

# OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

## *I Corinthians 10:12–14*

It was the 19th century Irish wit Oscar Wilde who confessed what many have thought over the years: “I can resist anything but temptation.” No one can resist smiling knowingly not only at the irony in that statement—but also at the reality of it.

Temptation is an ever-present factor in the life of every human being. From our forebears Adam and Eve down to the present day, the failure to resist temptation has been the source of countless tears of regret.

Temptation has captured the lives of many people. We must learn to defeat temptation if we are to walk victoriously in the spiritual life.

Fortunately, God has provided a way of escape from temptation. The apostle Paul wrote about that way in the passage of Scripture *I Corinthians 10:12–14*. I don’t know with certainty why Paul penned these specific words to the Christians living in Corinth, but it must have had something to do with the rampant wickedness in that city.

Corinth was a seaport, a crossroads in the Mediterranean world and, as such, was home to every vice known to man. Paul may have written this particular part of his first letter to the church at Corinth to help them defeat temptation in their own lives.

That reasoning makes his words particularly applicable to us today. We live in a society not unlike Corinth. Every conceivable temptation flaunts itself daily in our culture, and far too many Christians have become statistics in the war against sin. We need Paul’s words about escaping temptation as desperately as did the Corinthian believers.

Paul starts by helping us understand the commonality of temptation. No one is free from temptation, which means we must face it as a constant foe, no matter who we are.

### **THE COMMON EXPERIENCE OF TEMPTATION (*10:13A*)**

Paul begins by saying that no Christian experiences a unique temptation; all temptation is common to man. Somehow we get the idea that the temptations we face are unique; that no one else has ever faced the particular kind of pressure we feel. That is not true, Paul says. Temptation is the common enemy of every person on earth. There are no unique situations which would excuse us from the requirement to resist temptation and defeat it.

Scripture illustrates this truth from Genesis to Revelation. Abraham lied about his wife. Noah became intoxicated. David committed murder and adultery. Jonah rebelled against God. Peter denied the Lord Jesus. John Mark gave up on his missionary commitment. Paul and Barnabas became cross with one another. And even the Lord Jesus Himself was tempted—just as we are. The important thing to remember from Jesus’ temptation is that temptation is not sin. Though He was tempted, He was also without sin (*Hebrews 4:15*).

Temptation is exposure to the possibility of doing the wrong thing. Such exposure is not sin; it is not the same as doing the wrong thing, which is sin. The Bible offers no hope that temptation is going to go away, but it does offer hope for resisting temptation.

In fact, the longer we walk with the Lord and grow in maturity, the more intense and subtle the temptations seem to become. Satan seems to work overtime in devising traps and devices by which we might fall. We will not defeat temptation this side of heaven, but we can defeat him.

Kenneth Taylor, who wrote *The Living Bible*, paraphrased **verse 13** like this: ***“Remember this: the wrong desires that come into your life aren’t anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you.”*** So remember that temptation is common to you, to me, and to every believer. It is to be expected, so let’s prepare for it and plan for its defeat.

## **THE CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT OF TEMPTATION (10:13B)**

One of the greatest truths about temptation is found in the last part of **verse 13**. If every believer in Christ could internalize this truth our battles with temptation would result in far more victories: Temptation occurs in an environment controlled by God, That is, the temptations God allows you to experience are not more than you can resist. You do not have to give in and sin.

God knows what our strength is, what our limitations are. Whenever I hear someone say, “It was more than I could handle,” I know that is not true. Because the Word of God says all temptation is under God’s control and He does not give us more than we can resist with His help.

A good example of this in Paul’s life is the experience he described in **II Corinthians 1:8–10**. He described himself as being tested beyond his own strength, and yet not beyond God’s ability to deliver him. That is the core truth of Scripture regarding temptation as stated in **verse 13**.

Most people would prefer that life be free of temptations. But here is what would happen if that were true: You would never be able to demonstrate your great love for the Lord Jesus Christ. You would be kept from showing your loyalty to Almighty God and His holy principles as opposed to the things of the world.

If we were simply automatons who were programmed to know God and to love God, God would receive no glory from our decisions to resist temptation and obey Him instead. When we resist temptation, God is glorified in our choices. Even though He gives us aid through the power of His Spirit, to resist or not is still our choice. And He is either glorified or not, depending on our choice.

## **THE CERTAIN ESCAPE FROM TEMPTATION (10:13C)**

When we are tempted, God sees the end of the temptation (our escape) at the same time He sees the beginning of the temptation. When the test begins, God knows the way out. He doesn’t figure it out as we go along. Because Christ Himself was tempted, ***“He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18)***. He is able to come to our aid immediately when we are tempted because He has already “been there and done that.” He knows the way of escape and has it ready for us.

One of the things I have been learning as I get older is that temptation is not so much a matter of what we don’t do as much as a matter of who we love. When we come to know the Lord Jesus, and we cultivate within our hearts a relationship of intimacy with Him, that in itself will keep us from many faults and many sins.

His heroic image as the One who knew no sin becomes a powerful beacon for us. His ways of escape become ours through the indwelling of His Spirit. When we are living in fellowship with Him daily, it is hard to consider grieving Him, our Lord and best friend, by giving in to temptation. He becomes more than a preacher of do’s and don’t’s—He becomes the way of escape who is always with us.

One further admonition born of experience: With every temptation we ever face there is a point when we know the way of escape is before us. If we choose not to take it, it will not be there later. There is **“a way”** (singular) of escape. We must take it when God shows it to us. Not to take it is an indication that we didn't want to escape to begin with, which raises another level of concern about our desire to obey God in the first place.

The word **“escape”** which Paul uses was sometimes used in Greek to describe a very narrow passage through which one passed—like the steep walls of a canyon which defined a very narrow passage through a rugged bit of terrain. The way of escape is like that. It is a single, narrow choice which must be made.

There are not alternate ways out of that canyon of temptation. If we are going to get out, we have to take the one path that is provided. To turn and go a different way means being stuck in that place of temptation with no other escape.

***Here are seven practical suggestions which I have found will help you choose the way of escape God provides and defeat temptation.***

### ***Recognize the Possibility of Temptation***

The first indication that a person is setting himself up for a fall into sin is when he thinks he is beyond temptation. In **verse 12**, Paul states the case clearly: **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”** The person who says, “That could never happen to me,” is the most likely candidate to sin. **“Pride goeth before destruction,”** says the **King James Version (Proverbs 16:18)**.

A seminary professor who is a friend of mine kept track of ministers and students who failed in the ministry due to sexual temptation. When his list reached more than 100 names, he suddenly realized the common element. In all but two cases, he said, those on the list had been characterized by pride. Woe to the person who pridefully believes he is immune from any temptation.

### ***Request Help in Advance of Temptation***

Twice our Lord taught His disciples about the power of prayer as a defense against temptation (**Matthew 6:13a; 26:41**). Our daily prayer should be that God would protect us that day from the temptations which might enter our path. We should ask Him to make us sensitive, discerning, and aware of the very subtle traps the enemy might set. No soldier enters battle and then stops to sharpen his sword. Likewise, the best preparation for spiritual conflict is accomplished before the battle begins.

### ***Resist the Devil and He Will Flee from You***

James says that if we resist the devil he will flee from us. But the prior condition for that resistance is our submission to God (**James 4:7**). A key factor in resisting the devil is to submit to the Word of God as Jesus did in resisting Satan's temptations in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–14**). At the end of that period, when Jesus relied on verses from Deuteronomy to resist the devil's advances, the Bible says the devil **“departed from Him.”** He will also depart from any believer who submits to the Word of God in resisting temptation.

## ***Retreat from Certain Kinds of Temptation***

Resisting temptation is always our responsibility, but how we do that can vary. One of the ways Scripture admonishes us to do that is to retreat—run from temptation. There are three kinds of temptation from which we should retreat quickly.

### **1. We are to retreat from idolatry**

We are to flee from idolatry (***1 Corinthians 10:14***). An idol is anything that gets between you and God. While our idols may not be figurines sitting on a shelf in our home, there are certainly plenty of things which we are inclined to “worship” if given the opportunity. Flee from those things.

### **2. We are to retreat from immorality**

Twice the New Testament commands us to flee from immorality (***1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22***). This is the most dangerous area of temptation because of the power of sexual attraction. It is a deception to think we can toy around with temptation in this area and come out unscathed.

We are to imitate Joseph in the Old Testament who literally ran out of his master’s house when he was being tempted by his master’s wife—leaving his coat in her hands! (***Genesis 39***)

### **3. We are to retreat from greed**

***First Timothy 6:10–11*** says we are to flee greed. The pursuit of material things, the never-ending temptation to seek more, more, more, is what Paul warns against in this passage. Material things can become idols which come between us and God. The lure for mammon is so strong that Paul says to flee from it.

## ***Remove Any Means of Sin Far from You***

We have a responsibility not to make ourselves available to temptation. One man who was trying to lose weight decided he would only stop at the bakery if God provided a parking place directly in front of the store. A space became available on his eighth trip around the block. That’s not exactly demonstrating a high level of commitment to resisting temptation, is it? Yet how often do we find ourselves creating similar scenarios as we toy with temptation?

***Romans 13:14*** says to “***make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts***” (***Romans 13:14***). Instead of setting ourselves up for failure we should set ourselves up for victory. Don’t put yourself in a position where it’s impossible not to sin. Put yourself in a place where it’s not possible to sin by removing the means of sin far from you.

## ***Replace Bad Influences with Good Ones***

***Proverbs 13:20*** says, “***He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.***” There is a definite tension involved in our lives as believers. On one hand we want to spend our time around godly people who will influence us and move us in the direction of maturity in Christ.

On the other hand, if Christians are the only people we spend time with, how will non-Christians be won to Christ? The records of history are replete with multitudes of cases of well-meaning Christians being diverted from their standards of holiness in Christ by temptations encountered in their relationships with non-Christians. We must maintain accountability with other believers who can help us monitor our relationships.

Who is having the most influence? Am I influencing this person for Christ or is this person influencing me toward the world and sin?

It is obviously the right thing to do to reach out to those who don't know Christ, or even Christians who are less mature and still struggling to overcome the world. But if you become trapped in a web of deceit and sin because of your involvement, it needs to stop until you can regain perspective and maintain accountability for your own life and standards in Christ. You need to replace bad influences with good ones.

### ***Resolve to Live on the High Road***

If you are a Christian already you need to resolve to get off the low road of commitment and live permanently on the high road. The high road is not free of temptation or spiritual pitfalls. But it is the road by which you are committed to taking the way of escape God provides in times of testing. You will be tested, and there will be a way of escape provided. But only those on the high road will see it and take it.

Why not decide today to be a Christian committed to defeating temptation. God has promised a way out of every test, but it still requires a choice from you in every instance. Choose the way God provides, and temptation will flee. That's a promise from God Himself.