

Temptation #3

It has been called the turning point of the Revolutionary War. General Washington's troops were almost completely demoralized. They had been driven from New York by the superior British army. 90% of the Continental Army had either been captured or they had deserted. It was the middle of winter, and the comparatively few men that Washington had left were freezing and starving. Most of them didn't even have boots to protect their feet from the snowy ground. They had no food to eat. Morale couldn't have been lower. It seemed like the revolutionary cause had been lost. George Washington wrote to his cousin in Virginia, *I think the game is pretty near up*. And to add to the despair – it was Christmas. All the men could do was think of holiday memories being around a warm fire with their families while they were desperately trying to hang onto their sanity and lives.

It was at this lowest of all points that General Washington devised a daring plan. Some would say that he really had nothing to lose. But he was counting on the enemy being overconfident to the place where they would not be prepared. So General Washington led his men to cross the Delaware River on Christmas Day, 1776 to attack the city of Trenton, NJ. Because of the ice floating in the river, even the crossing was dangerous. It took 3 hours longer than Washington had planned for the men to get across. The last soldier didn't step out of the boat on dry ground until 3:00 in the morning the day after Christmas. *But at least the activity gave his soldiers something to take their minds off of their Christmas misery*, Washington reasoned.

Washington's calculations proved accurate. The German mercenaries who were holding the city of Trenton had partied hearty that Christmas day. When General Washington led his troops in attack the Hessians were nursing hangovers. In short order, two thirds of the German mercenaries were captured. And even more important, the Continental Army had shelter and supplies to make it through the harsh winter months. Morale was lifted and the Revolutionary War continued on. It could easily be argued that we are free people today because an army was not prepared for battle.

We have been looking at the subject of temptation during these past weeks. This is a critically important subject because we all face temptation in our lives. And temptation is like a battle. It is a spiritual battle. Just as it is important for an army to be prepared for conflict if it is to win the battle, so we must be prepared for temptation if we are to be victorious in the spiritual battles of life.

We have already seen that temptation is any circumstance or thought or inner desire that brings us to a point of moral decision in life. A temptation can be situational. We can be tempted by some unwelcome

circumstance that barges into our life. A temptation can be thoughtful. We can be tempted by a thought that springs into our minds. A temptation can be lustful. We can be tempted by an inner desire that we have. Whatever the source, temptation occurs when we are brought to a place of moral decision in our lives. We have already noted that temptation in itself is not sin. Even the sinless Lamb of God was tempted, but he never sinned. Temptation just brings us to the point of making a moral decision. If we accept the temptation into our lives and act upon it, then we sin. But if we reject the temptation and don't act upon it, our faith will grow and we will actually be stronger for having been tempted. In order to be ready for the inevitable temptation that we will all face, we must be prepared for it in advance.

Last week, we looked at positive preparations that we must make. As the Lord Jesus Christ was agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said to his disciples:

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."
(Matthew 26:41)

Jesus knew that he and his followers would only be prepared for the great temptation that was to come if they were watchful, alert, ready and prayerful, completely dependent upon the strength and power of Almighty God. Happily, the Lord Jesus Christ was prepared. He did watch and pray. He engaged the battle with the devil, the depravity of sin and death victoriously on the cross of Calvary. Sadly, the disciples were not prepared. They slept in the Garden of Gethsemane instead of watching and praying. They all fled the battlefield in fear and cowardice.

Now this morning, we want to look at 2 more preparations that we must make if we are to be prepared for temptation. These preparations are more negative in nature. They are what we must not do.

1. In Romans 13:12-14, the Apostle Paul writes:

¹² *The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.* ¹³ *Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.* ¹⁴ *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, **and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.***

Now we are going to look at the necessity of clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ in a couple of weeks, but this morning we want to focus on the negative part of this verse – not thinking about how to gratify the desires of our sinful natures. The KJV translates that last phrase, *do not make provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.*

The word that is translated *do not think about how to or make provision for* in the KJV has the idea of looking into the future and preparing for something to take place. It is the very same word that is used in 1 Timothy 5:8 where Paul wrote to the young church leader named Timothy *if any one does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

It is the responsibility of the leader in the household to anticipate the needs of the family and make adequate provisions for them. Children don't know what their needs are. Children don't know how to set up a budget or shop for enough nourishing food for the week or pay the mortgage bill. No, it's the responsibility of the parents to provide for the needs of the family. The parents anticipate the bills that need to be paid and then budget adequate money to pay them.

Now the process that happens in a positive sense with regards to parents meeting the needs of the family is the very same process that Paul is warning about in a negative sense with regard to temptation. We are not to make provision for the flesh. We are not to think ahead of how we might gratify sinful desires that we might have. We are not to look ahead and leave loopholes in our lifestyle so that we "accidentally" fall to temptation.

We shouldn't be like that young elementary student who lived on the farm. Every day the school bus dropped him about a quarter of a mile from his home and he had to walk by a pond to get to his house. The temptation was great on hot days to stop and swim for a while on his way home, but his mother didn't like him swimming all alone in the pond so she told him not to yield to this temptation. He promised that he wouldn't swim on the way home from school, but then he put his bathing suit on under his jeans.

Many times we are like that young boy. We know what we should and shouldn't do. And we vow that we will not succumb to temptation. But we leave some loopholes in our lifestyle just in case. This is making provision for the flesh. This is thinking ahead of how we can gratify our fleshly desires. When we do this, we are not preparing ourselves to be victorious over temptation, but we are rather already admitting the possibility of defeat in our minds.

The darkest time morally in the life of King David is an illustration of making provision for the flesh. David is presented as a model of a person who sought after God with all of his heart in the Bible. He wrote many of the songs that the Israelites not only sang 3,000 years ago but that we continue to sing even to this day. Many of our praise songs are taken right from the Psalms that David wrote. Yet David fell into a heinous, horrible sin because he made provision for the flesh. The story is a familiar one to many. It was the time of the year when Kings led their armies out for war. David decided this year to let General Joab do the honors of visiting the various countries surrounding Israel who were paying tribute to make sure those cards and letters continued to come in so the King had a lot of time on his hands with little to do. David noticed that a certain

beautiful woman would take a bath up on the rooftop of her house in the cool of the evening every day. Here is a view today from just about the place in Jerusalem where David's palace would have been. The King's palace would have been on the highest ground both for prestige and for the obvious practical matter of defensibility. You can see how easily David could have seen a woman bathing nearby on a rooftop. The King just happened to plan his schedule so that he would take his evening stroll on the roof of his palace when Bathsheba was taking her evening bath on her rooftop. David made a provision for his fleshly desires. He wasn't prepared for temptation. Ultimately his lack of spiritual preparation resulted in his succumbing to the sins of both adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.

In order to be prepared for temptation, the Bible says we must not make provision for our flesh. We must not prepare in advance to fulfill ungodly desires. This might mean we must avoid certain places at certain times as it would have meant in King David's situation. It might mean to we stop associating with certain people who consistently try to be a negative influence on us in our temptations. It might mean that we avoid reading certain magazines or watching certain TV programs. It might mean that we change the room our computer is in so that it is in a public area for accountability. But whatever we need to do, we need to make sure that we aren't making provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.

You see, we cannot plan to almost be victorious in temptation. This just doesn't work. I fear that many people obviously don't want to be bound and enslaved by sin, but they don't mind having a little of it around in their lives. They feel that some sin brings a spice and excitement to them. So while they never would want to be enslaved by sin, they make some provisions for some sin in their lives.

Now we are never going to come to the place of sinless perfection in this life. The Apostle John wrote that the person who claims to be without sin is a liar and the truth is not in him. But our goal has got to be to be completely victorious over temptation if we are to be prepared for battle with it. The sports team that just desires to be respectable and not get beaten too badly is never going to win a championship. It's the sports team that sets up the goal to win the championship that has the opportunity to do it. Now not every team that sets up its goal to win the championship will end up wearing the ring at the end of the year – some will fail to achieve the goal. But a team won't even have a chance to ride in the victory parade if they don't set that goal in the first place. So we must not make provision for the flesh in order to be prepared for temptation.

2. But let's move to another negative preparation found in Ephesians 4. READ Ephesians 4:25-27:

EPH 4:25 *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* ²⁶ *"In your anger do not sin" : Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,* ²⁷ ***and do not give the devil a foothold.***

The KJV translates verse 27, *Neither give place to the devil.*

This word translated *foothold* or *place* literally means an area of land. Paul is telling us not to give a portion of our land to the devil. Don't give him a place to live in our lives. Don't give him a little corner where he feels at home. Don't give him an area where he can have an influence on us. Don't give him a hold or handle in our lives.

How do we give a part of our ground to the devil? We do this by not giving all of our ground to the Lord Jesus Christ. We do this by not allowing Jesus Christ to be Lord over every single part of our life. If Jesus Christ is not Lord over our entire life, the devil becomes a squatter on that portion of land.

In most 3rd world countries where I have visited they have squatter issues. A squatter is a person who moves onto land that isn't his. Most 3rd world countries don't have the large middle class that we have here in American. In most 3rd world countries people are either very rich or very poor. The rich own most of the land. Much of the land they might never use and seldom even see. So a poor person or family can move onto a portion of that land and sometimes live there for years without the rightful owner even knowing about it. This is so common in most 3rd world countries that they actually have laws that if a squatter has been living on some portion of land for many years, they have some legal rights and cannot be immediately thrown off that land.

Now the devil has no rightful place in any Christian's life. In fact, the devil has no rightful place in any person's life. The devil hasn't created anything. The devil is just like a squatter who moves in and tries to take over a portion of God's land. If a Christian doesn't allow Jesus Christ to be Lord over every part of his or her life, the devil will try to exert influence in that area. As he exerts influence time and time again, he eventually gets a foothold or a place there in a person's life. In that area, the person becomes very vulnerable to temptation. The Bible says that we are not to give any foothold or place to the devil in our lives. If we do, we are not properly prepared for temptation.

Scott Bream, Jim Orlander, Mike Russell, Jeff Wetherby and Bruce Tanner are all scouts for the Detroit Tigers. Even though they are employed by the organization, they rarely even see the Tigers play. They are always watching the teams that the Tigers are going to play sometime in the future, later this week or next week. They watch the games of the upcoming opponents and make copious notes of any observations that they see. They write down the batters who are hot and the batters who are not. That way, Jim Leyland will

know which batters to intentionally walk and which batters to pitch to in critical situations. The observations that the scouts make that are very important to the Tiger pitchers are the weaknesses of the batters. If an opposing player has trouble hitting a low, inside curve ball, that is duly noted by the scouts. When the Tigers play this team and this batter comes up to the plate in a critical situation, the Tiger pitcher will likely throw a low, inside curve ball if he needs a critical out. The more weaknesses that the Tigers know about the opposing team, the more of an advantage they have over them. This is the reason for the Detroit Tigers' organization employing 5 men full-time just to continually scout the opposing teams that they will soon play.

If God's enemy has a foothold or place in our lives, he continually has access to a weak area. Whenever he needs to, he can tempt us in that area likely with success. So when we are growing in our Christian life and he wants to thwart that growth, he can go to his sure area of temptation. When we are joyful and he wants to bring discouragement, he can go to his sure area of temptation. When we are bearing fruit and he wants to hinder it, he can go to his sure area of temptation. The only way to stop this kind of influence is to make sure that God's enemy does not have a foothold or place in our lives. If we allow him to have a place, we will not be prepared to be victorious in temptation.

In order to be victorious in the temptations of life, we must be prepared for battle.

*Being prepared means being watchful and prayerful. We need to always be alert to the possibility of temptation and we need to be dependent upon God for his strength in facing it. Jesus told his disciples *to watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation.*

*Being prepared means not making provision for the flesh. Romans 13:14 tells us to *not make provisions for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

*Being prepared means not allowing the devil to have a foothold or place in our lives. Paul commanded the church at Ephesus to *not give the devil a foothold.*

Are you prepared for the temptations of life this next week?