Resisting Temptation

Good advice about how to resist temptation is hard to come by in the churches. Some in the churches think that there really is no such being as the devil, or that it really doesn't matter whether he exists or not. Many have a formal belief in his existence, but they underestimate him or ignore him. All sorts of inadequate practices and opinions exist. But there really isn't much good advice about how to deal with his lies.

Even a cursory study of the scriptures confirms the existence and activity of the devil. He has already been defeated by the Lord on the cross and his fate is already sealed, waiting to be executed at the proper time by God Almighty (Revelation 20:10). It is the Holy Spirit within us who opposes our sinful nature, so that we might not do what we want (Galatians 5:17). It is paramount that we recognize this and act on the Spirit's help. Paul urges us to live by the Spirit; then we will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:16). Failing to do this grieves the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). The Holy Spirit guides us to resist Satan's temptations and lies, but we are commanded to resist the devil ourselves (James 4:7). The Lord called the Spirit our "advocate" and "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:15-17).

All of Satan's temptations are lies. We need to deal with Satan's temptations specifically, guided by the scripture, since those temptations are in fact blatant contradictions of the word of God. When God says "Yes," the devil says "No." When God says "No," the devil says "Yes." It really is that simple. And the contradictions that some scholars, and others, bring against the Christian faith are very similar in essence to the lies of the devil. If one examines all their extensive scholarly apparatus carefully, one will discover that all the detailed scholarship boils down to the mere contradiction of the word of God. The contradictions arise out of the presuppositions of the scholars, not because of analysis.

How should we deal with the lies of the predator? We should answer the devil's temptations specifically like the Lord did in the wilderness (Luke 4). The Lord confronted the devil audibly when he was in solitude in the wilderness. We should do this also when the predator attacks us in our solitude. When we are alone, we may answer the devil's temptations with an audible voice. We should answer his temptations by an appeal to the scriptures, as Jesus did. It is not necessary to quote them exactly. Sometimes we will. But it is necessary that we deal with the text accurately and remember what the Spirit has taught us. The indwelling Spirit of God will help us. Martin Luther, when he was in solitude, frequently answered the devil's lies and temptations in an audible voice. Many of these rebukes were quite pithy. Some people have proposed that he was crazy. Others suggest that he was over-influenced by medieval superstitions, or some such rationalization. Martin Luther was the reasonable one. He was following James' advice and Jesus' example-- we should resist the devil, and he will flee from us (James 4:7).

In Luke 4, soon after Jesus resisted the devil's temptations audibly, he confronted an evil spirit, one of the devil's hooligans, in the same manner. The Lord told the spirit to come out of a man. All believers possess the authority, and in fact have an obligation and a privilege, to confront evil spirits when the Spirit of God reveals them in other people; indeed, Jesus said that he drives out demons by the Spirit of God (Matthew 12:28). The Lord clearly gave the disciples power and authority to throw demons out of people (Luke 9:1). We should confront them audibly, as Jesus did, and throw them out. Those foul hooligans will hate us for it, but the Lord is authoritative, and the evil spirits have no authority to resist us. They will slither away since they have already been

defeated by the Lord on the cross. The evil spirits, who are hooligans, have been scourged. They have been whipped, and they are cursed along with the devil (Genesis 3:14-15; John 16:11). They will obey our voice when we throw them out. It is the Spirit of Christ who reveals their presence to us, and the Spirit does so when He wants us to throw them out. We should obey. We have no reason to be afraid. Neither do we need any particular words, or some kind of lengthy preparation. No special ceremony is needed. No special technique is involved. We should simply kick them out with indignation. This will please the Lord.

Notice also in Luke 4 that immediately after Jesus rebuked the devil in the wilderness, Jesus was attacked by the men and women of his own hometown, and they intended even to kill him. The Lord has told us in any number of places in scripture that when we resist the devil, that foul liar will resort to other means of attack. This is what persecution is all about. The Lord says we are blessed when we are persecuted (Matthew 5:10). We should not be afraid. We should realize that the devil is responding to the resistance that we have shown him. Paul indicates in Romans 8:17, and the passage that follows, that suffering persecution is a normal and indeed inevitable part of the Christian life. Peter says (1 Peter 4:1) that he who has suffered has ceased from sin. If the Lord suffered persecution in this manner, why should we expect to escape it after we have begun to resist the devil? We are privileged to be counted worthy of such suffering. The Lord will help us. We share his whole life, including his suffering. He shares his love with us, and his joy, and his peace as he shares his whole life with us. Indeed, he shows himself to us as we obey his commands (John 14:21). We are blessed when we are persecuted.

Do not forget that the devil deceives and tricks us. He does this spitefully now because he has been tricked and defeated on the cross by the incognito Jesus. Do not forget also that the devil is foul. He is a murderer. He is utterly self-absorbed. He is vicious. He is spiteful-- he continues his attack on the Lord and the Lord's people even though he has already been defeated by Jesus Christ on the cross. We would do well to remind the devil frequently that we have seen how the Lord tricked him on the cross. Martin Luther recommended that we even mock the devil when he persists in tempting us after we have resisted him by the word of God. We could ask him, for example, how his own medicine tastes. James assures us that the demons shake when they are reminded of the truth (James 2:19). The devil does likewise, and he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Scripture gives us a red flag warning about the problem of idolatry, in both Testaments. Idolatry is still our number one problem. It was listed first in the Ten Commandments for a reason. And Paul warns the Corinthian church about it in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, for example. We are not tempted anymore to worship images formed by our own hands, as was the ancient practice. No, the devil has become clever about the forms of idolatry, but we still worship things other than our God, and these forms are common worldwide (1 Corinthians 10:13). These words in 1 Corinthians appear to be Paul's own commentary on the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Paul says that God will provide a way of escape from the idolatrous temptations that have seized us, so that we can "stand up" under them. The forms of modern idolatry are common, things such as power, prestige, pleasure, personal attainments, knowledge, wealth, and sexual desires. We must be on our guard against putting any of these things, or anything else, in the place of our God, and it is necessary that we be alert to the way of escape that God will provide us when the devil has seized (overtaken) us.

In 1 Corinthians 10:20 Paul indicates that in our idolatry we are participating with demons. This applies to modern idolatry. The demons have not fallen asleep or gone on vacation in our time. In 1 Corinthians 10:22, Paul then shows that the Lord's jealousy will be aroused by such participation. The Apostle John says that the Lord disciplines us, but his discipline arises out of his love for us, like a father disciplines his child (Revelation 3:19). Such discipline is certainly to be

feared. This discipline of the Lord is discussed in more detail below. Paul stresses that we must not participate with demons (1 Corinthians 10:20).

Often the scriptures speak of "standing firmly" against the devil's attacks. Moses directed the Israelites to stand firmly against the Egyptian army that was about to attack them on the shores of the Red Sea. The Israelites were instructed to watch God fight for them (Exodus 14:13-14). King Jehoshaphat was also instructed by God to simply stand still in the battlefield and watch God fight for him against the armies of Moab, Ammon, and Edom (2 Chronicles 20:17). Perhaps the best-known king who proceeded something like this was Hezekiah against the huge army of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19; Psalm 46:10). The devil will flee from us when we stand firmly against him in the same manner (James 4:7).

Sometimes we should flee ourselves (1 Corinthians 10:14). When we have been seized by the devil because of our lack of alertness and we are being tempted so strongly that we are in danger of being overcome, God will provide us a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). We should flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14). The way of escape will certainly be in the way of faith. Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 10:14 stresses the urgency of this escape and alludes to Joseph's response to the sexual advance of Potiphar's wife, when Joseph just ran away (Genesis 39:11-12).

So, whether we flee temptation or stand firmly against the devil, resist him, and watch him flee from us, we can meet temptation victoriously. In all cases, it is the Lord who fights for us, just as God fought for Moses, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. The actual fight belongs to our Lord, not to us. We are not able to fight the devil. The devil and his hooligans frequently laugh at us and revel in their premature celebrations of victory. But the Lord is a warrior, and he has in fact already defeated the devil on the cross (Ephesians 6:10; Revelation 3:21). We would do well to remind the devil of the Lord's victory over him, indeed even audibly when he attacks us in our solitude, just as Martin Luther did. Satan will flee because he abhors, and is terrified of, the Lord's victory over him.

In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul tells us that we should stand firmly against the devil by putting on, as armor: truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer. The seventh of these, and the one which completes the set, is prayer. More will be said about this later. These are the very things that the devil tries to steal from us incessantly. A bit of reflection on our own experience with temptation confirms this. Satan's attack on the truth and the word of God is unrelenting. And his attempts to question our righteousness, to cripple our readiness to be peacemakers with the good news, to diminish our faith, and to attack our salvation are prominent. Paul urges us to take all these things back from the devil and put them on ourselves as armor against him. When the devil lies to us, we should take the truth back and wear it around our waist. When the predator tries to steal our righteousness, we should take it back and put it on as a breastplate. When the devil tempts us to be fearful of sharing our faith with others, we should not be afraid but obey our Lord's command to share our faith as peacemakers in the world. When the devil tries to rob us of our faith, we should take it back and use it as a shield to block his flaming lies. When the devil attempts to question our salvation, we should take it back and place it on our head to protect us. And when he tries to grab the word of God away, we should take it back and use it as a sword to defend against him. The predator tries to take away the word any way he can. He incessantly twists it, wrenches it, bites it, and urinates all over it like a dog marks its territory. He does everything to it but respect it. We should take it back. And when the devil tries to steal prayer away, we should take it back and offer prayers to God for ourselves and others. Those prayers are a sweet aroma to Him. Peter says that because the devil is constantly prowling around like a lion, seeking to prey on someone, we need to be alert and resist him by standing firmly against him (1 Peter 5:8-9). This is the same alertness that Paul urges (Colossians 4:2) when he tells us to be alert in prayer itself by giving thanks. The devil indeed even tries to steal prayer from us as we are in the act! At times, he does this by tempting us to slumber, among other things, as happened to Peter

and the disciples as the Lord agonized in Gethsemane. We should take back prayer when the devil tries to steal it by taking advantage of our weariness. We can do this by giving our great God thanks in our prayers. Contemplating what we have been given, and giving thanks, will be the antidote to the predator's attempt to steal our prayers away at night.

Paul adds in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 the injunction to be alert and self-controlled so that we can stand against the devil with the armor of faith, love, and hope. So, when the devil tries to steal our love, as well as our hope and faith, we should take them back. He will try to steal our love, and he may be able to wrench it out of our hands, but he cannot take anything away from the Lord. The Lord's love is decisive, and the devil cannot snatch us out of his hand.

All these things are the targets for the devil's thievery, and they are the very things that we must hold tightly to stand our ground against him. As we stand, it is the Lord who advances against the devil and wins battle after battle. We are told to stand firmly and not give back the ground we have already attained (Philippians 3:16). All these great gifts that we have received-- faith, hope (of righteousness and salvation), love, truth, readiness to be peacemakers, the word of God, and prayer-- are the things that the devil tries to take from us. We should hold on to what has been given to us and let the Lord engage in the actual fight against the devil-- and win for us. We should not forget that the Lord has already defeated the devil on the cross.

We should remember too that the Lord even uses the heinous lies of the devil and the foul confusion of the demons to discipline us when we are disobedient; he does this because he loves us (Revelation 3:19). He wants us to repent and allow him to fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20). The Lord's discipline in this manner is always constructive, and it is always measured. The Lord has put the devil on a short leash. The devil may not do whatever he wishes, just as God limited him in the case of Job. Job, incidentally, was not attacked by Satan because he had been disobedient. This is one of the main points of the text in the Book of Job. His case is different from the case of the Laodicean church in Revelation 3, and from what is being discussed about temptation here. In our case, when we fall into habitual sin, the Lord will not allow the devil to harm us (1 John 5:18). We will not continue in our sin because the Lord will discipline us through the attack to which we have already capitulated. We will not be destroyed by the attack, which will be a measured discipline that is designed to turn us back to our Lord. We are blessed beyond words. We should give thanks to our Lord always. We will learn what it means to love our Lord and what it means to fear him (Ephesians 5:21). We will learn to fear his discipline like a child fears the discipline of his father but still loves him. So, we also will learn to fear the jealousy of the Lord. He is jealous to uphold the holiness of God and to preserve our victory. The Lord is our shepherd, and he will guard us. He will in fact turn the evil of Satan upside down and bless us through it, just as God did to Job.

This discipline by the predator and his pack of laughing hyenas is important to understand. It is actually very common. It is a form of captivity, of a loss of our freedom, which is the thing that human beings despise the most. When we fall into chronic sin, the Lord can discipline us by exposing us to the attack of the devil and his gang of hooligans. The Lord is not cruel in this. He puts the devil and his pack of laughing hyenas on a short leash, and they are not allowed to harm us. But our loss of freedom as we are subjected to the attacks of the devil are designed to turn us back to our Lord who has already freed us from our sin by his own death. Our temporary loss of freedom during our period of discipline becomes intolerable, and the Lord will mercifully take us back as we repent. It is tough medicine, but it is a common experience and should be recognized as the loving response of our Lord who is jealous of upholding his Father's holiness and preserving our victory as well. The Lord's jealousy upholds simultaneously both the Father's holiness and our victory. The works of Jesus Christ are beautiful beyond words.

Some will doubt this notion of discipline by the devil and his pack of criminals, and nobody should accept any teaching without scriptural support. Perhaps 1 Timothy 1:19-20 is the best direct

scriptural support of what is being described. Paul tells Timothy that some believers have rejected faith and a good conscience and so have shipwrecked their faith. Paul says that Hymenaeus and Alexander are two examples whom he himself, with apostolic authority, has handed over to Satan so that they might be taught not to blaspheme. The term "handing over" is the language used in reference to the handing of criminals over to a jailer who superintended their captivity in jail. Paul indicates in 1 Timothy that the purpose of being jailed like this is to be taught a lesson, not to be destroyed by the devil.

King Solomon, in his prayer of dedication of the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 6:36-39), anticipated the captivities of Israel and Judah because of their sin. He knew that God would discipline the Hebrew people by captivity. That captivity was different than ours, but the dynamic was the same. Our captivity, when we are disciplined by the devil, is intended constructively just like the captivities in Assyria and Babylon. The people came back to the promised land and inhabited it again. They rebuilt the temple and worshipped God once again by His mercy and grace. The same kind of thing is intended by the Lord when he disciplines us by demonic captivity now. He disciplines us because he loves us, and he wants us to repent and allow him to fellowship with us (Revelation 3:19-20). Consequently, he stands outside our door as we are sinning and waits for us to open it to him, instead of so rudely ignoring him outside. His patience and gentleness are majestic.

We should remember that we can pray that God will deliver us from evil. This is the Lord's Prayer that he taught us. God will deliver us from doing evil if we ask Him. We should remember that our prayers rise before God like a sweet aroma. Prayer is, in fact, one of the great means by which we stand against the devil (Ephesians 6:18). If we want to deepen our prayer life, we will do that as we struggle against the devil. When the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray, they didn't know exactly what they were asking. We learn to pray largely through the great struggle we have with the devil. As we struggle, we need to remember always that our Lord will keep us safe; the devil cannot harm us (1 John 5:18). The Lord will turn the evil of the devil upside-down and bless us through it. When we pray, we can pray for ourselves, and we can intercede for others. We should always pray in the Spirit. The number and variety of different prayers about temptation is unlimited, but we should pray as the Spirit of Christ leads us.

The important thing to remember is this: Resisting the devil is one side of a coin that has two sides. The other side involves submitting oneself to God (James 4:7). When we are stuck in our sin by failing to resist the devil's temptations (verse 4), God gives us more grace (verse 6). This is who He is. By His grace, we are enabled to submit to Him and resist the devil, and the devil will flee from us (verse 7). If (not when) we draw near to God like this, He draws near to us (verse 8). And so, we attain to our goal of fellowship with our God. The Spirit helps us when we are tempted, and we remain in fellowship with the Spirit also by resisting the devil's temptations. The practice of resisting temptation is therefore paramount to maintaining our fellowship with our God. It is a spiritual discipline in which we must be engaged, or we cripple our fellowship with our God. This is the devil's goal. We need to be ready for him with alertness and self-control (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8). Our fellowship with our God is at stake.

More is involved as we have already indicated. If our sin becomes habitual, the Lord will never abandon us; he will guard us, and the devil cannot harm us (1 John 5:18). The Lord will exercise his faithful discipline, and it is tough medicine, but if (not when) we repent, he fellowships with us once again (Revelation 3:19-20). He never abandons us. Consequently, we attain our goal of fellowship with the Lord as well.

We may ask God for His grace! We may ask God to give His grace also to others, so that they may be healed (James 5:16-18). Elijah, great as he was, did nothing to merit God's grace. Like

us, he was sinful, but God heard his prayers on behalf of the nation of Israel, and He answered them.

Therefore, we should throw down our doublemindedness (James 4:8). We should pursue godliness, focused on the hope of our perfection on the last day when the Lord will transform us to be like himself (Philippians 3:21). Paul puts it this way: "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Since submitting to God involves our whole life in all its facets, we must reap the benefits of exercising the Christian practices and spiritual disciplines, which are means by which we have fellowship with our God, with the Lord, and with the Spirit who lives in us. Paul puts it this way: "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8).

By submitting to God, we will avoid quarrels and fights with others (James 4:1). We will be able to submit properly to others within the Church and within our own households (Ephesians 5:21). We will learn to submit properly to others in the world also (Romans 13:1-7). Wives must submit to their husbands, and husbands must love their wives (Ephesians 5:22, 25). We do this by submitting to God and resisting the devil.

© 2025, 2026 Brad Goral. All rights reserved.