

- **\*READ 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8\*** In what is a part of our main focus Text for this year, we find the Apostle Paul both commending the Thessalonians for their faithful walking in such a way that is pleasing to God and encouraging them to pursue furthered excellence in all that they did. The context of these verses zeroes in twice upon the concept of sanctification. **(vv.3,7)** To be sanctified is to be seen as set apart, holy, and pure, being free of sin. Paul's desire is that these brethren continue to live as a set apart, holy, and pure people who are free of sin. The specific sin being addressed in this text is sexual sin, but we will save that study and discussion for a later time.
- For this study, I would like to instead expand Paul's admonitions for excelling in sanctification to the broader sense of sin in general. Our focus for this year is on the idea given in this text of learning to excel still more in all that we do. When we come to faith in Christ Jesus, we begin a process wherein we are changed and transformed by our interactions with the Bible and its teachings. We come to know more about Jesus and His desires for the type of character that we are to have as His disciples. That knowledge then leads to our actions becoming different, and all of this is done with the hope that we do become sanctified, set apart from those of the world who live without faith.
- Additionally, as we grow in our faiths, the goal is for us to pursue to a point of excellence in all that we do, and even if we think that we have become excellent...we are encouraged to pursue even greater excellence in what we do. All of these things are true when it comes to the temptations and sins that we face in this life. If we want to truly be excellent in the eyes of God then we must be that sanctified people. We must be holy, pure, and free of the guilt of sin. In order to be excellent in overcoming temptation and sin, I believe there are at least five key things that we must know and be committed to doing as we make our way through this life as disciples of Jesus Christ. These five keys will be the focus of our considerations this morning.

## **5 Keys To Excelling Against Temptation & Sin**

### **I. Know what temptation and sin are.**

- A. If we are going to overcome temptation and sin then we must begin by knowing what exactly those things are. It would make no sense to give effort to defeat and overcome that which we don't even know. Thankfully, the Bible is plain and clear by informing us what these two things are. God, in His wisdom, knew that we would be well served in knowing what temptation and sin are so that we would have a better chance in identifying and overcoming them in our efforts to become sanctified disciples of Jesus Christ.
- B. James has a lot to say about temptation and sin in **James 1:13-15**. The word "temptation" itself isn't an inherently negative term. It simply means something that we desire. I might say something like how I am tempted to grab a piece of pie after supper. That pie looks really tasty and it is tempting me to snag up a piece to enjoy. There is obviously nothing wrong in that type of desire and temptation, but there are other things that we might desire that are wrong that tempt us which is why we do most often associate temptation with something bad. Temptation is something that we experience, and it is an opportunity for us to make decisions as to what we will do with the freedom of choice that God has given us. If temptations center around our desires then when we see something that we want, we are presented with the opportunity to either take hold of it for ourselves and enjoy it or to deny that desire. This is temptation.
- C. Now, this morning I'm not too worried about being tempted by a piece of pie after supper. I'm concerned only with those temptations are lead us to sin, and we are led to sin by temptation in this way according to James, *"But each is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."* (**James 1:14,15**) The picture given by James is very simple. Each of us have

desires that we might wish to fulfill. It is at the point when we have opportunity to fulfill those desires that we can say we are being tempted. When opportunity, desire, and action come together...well then sin has been produced, but what exactly is sin? According to **I John 3:4**, sin is defined as lawlessness. Sin is the breaking of God's law, and any desire we have that is against the will of God has potential to overcome us if we are not strong against those desires and temptations. Simply knowing what those desires are and knowing the sin that follows them will go a long way in helping us to overcome temptation and sin. And yet, there is more in **James 1:15** that helps to encourage us to be strong to overcome temptation and sin.

## II. Know what temptation and sin do.

- A. Temptations seek to draw us towards our own desires that are against the will of God, and the end result of us giving into those temptations could not be any worse for us. James make it clear that sin leads to death! This is something that we see time and time throughout the Biblical text even back to the very beginning. We all know well the events that took place in the Garden of Eden in **Genesis 3**. We could go back to see the law laid down by God that Adam and Eve were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (**Genesis 2:16,17**) He even plainly states that the day they ate of the tree...they would die. This principle is repeated both through teaching and example throughout the Bible, and we are taught as disciples the importance of not sinning so that we will not incur the punishment of death. (**Romans 6:23**)
- B. Yet, what death are we talking about? Is sin so bad because when we commit sin then we are instantaneously killed? We have to admit that this was sometimes the case in Scripture. Nadab and Abihu, Uzzah, and Ananias and Sapphira all stand out as examples of this very thing happening. Nadab and Abihu were struck dead for offering strange fire to the Lord. (**Leviticus 10:1,2**) Uzzah was struck dead for his unauthorized touching of the ark of the covenant. (**II Samuel 6:7**) Ananias and Sapphira were each struck dead for their lying to the Apostles and God about the money they had given. (**Acts 5:1-10**)
- C. Yes, people were immediately killed for their sin and disobedience to God, but that type of punishment is the exception and not the rule. There are plenty of other examples where sin was committed, and yet people were not struck dead. This must lead us to the understanding that the death that is brought on by sin is a spiritual death wherein we are separated from God. According to **I John 1:5-7** our fellowship with God is contingent on our willingness to walk in the light and not sin. Therefore, any decision to walk in the darkness of sin would lead us to be separated from God in fellowship. Sure there are often temporal consequences of sin, but the true harm of sin lies in the fact that we are no longer in fellowship with God. Knowing this disastrous consequence should serve as a strong influence for us to overcome temptation and sin.

## III. Know who desires for us to sin.

- A. Further, coming to know who it is that desires for us to be tempted and sin is another step in being motivated to overcome such things. Back in **James 1:13**, we are told by James that it is not God who seeks for us to be tempted. God only wants to bless us in such ways that He is glorified through our actions, and He would not be glorified in the situation where we are tempted and eventually sin. Instead, we must recognize that there is only one who seeks for us to be tempted so as to sin and that one is Satan.
- B. It is he who is described in **I Peter 5:8** as a roaring lion who is seeking someone to devour. It is he who was in the beginning with Adam and Eve who sought to distort the will and commands of God in their minds so that they might sin. (**Genesis 3:1-5**) It is Satan the father of lies (**John 8:44**) who continues to try to deceive to us in many different ways today by dangling fulfilled desires and worldly pleasures in front of our eyes as a means of tempting us to sin and be separated from God.

He does such a thing because he knows that he has already lost this spiritual war against God and the forces of good. He knows that the only thing that awaits him is the eternal fire that has been prepared for him and his followers. **(Matthew 25:41)**

- C. There is nothing about Satan's desires for us that is for our good! He certainly doesn't want for us to be sanctified in the eyes of God. That is something only God wants, and He seeks to lead us to such sanctification through His commandments in how we are to live. God's commandments and will are not burdensome and for our good **(I John 5:3)**, everything that Satan wants us to do is to our detriment. He only wants for us to be spiritually destroyed and burned with him in hell. He knows that he can cause that to happen if we will give into his temptations of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. **(I John 2:15-17)** If we will know and always remember that it is the devil who is at the root of the temptations that face us then we will hopefully remember that he only desires for our destruction and it is God who wants for us to be saved through our willingness to be set apart from the sin of the world.

#### **IV. Value the eternal over the temporal**

- A. Having a knowledge of what temptation and sin are, what they do to us, and who wants those negative things to come upon us...we will shift our attention to what we need to do with this knowledge. Knowing that sin, though rooted in our own desires, only leads us to ruin...we must learn to develop a mindset and attitude where we are willing to forgo temporary pleasure in order to obtain eternal joy and happiness with God in heaven. It is Satan's desire to entice us to sacrifice fellowship with God in order to enjoy some passing pleasure that is available to us in this life.
- B. However, it is God's desire that we recognize that Satan is only ripping us off when we give into such a deal as he offers. God wants for us to come to understand and accept that what Satan is offering is nothing compared to what God offers us. Satan offers temporary pleasure that we can experience right here and right now if we will only sacrifice an eternity of joyous perfection in the future with God in heaven. I'm no Deal Or No Deal expert, but I'm pretty sure that the deal being offered to us by God is so much better than what Satan tries to trick us into doing when we give into temptation and sin. It sure didn't work out for Adam and Even and it wont work for us either.
- C. Therefore, it is God's desire that we learn to be like the Apostle Paul and imitate his mindset of being willing to endure the momentary light afflictions of this life in order to experience the full eternal weight of glory that awaits for the faith in the next life. **(II Corinthians 4:17,18)** I fully recognize that it is easy for us to get sucked into the mindset where we focus only on what is in front of us and embracing it to the fullest degree, but we must, again, remember the words of Paul and set our minds on things above and not on the things that are right here an now. **(Colossians 3:2)** Yes, that will mean that we sacrifice some physical pleasure, monetary gain, personal pride, or anything else of this earth, but we are willing to do so because we know that we will gain so much more in the eternal life to come. If we will learn to value the eternal glory of heaven and those spiritual blessings over anything this world has to offer then we will have a major advantage over Satan and any temptation and sin he might throw our way

#### **V. Grow in our dependence upon God.**

- A. When it comes to overcoming temptation and sin, we must readily acknowledge the truth that is found in **I Corinthians 10:13**, *"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."* There are a few points that I want for us to recognize from this text.
- A. Firstly, let's notice that all of us are tempted. This is the reason for the importance of this lesson in the lives one each of us. No one is exempt from the temptations of this life that are thrown at us by Satan and his evil workers.

- B. Secondly, God is with us when we are tempted. He seeks to aid us when we are tempted to the degree that He won't allow for us to ever face a temptation that we cannot overcome. This isn't to say that we won't face real heart wrenching temptations, but it is saying that we will always have the choice of whether or not we will give into the temptations.
- C. Thirdly and most importantly, we find within this verse the recipe for success against temptation. That recipe is simply: Seek the way of escape that God provides. At the heart of our struggle in overcoming temptation and the sin that results from the temptation is our willingness to allow God to dictate how we think and what we do. Any effort outside of allowing God's will to rule in our lives will only result in being overcome by temptation and sin.
- B. All of this put together means that we must learn to lean upon God more and more as we move forward in this life because there will never come a time when we will not need God to overcome temptations and sin. By ourselves we are weak and vulnerable, but with God all things are possible...most especially our ability to overcome sin within our lives. There might be a temptation to think that the older we get, the stronger we get, and the less we need God...but this is utter foolishness! It isn't that we become stronger and need God less...instead it is that we grow wiser and realize just how much more we need God each and every day. As we grow, we come to acknowledge how much more we need Him and how much more we will allow for Him to come into our hearts and shape us into exactly what He would have us to be.
- C. Those prayers for wisdom that we should be offering up when we face trials and temptations (**James 1:2-5**) should only yield further realizations on our part of how much we continue to need God. Satan is not going to give up just because we have grown older and more mature in our faith. In fact, he would only love to ratchet up the temptations in order to cause an experienced disciple to fail and bring shame upon God and His people. Therefore, if we want to continue to excel in our ability to overcome temptation, then we must continue to learn to lean more and more upon God, and through doing so we will be further strengthened to overcome temptation and sin.

There is much that can be said about becoming excellent in our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, but much of it comes down to whether or not we are willing to overcome temptation and put away the sin that separates us from God in order to become holy and sanctified people of God. It is only through our sanctification that we can truly be excellent, and it is only through God that we can find the strength and ability to be sanctified. May each of us be reminded this day of God's will for our sanctification, and may we all be even more committed to living sanctified and excellent lives for Him so that we might be blessed with the ability spend an eternity with Him in heaven forevermore.