

White Stone Ministry

Responding to Temptation by David Kyle Foster

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St. Frances de Sales once wrote: "All the temptations of hell do not stain the soul who does not love them." It's a terrible moment when we discover that we love the things that God hates, and all the more horrible to realize that there's nothing we can do about it except throw ourselves on the mercy of God. Thus God uses our plight to crucify our flesh. The only way to handle this insufferable condition is to embrace the humiliation of death to self and yield ourselves to God as vessels of God's Spirit.

It begins with receiving freely the grace of God through Christ's work on our behalf and ends the same way. We never actually become self-contained agents of righteousness, but rather become containers of His righteousness. Galatians 2:20 says it plainly: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul later adds in Romans 6:6-7: ". . . our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

Let's look then at the very practical ways that God has given us to respond to temptation.

1. Reckon Yourself Dead to Sin and Alive to Christ

(Romans 6:11)

It's important to understand that it is not a sin to be tempted. It becomes sin only when we embrace the temptation with our mind and allow it to remain. The longer we allow it to remain, the more power it gains to stay and to cause us to act. Doing nothing is in itself a transgression - like getting your tax form in the mail but refusing to fill it out.

When temptation comes knocking at the door of the mind, we need to act. And one of the most effective ways to respond is by reckoning ourselves dead to it. To reckon means to accept as a fact for yourself and in your own experience.

Being "dead to sin" does not imply "inaction". We are at the same time to be "alive to Christ" That suggests a proactive response. When the temptation comes, say, "Sorry, you're talking to a dead man. There is no place in me for you - rather I am filled with Christ and the power of His righteousness! My old man is not here, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is. Would you like to talk to Him?" Then wield your sword of the Spirit and quote a little scripture - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil1:21). Then turn your mind and heart away from the temptation and ignore it. "Set your mind on things above....For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:1-3).

2. Take Every Thought Captive!

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

What was just described is one of the many ways of "taking every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ". We enshroud evil thoughts in a coffin by reckoning ourselves dead to them and by handing them over to God to be cremated by the fire of His Holy presence. You see, God has given us powerful weapons against the enemy - weapons that have "divine power to demolish strongholds". Notice the choice of words in this passage - DEMOLISH! We are not hopeless, fated victims of some pervasive evil power. What is available to us is total annihilation of the enemy in every battle. Galatians 5:16 couldn't be more clear: "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." 2nd Peter tells us that God's divine power has given us everything we need for godliness through our knowledge of Him. We must believe this! The powerful things of the Kingdom of God only manifest when we call them present by faith.

Aggressive spiritual warfare prayer is often the response that God will urge us to employ. In the Old Testament, we see a picture of how we are to engage the enemies of our soul, in God's command to the Israelites to utterly annihilate every enemy - even those who did not appear to pose a threat - as they entered the Promised Land. There can be no compromise in this battle with sin. We must be ruthless and aggressive in our response to temptation, having decided in advance that giving in to temptation is no longer an option and never will be, ever again. What is most important is not the flawless realization of the commitment, but the sincere determination in our heart that it is the goal toward which we will inexorably move the rest of our days, as God empowers us. When we refuse to be ruthless with evil, it grows strong again and eventually leads us back into idolatry, just as the enemies of Israel did after they refused to obey God's command. Take no prisoners!

3. Be Aware of Satan's Schemes.

(2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11)

Satan sets us up in advance. That's one of his schemes. He gets us to compromise in the little matters of life over a period of time (lying to the wife, cheating on the taxes, spreading rumors about someone, briefly entertaining lustful thoughts, etc.). In many small ways, he tills the ground of our heart so that when he finally sends the big temptation, it takes root in our heart and we fall. That is why being faithful in small things is so important. We must commit to remaining faithful to God even in the small temptations of life that seem so innocuous when they appear. We must commit to holiness across the board. No more supermarket shopping for holiness -i.e., "I'll take some of this, but not some of that." We must commit to saying "Yes" in every area that the Holy Spirit addresses in our lives and learn to use the tools that He gives us to make it possible.

Another scheme of the enemy is how he uses the darkness in which he operates to confuse us. As a result, we often don't know what's happening to us. Sometimes we think it's Satan when it's not.

When temptation comes with great power, out of blue, and you cannot tie its coming to your thoughts and actions prior to that moment, it is most likely a demonic attack. These come without provocation. They come uninvited. Yet they come with an element of power that can be frightening.

It's important to recognize when temptation comes from a demonic attack because how you respond in such a moment is important. Your response usually needs to be aggressive spiritual warfare-style counter-attack. Command that the demonic powers leave in the name of Jesus Christ and go where He sends them!

Since God never lets you be tempted beyond what you are able to withstand, (1 Cor 10:13), if He has allowed the enemy to tempt you, it is because He knows that you have learned enough to respond victoriously. In such a case, God is actually giving you the opportunity to grow stronger, to be more filled, more experienced, more bold in the things of the Kingdom. It is an opportunity to grow in righteousness and be used by God to take more ground for the Kingdom of God. Seeing such moments as opportunities for growth turns the tables on Satan's scheme and helps DEMOLISH his stronghold in that area.

We must also recognize that not all temptation comes from Satan. Out of our own heart comes plenty of evil (Mt 15:19; James 1:13-15). A temptation that has come from your own heart usually does not appear with blindsiding power. It emerges more slowly and naturally and can be tied to your thoughts and behavior prior to the moment -e.g., what you've been reading, watching, doing, setting your mind on, etc.

The response to temptation from the heart is therefore different. Rather than spiritual warfare prayer, the proper response is sorrow and repentance - grieving over what remains within you that is in opposition to God and deciding not to give it any consideration. Ask for God's mercy and His power to overcome what still attracts you. Ask Him to transform your heart and mind, to give you a greater love of Him than what has tempted you.

Ask Him to fill you with a love of purity and righteousness and a hatred for sin. Ask and keep asking. The answer to such a prayer is a lifelong process.

Get mad at sin and evil! Recognize the damage that it has inflicted in your life and the devastation that it wreaks on people throughout the world, leading most of them into eternal damnation. That same devil that is tempting you to lie or to look at someone to lust after them is the same devil that is stirring up men's hearts to torture and murder innocent children, destroying lives, killing, raping and hating everything that God loves. Determine in your heart, that by God's power, you will never again get in bed with that devil, no matter how small his lure! What we're really talking about here is growing up and becoming mature in Christ.

4. Loving Him More

The Apostle Paul prayed that the eyes of our heart might be enlightened so that we would know the hope to which He has called us, the riches of His glorious inheritance and His incomparably great power for us who believe. (Eph 1:18-19)

God has something better than the sinful baubles that Satan offers. Evil is just so much cheap jewelry, giving image without substance. We need to realize that when he tempts us, we are being lied to, we are being sold a bill of goods, we are being made fools.

God has something infinitely better. Not only do we get the riches of His glorious inheritance, we get Him. We get intimate relationship with the One who shed His blood for us. We get to marry the knight in shining armor and live with Him forever. We get the unmatched privilege, honor and comfort of His unending and unfailing love. Reminding ourselves of these facts each time we are tempted will motivate us to say "No" to ungodliness.

When we are tempted, it really comes down to one simple question: "Who do you love more in this moment - the One who gave His life for you or the pitiful excuse for a option that has come to take you away from Him?" When you see things in their proper perspective, the choice becomes obvious.

Love is more than just a feeling. It is the sum of the choices we make day in and day out to love God more than the things of the world.

5. Being Both Lion and Lamb

Jesus modeled this perfectly. In relation to His Father, He was the Lamb of God. He did only what His Father told Him. His posture toward God was yielded, dependent and obedient. However, in relation to the rest of creation, He was the Lion of Judah. His posture was one of aggressive leadership. He exercised dominion, authority and leadership by employing the tools given Him by the Father. He was weak before His Father and strong against the kingdom of darkness.

We need to follow Jesus' lead. We need to be weak and yielded before God, operating only by His direction and only by His empowerment. Yet toward the kingdom of darkness, we must be strong and aggressive and commanding. We must take up our calling as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God and stewards of all that He has given us. As God said in Genesis 3:7, sin is crouching at the door, desiring to have us, but we must master it.

6. Let God Operate on You

Satan takes advantage of brokenness. He lies to us in the midst of it, telling us that God doesn't care, that we are hopelessly unlovable, unforgivable and defective. He stirs up anger, judgment and condemnation in us toward God and those who have hurt us. He puts a fear of intimacy in us in the aftermath of failed relationships. Then he persuades us that to be accepted, we have to put on a mask and pretend to be happy and successful and without need of counsel or healing. He puts the fear of man's opinion in us and causes us to ignore the fear of God's.

Jesus Christ wants to change all that. He wants us to learn the truth and not be afraid of His presence. He wants us to take action against the lies, the sin and the unholy strongholds that make us vulnerable to fall. The Hollywood image of the strong, self-reliant man who needs no

help is a lie. We need help and in order to get it, we must humble ourselves and admit our need before God and those He has placed around us in the body.

We must come before Him with the attitude, "I will do whatever it takes, Father. Show me the way and give me the tools, and I will respond." With that posture, God can do miracles. In your moments of worship, scripture reading and prayer, He will begin to unfold the source of your weakness and His provision for your healing and transformation. He'll show you how to break the rituals of addictive behavior, how to forgive, how to wield His power for righteousness, and all the brilliant things of the Kingdom of Heaven. He will fulfill His promise in Ezekiel 36:25-27:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws."