, the world is to be unable to get to us because we are dead to the world.³¹ We are to be separated from the world and its sinful pleasures. It is to be as far from us, and as unattainable to us, as the spirits of those who have died are far from, and unattainable to, the living.

One of the reasons it is easy to sin while being tempted is because being separated from God does not sound like such a big deal while we are on earth. The reason for this is because, while we may be separated from God spiritually, no one has ever been separated from God physically in this life. God still gives light and life to the earth for all of us.³² We are still in contact with people we love and who love us. We can be separated from God through sin and still have many of the blessings of God. The idea of being separated from God is an easy choice to make in this life because we do not actually know what it is like to be separated from God. To be separated from God for an eternity – to be separated from light, life and love – is a far different matter.

Questions for discussion:

30 Compare Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:56; James 1:15 with Isaiah 59:2; Micah 3:4; Ephesians 2:12.

31 Romans 6:1-11.

32 Matthew 5:43-45.

1. What does it mean to you to be “separated” from God?
2. Why do you think sin separates us from God? Why won't God allow sin into His presence?
3. When we're tempted, how can we remind ourselves of the reality of being separated from God?
4. In what ways do you think “death” and “separation” are similar?
5. What does it mean to you to say that we are dead *to* the world and alive *in* Christ?

Addiction:

Tim Keller, the Presbyterian preacher in Manhattan, rightly claimed: “Not all addictions are sinful, but all sins become addictions.” The Scriptures teach us that this is true.³³ In fact, when we sin, we are not only binding ourselves to it, but we are serving it.³⁴

Consider the following scenario:

1. A crew of men build a boat for slave traders.
2. Slave traders buy the boat.
3. A crew of men work for the slave traders as they sail to another continent.
4. A native kidnaps and sells his own countrymen to the slave traders.
5. The slave traders sail back to their homeland.
6. The slave traders sell the kidnapped slaves for a profit.
7. A rich man buys one of the slaves in order to work on his property and to help the rich man make further riches.

In every step of the above process, the actions of each person contributed to a greater narrative of evil, climaxing in the greed of one rich man and the oppression of one poor man. The above process, by the way, has happened in human history. Everyone involved in the slave trade contributed in turning

³³ John 8:34; Proverbs 5:22.

³⁴ Romans 6:16.

the wheels of wickedness, each for their own reasons. The above is meant to illustrate that there are greater wheels of sin than we immediately see, and when we sin, we are servants to sin, turning its wheels and keeping it going. The ultimate irony about the African slave trade is that those who were caught up in kidnapping and selling people were greater slaves to sin than the Africans who were sold.³⁵

The Scripture describes the human situation as being one of servitude. We are either servants of sin or we are servants of God. There is no possibility of **not serving**. The popular notion that we can break ourselves free of our chains and shackles and become our own person is a false ideology that easily traps people in the mindset of: *I can do whatever I want and you have no right to tell me otherwise*. This false ideology very quickly leads to sin and further enslavement by it.

When we sin, one of the consequences is addiction. The lie is that we can sin and ***get it out of our system*** so that we can move on. The truth is that when we sin, we want to do it again. There is no such thing as sin that does not affect a greater whole. Sin makes slaves of us and uses us to serve greater processes in order to keep sin going in the world. When we are tempted, we are tempted not just to hurt ourselves but to hurt others by keeping sin in an ever-moving cycle.

Questions for discussion:

1. Why are we reluctant to take ourselves out of sinful situations?
2. Why is it hard to stop sinning once we have started?
3. What is stopping us from overcoming sin ourselves?
4. What other kinds of systems and processes can you identify as being made up of a number of small, individual sins? Is there such a thing as a sin that only affects one person?

The holiness of God:

³⁵ While the Bible was used at times to justify the slave trade, such passages as Deuteronomy 24:7, 14 clearly teach that God did not condone the kidnapping and selling of people. Both Old and New Testament slavery was far different than what happened in the United States.

Now that we have looked at sin and its consequences, there is another important factor when dealing with resisting temptation and sin. This is the holiness of God. A better understanding of the holiness of God helps us to see the awfulness of sin and why we should resist temptation in the first place.

Have you ever wondered why God struck down Uzzah for steadying the ark?³⁶ Or how God could command Saul to destroy men, women and children?³⁷ Or why God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden after only sinning one time and went to such measures as putting an angel with a flaming sword to make sure they did not return?³⁸ These are difficult situations to understand without understanding the holiness of God.

Holiness is not what is often portrayed in our culture. The idea of a highly religious person being *holier than thou*, or when someone may refer to a *holy man* (as in a guru in a place like India) are inaccurate views of the Scripture's depiction of holiness. This is not what the Bible means when it says that God is holy.

God's holiness is: *“The quality of God that sets him utterly apart from his world, especially in terms of his purity and sanctity,”* or *“The moral excellence of God that unifies his attributes and is expressed through his actions, setting him apart from all others.”*³⁹ Holiness is the idea of being set apart. The Law of Moses did not so much detail rules for Israel to follow as it shed light on what profaned holiness – what made something *unclean* and *common*. Sin profanes the holiness of God's name and pollutes the land.⁴⁰ God will not tolerate it indefinitely. The death of a human being is far less unjust than the profaning of God's holiness. This is why God can command that women and children be slaughtered ***and still be in the right.***

36 2 Samuel 6:5-7.

37 1 Samuel 15:1-3.

38 Genesis 3:23-24.

39 Dictionary of Bible Themes.

40 Ezekiel 36:21-23.

God is *uniquely* holy in a way that nothing on earth can achieve.⁴¹ His holiness is an incomprehensible holiness. His holiness is so pure, radiant and glorious that it can be seen – and nothing on earth can compare with it.⁴²

God's holiness is essential to Christian worship and daily living. God is worshiped for His holiness.⁴³ We cannot come before God's holiness unless we ourselves are first changed and purified.⁴⁴ As Christians, we are to be holy like God and our holiness only comes from God.⁴⁵

God's holiness cannot be overemphasized. God will not allow sin and uncleanness to violate His holiness.⁴⁶ God may love every one of us, but it is *morally wrong of us* to sin and to violate the holiness of God. Because sin is not only just a little bit of dirt on the otherwise stainless shirt of God. Sin is *uncleanness* that was expressed through Ezekiel by the eating of dung bread.

When we are tempted, we need to realize that what we are tempted to do is to violate the holiness of God. We, who are made in the image of God – and especially Christians who carry the name of Christ – are not to have anything to do with the defiling and uncleanness of sin. Sin, as we have seen in an earlier section, is a direct attack on God. Thus it is a violation of His holiness. This is why not even a little bit of sin is OK. No amount of sin is acceptable. This is also why living good moral lives will not allow us into heaven. God may love us, but if our sins remain unforgiven, then God will not allow us into heaven with Him because our sins would violate and contaminate His holiness. Morality is not the issue of salvation. Faith in the purifying and healing power of Christ's atoning sacrifice is the issue. When we have been healed, however, we have no other choice but to follow in Christ's moral footsteps. Because our holy God in the person of Jesus Christ took on the uncleanness of sin and violated His holiness in order to bring us into a relationship with Him – the reason we were

41 Exodus 15:11; Psalm 77:13; Revelation 15:4.

42 Mark 9:1-3; Exodus 34:29-35.

43 Psalm 99:5; 1 Chronicles 16:29.

44 Exodus 3:5; Psalm 24:3-4; Hebrews 10:22

45 Romans 12:1; Leviticus 11:44; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:22-24; Hebrews 12:14.

46 Joshua 24:19-20.

created in the first place.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is holiness to you? What do we mean when we say that we're to be holy as God is holy?
2. Does understanding the disgusting nature of sin and the nature of the holiness of God make it easier to see how and why we're to withstand the temptation to sin?
3. Why do you think it's wrong to profane God's holiness?
4. What does the word "holiness" mean in our culture today? How does this compare with the Biblical view of holiness?
5. How does God's holiness fit into our worship of Him? How does this fit into our daily lives?

Practical advice and things to remember when dealing with temptation:

1. Temptation comes from walking in this world.⁴⁷
2. Temptations do not come from God but we sin when we're enticed by our own desires.⁴⁸
3. We can be tempted when we put too much of the world into our minds.⁴⁹
4. Sin can overtake us because of specific situation in which we have a lack of self-control.⁵⁰
5. Satan actively seeks to tempt people to the point of sin in order to accuse them before God.⁵¹
6. Christians are to be able to be open with one another about their temptations in order to help one another.⁵²
7. Being around worldly people will place temptations in our way.⁵³
8. We will not be tempted beyond our abilities.⁵⁴

47 Ephesians 2:1-3.

48 James 1:13-14.

49 Matthew 6:22-23.

50 1 Corinthians 7:5.

51 1 Peter 5:8-9; Zechariah 3:1-5.

52 Galatians 6:1-2.

53 1 Corinthians 15:33-34.

54 1 Corinthians 10:13.

9. Temptation is not a time to abstain from prayer but to draw near to Jesus.⁵⁵

10. Loving the world allows temptation to come into our lives through three avenues: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.⁵⁶

11. Resist the devil by drawing near to God and the devil will flee from you.⁵⁷

Conclusion:

Temptation is sure to come to every one of us. There is no escaping it. We may be able to endure temptation some of the time, but we will not be able to endure it all of the time. It is easy to give in to temptation when we do not understand the uncleanness of sin or the holiness of God. Reminding ourselves of, and learning about, these things help us to endure temptation. If we do sin, we must not take it lightly, but we must also not take lightly the power of forgiveness through Jesus's sacrifice. As John wrote: *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.”*⁵⁸

55 Hebrews 4:14-16.

56 1 John 2:15-17.

57 James 4:7-8.

58 1 John 2:1-3.