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How to Handle Temptations; Matt 18:7-9  
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Introduction – In the previous verses of ch18, Jesus is teaching the disciples how to rethink greatness in kingdom terms rather than in worldly terms. He ends that lesson by issuing a stern warning to anyone who would cause a believer to stumble or sin. In other words, being in the role of tempter is a dangerous place to be. That warning against being a tempter is now the gateway into the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson from Jesus in ch18 on temptations.

What is a temptation? A temptation is any form of distraction, detour, or doubt of the will of God for our lives as revealed in His Word. The nature of a temptation is to present itself as more satisfying and acceptable and pleasurable than following God's path of promised everlasting life and joy. The purpose of a temptation is to derail and steer us away from God's perfect plan for our lives. The end goal of temptation is the destruction of our lives and ultimately of our soul. So the presence of temptation is always an occasion for the fight of faith. Temptation says, "Doubt God. Believe there is another, better way." Temptation has been that way since the beginning when the serpent questioned Eve, "Did God say? You will not surely die." And Adam and Eve gave in to temptation and discovered that temptations are always candy-coated lies and God always tells the truth.

In this life, we are faced with temptations each and every day. We are tempted from within by our own sinful desires that arise from time to time. We are tempted by thoughts, feelings, and imaginations. We are tempted to be negligent and apathetic when it comes to pursuing the things of God.

We are also tempted from without. The ways of the world appear enticing. Worldly mindsets and philosophies appear convincing. Pressure to align with the current trends of our culture seem overwhelming. Indulging sinful pleasures appear promising and satisfying.

There are thousands of pitfalls all around us every day dressed up as pathways to joy and happiness. If there is a much-needed lesson for believers, it is the lesson from Jesus on how to handle temptations.

- I. Realize the Reality of Temptations
  - a. "For it is necessary that temptations come." We have to first realize that temptations are real and present, all around us, every day. They are not options or other paths or different valid choices to the will of God. They are temptations to depart from the will of God.
    - i. They are necessarily present because we live in a fallen world. The way of the world will always be opposed to the way of God, for this world lies under the curse of sin.
    - ii. They are necessarily present because our sinful nature will always be at odds with God's path to peace and life.
      - 1. That's why temptations are so powerful. Voices from without and from within agree! Only the power of God can cut through the deceptive allure of temptation. Phil 4:13.
    - iii. They are necessarily present in order to provide occasions for obedience. It's when we are presented with a choice to disobey that we by faith can obey God and prove over and over again that His ways are the only true ways, the best ways.
    - iv. They are necessarily present as occasions to try and stretch and strengthen our faith. Each time we resist temptation and cling to the promises of God, our faith is deepened as we come to know real, life-giving, soul-saving satisfaction in Christ.
  - b. Temptations will always be with us in this life. Just because we pray against and fight against our inclinations to drift from God's will does not mean the temptation, the opportunity, to drift will vanish.
    - i. We get confused in this matter from time to time. We can wrongly think that victory over sin in our lives is equated with the absence of any temptation. That's not true. Victory is not the absence of the temptation. Victory is believing God and therefore not being swayed by or giving in to the temptation.
    - ii. We will always be fighting the fight of faith in this life because there will always be temptations in this life. They are necessarily present.
- II. Discern the Deception of Temptations

- a. A temptation would not be a temptation if it did not cause us to pause and consider another path. If it didn't appear pleasing and alluring, it wouldn't be a temptation.
- b. The nature of a temptation is that it looks pleasing, it appears satisfying, it promises happiness. But in the end, it is always decay and death. It always fails to deliver what it promises long term. The promises of sin are always short-lived. It always leads to harm and destruction.
- c. Jesus says, "Woe to the world for temptations to sin." That's a warning to the unbeliever who criticizes and chastises the Word of God.
  - i. The word "woe" in the Bible is the opposite of the word "blessed." Remember Jesus says in the beatitudes, Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. The word blessed means spiritual blessing, eternal blessing.
  - ii. Woe is the term for spiritual ruin, eternal ruin.
  - iii. Temptation leads to sin, and sin leads to woe, not blessing.
- d. But the woe of sin not only applies to temptation, it applies to the tempter as well – "woe to the one by whom the temptation comes."
- e. That woe, my friend, is not reserved solely for the unbeliever as the first woe in v7. This woe would include anyone who causes a believer to stumble or sin or doubt or drift from trusting in God and clinging to His promises.
- f. There is more than one way to put stumbling blocks in front of others to keep them from Christ or to cause them to doubt the faith.
  - i. The unbelieving world will persecute and ridicule and oppose and argue to dissuade trust in Christ.
  - ii. But even among those who profess to know Christ, who claim to be believers, we can become stumbling blocks to unbelievers and a hindrance to the faith of other believers.
  - iii. We do that when our life is inconsistent with our profession of faith. When we say Christ is our Treasure and yet prove by the way we live our treasure lies elsewhere. Does our talk and speech encourage faith or cause to stumble? Do our lives appear so enamored with the world that the Christian faith seems meaningless? If there is no distinct difference in our

lives and the lives of those who are apart from Christ then we are actually standing in the way of others coming to Christ!

- iv. Do we fight against sin or do we indulge it? Do we fight for our marriage or give up on it? Do we pursue holiness or pursue our selfish interests? Does the unbeliever see anything in our lives that would bring them to the conclusion that we must be a Christian? Are other believers surprised to find we claim to be Christian? Do we cause others to stumble on the path to God? Or are we making the case before the world that knowing Jesus is the greatest treasure of all?

### III. Fight Temptations with Drastic Measures

- a. Why would Jesus use such startling, barbaric language? If this were a movie it would be rated R for gore. What reason is there to speak of maiming yourself and gouging out an eye? Why so drastic?
- b. Jesus speaks of drastic measures in our fight against temptation and sin in order to highlight the drastic, dreadful consequences of not fighting sin and not resisting temptation.
- c. In other words, we must fight fire with fire! Unrepentant sin, ongoing indulgence and pleasure in sin are sure signs of unbelief! To continue to embrace temptation and flirt with sin indicate that one does not truly know Jesus – the all-satisfying treasure of the universe!
  - i. Psalm 107:9 – He satisfies the longing soul and the hungry soul  
He fills with good things.
- d. Temptation is not a jesting sidestep on the way to heaven. It is a diverging prison that enslaves and drags you down to the depths of hell. Sin wants more than your witness and profession. Sin wants more than your marriage and family. Sin wants more than your life and future. Sin wants your soul, and temptation is sin's invitation to eternal ruin.
- e. Therefore, Jesus warns not to flirt with sin or play with temptation. Don't see how close you can walk to the edge without falling in. Fight! Fight with all you have. Do whatever it takes to kill sin. Cut it off. Cut it out. Get away from it. Distance yourself. Don't play with fire or you will get burned.
- f. If your friend group leads you to sin, find a new friend group. If social media causes you to sin, delete your account. If your smart phone or

laptop provides you with occasion to sin, get a flip phone and throw your laptop in the garbage. If your co-worker is pulling you into an affair, get another job. Whatever is luring you to hell, cut it off. Gouge it out. Whatever sin promises you today, it's not worth eternal fire tomorrow.

- g. Do not be deceived! Take drastic measures NOW or what you think will bring you pleasure will soon bring you pain, and eventually lead you to the hell of fire. Every one of us should go home today and cut something out of our lives that tempts us to sin.
- h. Paul says it this way in Romans 8:13 – For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- i. Puritan theologian John Owen put it this way – Be killing sin or it will be killing you.

Conclusion – How to handle temptation. Realize the reality. Discern the deception. Take drastic measures. All that begins right here, right now, with repentance!