



Temptation

What is temptation?

James 1:13-14 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. (14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Most people want to blame the devil when it comes to temptation, but James says that it is based on our own desires.

The devil is known as "the tempter" (see Mat 4:3, 1 Thes 3:5), so he does indeed tempt people to sin, but the appeal of sin is rooted firmly in our own desires.

1 Cor 7:5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Paul acknowledges this principle when he advises Corinthian married couples not to refrain from sex (except for an agreed time for prayer and fasting), because the devil will use that natural desire as a basis for temptation to sin.

See Mat 4:1-11 where the devil tempted Jesus.

The only desire that the devil knew that Jesus had, and therefore he might be able to capitalise on, was the desire for food, as Jesus had just fasted for forty days.

Therefore, the devil began with that temptation, trying to use Jesus' natural desire for food as a lure to sin.

The next two temptations that the devil threw at Jesus – temptation to pride and greed – were a long shot as the devil didn't know whether Jesus had those desires or not.

John 14:30 I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.

The devil was mistaken and found nothing in Jesus that would respond to his tempting because Jesus had no evil desires.

As we can see, temptation is an enticement to sin, but the desire has to already be in our nature for it to be effective.

How can we overcome temptation?

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

The key to overcoming temptation is to put into action a dual strategy.

First, submit to God; anyone whose heart is not submitted to the Lord will be unable to resist temptation.

Second, resist the devil; this is a deliberate choice to refuse to do what you are being tempted to do.

Mat 26:41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Jesus gives two more important keys to overcoming temptation.

The first is to watch, to be on the alert, and the second is to pray.

1 Tim 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

There is a specific warning to deal with the desire to be rich, as those who possess this desire will certainly fall into temptation.

What if the temptation is too strong?

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Temptation may often feel overpowering, but God has promised that there will be no temptation in our lives that He will not give us the ability to overcome.

But keep in mind that all the promises of God need also to take into account instructions from God on how to live victorious lives.

Therefore, even though God promises that we won't be tempted beyond our ability to resist, that promise does not negate our own responsibility to have hearts that are yielded to Him.

If our hearts are not yielded to Him, then any temptation may be irresistible.

Is there any reward for those who overcome temptation?

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

God rewards overcomers with the crown of life.

He also equates overcomers with those who love Him.