

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 10

"The Problem of Temptation"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Mark Anthony was known as the silver-throated orator of Rome.
 - A. He was also credited with being a brilliant man, a strong leader, and a courageous soldier.
 1. But one thing he lacked was strength of character.
 - a. On the outside, he was strong and impressive.
 - b. But on the inside, he was weak and vulnerable.
 2. This fact so enraged his tutor that on one occasion, his mentor shouted, "O Marcus! O colossal child... able to conquer the world but unable to resist a temptation."
 - B. That indictment not only fits Mark Anthony, but it would also fit some of us.
 1. None of us are immune to temptation – we'll NEVER reach a point in our lives where temptation isn't lurking around some corner, ready to trip us in some unguarded moment.

2. But some people, like Mark Anthony, find it virtually impossible to resist the constant pull to compromise and to give way to sin.
- II. As we enter this study in dealing with the problem of temptation, there are a few facts we need to keep in mind.
- A. First – Sexual temptations are NOT the only temptations we face.
1. When we talk about facing the problem of temptation, nearly everyone begins to think about overcoming sexual weaknesses.
 - a. However, while we are constantly being bombarded with that particular temptation – especially in our society – sexual enticements aren't the only one's we face.
 - b. When we focus all our attention on guarding against that temptation, we don't properly guard against others that sneak up on us.
 - (1). Temptations like gossip, envy, the love of money, prejudice, selfishness, etc...
- B. Second – Never think we've conquered a temptation. Because, just when we think we've conquered one temptation, Satan often deals us a devastating blow – with the VERY ONE we THOUGHT we conquered.
1. This is another way of saying we can NEVER become over-confident when facing problem areas of our life, especially temptation.

- a. We may have it under control, but like turning our back on some wild animal, it can leap on us and devour us in some unguarded moment.
 2. Our guard must be "UP" at all times – Satan is a relentless foe, and he never admits to defeat.
 - a. His aim is to turn our hearts away from God.
 - b. If he's been successful in one particular area of our life in the past – rest assured, he will try there again some day in the future.
- C. Third – Satan can be defeated!
1. Perhaps you've heard someone say, "I can resist everything but temptation."
 - a. We may laugh at that, but what that person is really saying is, "I'm helpless in Satan's hands."
 - b. Brethren, that isn't true! In fact, it's UNBIBLICAL!
 2. Jesus Christ gave His life on the Cross so that we could have the victory OVER Satan's power.
 - a. **1 John 5:4-5** – *"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"*

- b. **1 John 5:18-19** – *"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."*

BODY:

- I. So, let's begin by turning to the book of James and looking at the subject of temptation to learn how we can become the VICTOR.
- A. The book of James was the first letter written to Christians in New Testament times.
1. It was specifically directed to Jewish Christians scattered across the Roman world (often isolated from warm, supportive friends and family).
- B. James begins his letter by addressing two problems common to all Christians – the problem of TRIALS, and the problem of TEMPTATIONS.
1. TRIALS – are an ordeal, a hardship, something that can reshape our lives and something that can put our faith to the test.
- a. Many people think that TRIALS are an indication that they've done something wrong – that they've sinned.

(1). This is certainly not always the case.

b. God can use trials in two ways.

(1). If there IS some sin in our life that we need to confess and get rid of, God MAY bring a trial as a means of disciplining us as one of His children.

(a). **Hebrews 12:5-6** – *"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.'"*

(2). Or, God can use trials to strengthen our faith, and mold us into the character He wants us to have.

(a). Job faced terrible losses in practically every area of his life – NONE of which were the result of sin. **(cf. Job 1-2)**

(b). Elijah experienced deep depression when his life was threatened, but his trial was not the result of sin. **(cf. 1 Kings 19:1-4)**

(c). The apostle John was banished to the isle of Patmos and faced the trial of loneliness, but not as the result of sin. **(cf. Rev. 1:9)**

c. TRIALS are NEVER intended to weaken us or undermine our faith – they are ALWAYS used by God for good, to change us for the better, and to give us new hope and assurance.

2. TEMPTATIONS – as Webster defines it, is "the enticement to do wrong, by the promise of pleasure or gain."

a. The goal of TEMPTATION is to ALWAYS bring us down spiritually – to weaken us, and destroy our relationship with God, and flood our conscience with guilt.

3. While the end result of TRIALS is hope, assurance and growth -- the end result of TEMPTATION is death – separation from God, and living a death-like existence (where there is no longer any real joy in living).

II. Let's focus on some principles found in James that apply to temptation.

A. First, James tells us that temptation is inevitable.

1. **James 1:13a** – "Let no one say when he is tempted..."

2. Notice that the verse doesn't say "IF" we are tempted, but "WHEN!"

a. The fact that we were born into this world (physically) means we are subject to temptation.

(1). No human being, who is a mature, responsible adult, is immune from temptation.

b. So, temptation is never an "IF" proposition – it's always a "WHEN" proposition.

(1). It's not a question of "IF" we will be tempted, but "WHEN!"

B. Second, James tells us temptation is NEVER directed by God.

1. **James 1:13** – *"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."*

2. God simply doesn't traffic in the realm of the immoral.

3. But there's a very interesting choice of words used by James in this verse. When he penned these words, James had two choices when he used the Greek prepositional thought "by."

a. One encompasses the idea of DIRECT AGENCY.

(1). This would have implied, "Let no one say, God DIRECTLY led me into this sin!"

b. The other conveys the idea of INDIRECT AGENCY.

(1). This would imply, "Let no one say, that God, even INDIRECTLY, led me into this sin!"

4. Which one did James use?

- a. INDIRECT AGENCY – the stronger of the two!
 - b. God is not even INDIRECTLY involved in leading us into sin.
5. And there are two reasons why:
- a. One – God can't be tempted by evil.
 - b. Two – God doesn't tempt anyone else, not even INDIRECTLY.
6. A classic example of what James is talking about is seen in the book of Genesis. **(cf. Gen. 3:12)**
- a. Remember when the Lord confronted Adam and Eve about their disobedience, Adam immediately responds, "*The WOMAN...*," *trying* to shift the focus off himself and onto Eve?
 - b. But, with the next few words, he also tries to subtly lay the blame at the feet of God: "*The woman whom YOU gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.*" **(Genesis 3:12)**
 - (1). It's as if Adam was saying, "Here I was enjoying the Garden of Eden until YOU brought this female into my life. And if it hadn't been for her..."
7. Have you ever said (or thought), "God, YOU gave me these feelings, YOU created these desires in me that I can't control?"
- C. Third, James says our response to temptation (either resisting it, or giving in to it) is strictly a matter of PERSONAL responsibility.

1. **James 1:14** – *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."*
2. When we sin, it is OUR choice – and like a metal being drawn to a magnet, so our sinful nature is drawn into temptation.
 - a. Nothing outside ourselves – no set of circumstances, nor any allurements – is strong enough to FORCE us to sin.
 - b. Sin occurs when WE agree to the temptation and get involved with it – when WE begin looking with desire at the bait Satan dangles before our eyes.
2. And, by the way, Satan knows what kind of bait we like.
 - a. Those of you who fish know that certain fish like certain bait or certain lures – that's what you use.
 - b. Satan knows us better than we know ourselves, and he doesn't waste time in tempting us with things that don't interest us.
- D. Fourth, James tells us that temptation always follows the same pattern.
 1. **James 1:14-15** – *"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."*
 2. Here's the pattern of temptation. First, the bait is dropped.

- a. Satan puts some kind of allurement in front of our eyes.
 - (1). This allurement will appeal to one or more of our desires (such as a physical desire or an emotional need).
3. Next, our inner desire is attracted to the bait.
 - a. The Greek word for "enticed" is a fishing term.
 - (1). James describes Satan as some expert angler fishing for Bass.
 - (a). The second that Bass sees the lure and begins moving out of his secure hiding place – he's as good as caught (assuming you're as good a fisherman as Satan).
 - (b). In the same manner, as soon as we MOVE TOWARD THE BAIT – we're hooked, even though we haven't actually taken the bait yet.
4. Next, sin occurs when we yield to temptation.
 - a. When temptation is allowed to impregnate the sinful desires of our mind, it spawns (gives birth to) sin.
5. Finally, sin ends with tragic consequences.
 - a. Even though sin often times brings temporary pleasure – it always ends in a tragic death.
 - b. I think we experience death in two ways:
 - (1). Spiritual death.

- (a). Sin separates us from God – not from the LOVE of God, but from fellowship with God.
- (b). **1 John 1:5-10** – *"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."*

(2). Emotional death.

- (a). Sin eventually robs us of joy and peace – leaving us with nothing more than a death-like existence.

III. Now that we understand something about temptation, let's find some practical ways of overcoming it – some useful weapons in our day-to-day struggle to resist temptation.

- A. First – You must counteract temptation, not tolerate it.
1. For instance, there are certain kinds of music, magazines, books, movies or TV shows, and even the Internet that brings alluring images before us. When you allowing these alluring images into your life, you're not COUNTERACTING sin and temptation, you're TOLERATING IT!
 - a. You know where your weaknesses are – so avoid them.
 2. And yet, how often do we pray for deliverance from some temptation, then turn right around and expose ourselves to it?
 - a. It's like praying you won't get burned, then turning around and sticking your hand in a fire.
 - (1). I can absolutely guarantee you – you'll get burned.
 3. Right now, think of some area in your life where you've had problems with temptation.
 - a. Now – Let me ask you two important questions.
 - (1). What do YOU DO to make it easy for Satan to tempt you?
 - (2). What SHOULD you do to keep Satan from tempting you in that area?
 4. Don't tolerate temptation – counteract it!
 - a. **1 Thessalonians 5:22** – *"Abstain from all appearances of evil."*
 - (1). The NIV says it better, *"Avoid every kind of evil."*

B. Second – You must use the right resistance.

1. The technique you use to resist temptation must match the temptation – not every temptation can be handled the same way.
2. For example:
 - a. Every time sexual or sensual sins are mentioned in the New Testament, we are told to "FLEE!" – to RUN, to GET AWAY AS FAST AS WE CAN!
 - (1). That's exactly what Joseph did when his master's wife tried to seduce him. **(cf. Gen. 39:1-12)**
 - b. If you wrestle with the temptation to get rich at all costs, the Scriptures teach that you can subdue it by being generous. **(cf. 1 Tim. 6:9-10, 17-19)**
 - c. If your living or working environment is filled with temptations, Solomon gives the practical suggestion of putting a leash of self-control on your wandering eyes looking straight ahead.
 - (1). **Proverbs 4:25-27** – *"Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil."*
 - (2). **Proverbs 4:25-27 (New Living Translation)** – *"Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you."*

Mark out a straight path for your feet; then stick to the path and stay safe. Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil."

3. By the way, never be lulled into thinking, as you grow older, that you've mastered certain areas in your life.
 - a. You may need to keep your eyes from wandering at 81 as much as you ever did at 18.
- C. Third – You must constantly remind yourself temptation brings only temporary pleasure.
 1. Let's all be honest – sin is pleasurable.
 - a. Let me ask you – How many of you enjoy going to the Dentist?
 - (1). No matter how pleasant the Dentist, and no matter how nice the office is, or how cooperative the staff, or how good the magazines in the waiting room – it is NOT a pleasant experience.
 - (a). It's important that we go, and we're glad after it's all over – but it's NOT a pleasant experience!
 - b. Let me ask another question – How many of you would sin if the experience was like going to the Dentist?
 2. Satan offers pleasure – he offers something fun, enjoyable, pleasurable and exciting with every temptation.
 - a. But there are two problems here:

- (1). The pleasure (fun, excitement, enjoyment) is only for a moment.
 - (2). After pleasure is gone, the painful consequences begin.
3. The Scriptures speak clearly – *"The soul that sinneth, IT SHALL DIE!" (Ezekiel 18:20a)*
- a. We need to develop the same kind of faith that guarded Moses.
 - b. **Hebrews 11:24-26** – *"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."*
- D. Fourth – You can control your thoughts by "treasuring" Scriptures in your heart. **(Ps 119:9, 11)**
1. **Psalm 119:9, 11** – *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word... Your word I have hidden (treasured) in my heart, that I might not sin against You."*
 2. To "treasure" the Scriptures means much more than simply memorizing them – it's more of an ATTITUDE than an ACTION.

- a. It means to memorize Scripture from the stand-point of making valuable application of those Scriptures to our everyday life.
3. When Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness, do you remember how many times He made use of Scripture? He quoted Scripture three times – one for each temptation! (**cf. Matthew 4:1-11**)
 - a. Relying on Scriptures to help us during times of temptation is using GOD'S WISDOM!
- E. Finally – You need to do battle on a daily basis.
 1. Just because you've successfully resisted a certain temptation today – DOESN'T MEAN you've CONQUERED IT.
 - a. Remember – Satan left Jesus for the moment, but planned to return at a more convenient time.
 - (1). If he did that with Jesus, he'll do the same thing with us.
 2. So, in battling temptation on a daily basis try these guidelines.
 - a. Begin each day with a prayer – specifically praying to be delivered from your most vulnerable temptations.
 - b. Read passages that deal with particular areas of weakness in your life.
 - c. Remember, when you "resist" he "flees."
 - (1). **James 4:7** – *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."*

- d. Thank God for giving you the victory, and prepare for the next attack.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Mark Anthony's most widely known, and certainly his most costly, temptation was the beautiful and notorious Cleopatra.
 - A. Mark Anthony was destined to be one of the world's greatest leaders.
 1. However, the adulterous relationship between Mark Anthony and Cleopatra cost him his marriage, his place as a future leader of the Roman Empire, and ultimately it cost him his life.
 - a. Manipulated by Cleopatra into believing she was dead, he fell on his own sword, committed suicide, out of devotion to what was once only a temptation – something that could have been avoided altogether.
 - B. What temptations do you face?
 1. Are you fully aware of the areas of your life where you are most vulnerable?
 2. Or are you blinded by the "passing pleasures" that temptation will bring?
 - C. Since temptation is something you'll face for the rest of your life, what are you doing to avoid it or counteract it?

1. Are you avoiding people, places or things that tempt you?
 2. Or do you find yourself occasionally tolerating temptation, or even flirting with it?
- II. If you're having trouble overcoming temptation, let me suggest one last possible reason – maybe you aren't getting Divine help in overcoming Satan's influence in your life, because you don't have a proper relationship with Jesus Christ.
- A. If you've never become a Christian – acknowledged your faith in Him and surrendered your life in complete obedience – then there isn't much He can do to help you.
 - B. And if you are a Christian, but you've not willing to completely surrender your will to His – then there isn't much He can do to help you either.