

Genesis 3:1-7 "How the Tempter Works" [**\[1\]](#)

Main Idea: In the world's first temptation and resulting sin, recorded in Genesis 3:1-7, we discover how the tempter works. We see vividly that the temptation process involves three downward steps.

Definition: "Temptation, then, in general, is *any thing, state, way, or condition that, upon any account whatever, hath a force or efficacy to seduce, to draw the mind and heart of a man from its obedience, which God requires of him, into any sin, in any degree of it whatever.*" --John Owen, *Of Temptation*

I. The first temptation began with foolish dialogue (1-5).

A. The tempter questioned God's Word (1).

1. He undermined God's authority.
2. He undermined God's goodness.

B. The woman misrepresented God's Word (2-3).

1. She misquoted it.
2. She added to it.

C. The tempter attacked God's Word (4-5).

1. He offered a *rival* message.
2. He made sin sound *good*.

II. The first temptation led to a forbidden decision (6).

A. Eve was deceived.

1. She based her decision on what she *saw*.
2. She based her decision on what she *wanted*.

B. Adam was just plain defiant.

1. He became a passive husband.
2. Instead of leading in a godly manner, he became a follower.

III. The first temptation resulted in a fateful discovery (7).

A. They had changed.

1. Their innocence was gone.
2. They felt shame.
3. They tried to hide their shame.

B. They were in trouble.

Think about it: "It does not matter how small the sins are provided their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light... Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one." --C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

The Bottom Line: In order to stand against the Tempter, you must put your trust in Jesus.

Earlier in the year we began hearing about the potential dangers of the H1N1 flu, more commonly referred to as the "swine flu." This past week I went to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website and did some reading about it. There's a lot of helpful information on that site about what the virus is, how it spreads, what the symptoms are if contracted, and what to do if contracted. But there's also a lot of information about what to do to keep from catching the virus, such as: Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, since germs spread that way.

It's basically common sense. You don't wait until you get the H1N1 flu to be concerned about it. You do everything you can to *prevent* it. That's a high school health class lesson, right? Pretty basic.

But the fact is, there's an even more destructive virus in the world today, one that destroys not just a person's body but his or her soul as well. I'm talking about course about the SIN virus.

The Bible has a lot to say about the solution for the sin virus, for we learn that there's healing for the sin virus through the person and cross-work of Jesus Christ. But it dawned on me this week that the Bible also speaks to us about the *prevention* of sin. Unfortunately, we don't talk about sin's prevention very much, and we could learn a lesson from the CDC. After all, why would we keep sending an ambulance to rescue folks at the bottom of the cliff when building a good guardrail at the top would prevent them from going over in the first place? When it comes to sin, we ought to be thinking about *prevention* just as much as cure.

Jesus certainly made that point in what we call "The Lord's Prayer." He taught His disciples to pray six petitions. Remember the final two? He said we're to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). Notice that we ought to be praying about the prevention of sin (*lead us not into temptation*) before we pray about deliverance from it.

That request raises some important questions in my mind, such as... What is temptation? What happens when we are led into temptation? Are there things we should be doing besides praying so as *not* to be led into temptation?

The night before His crucifixion Jesus again emphasized the need for sin's prevention when He gave this command to His inner circle of disciples in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (also in Mark 14:38 and Luke 22:46) Did you catch that? Jesus told His most trusted followers to take seriously the potential danger of falling into temptation. That again raises questions like, what is temptation, how do you fall into it, and more importantly, how do you *not* fall into it?

I want to know the answers to those questions. I *need* to know the answers to those questions, and I believe you do, too. Beloved, we're in trouble if we don't understand how the tempter works. Indeed, if we're going to stand for Christ, it's vital that we grasp how to withstand temptation. That's why we are beginning a new series this morning entitled, "***Lead us Not into Temptation.***" Here's a tentative overview of what we'll be learning, the Lord willing, as we study the Scriptures together in the next month:

Today: "*How the Tempter Works*" *Genesis 3:1-7*

August 16: "*Understanding How Temptation Works*" *James 1:13-15*

August 23: "*The Temptation of Jesus*" *Matthew 4:1-11*

August 30: "*Good News When Tempted*" *1 Corinthians 10:130*

I'm indebted to a valuable book written some three hundred fifty years ago (1658) by the Puritan John Owen, a book entitled *Of Temptation*. Actually, the complete title [the Puritans loved long titles!] is *Of Temptation: the Nature and Power of it; the Danger of Entering into it; and the Means of Preventing that Danger*. I'll be citing from Owen throughout this series. To begin, here's a helpful definition provided by Pastor Owen:

"Temptation, then, in general, is *any thing, state, way, or condition that, upon any account whatever, hath a force or efficacy to seduce, to draw the mind and heart of a man from its obedience, which God requires of him, into any sin, in any degree of it whatever.*"^[2]

Let's break that apart. Temptation is *any thing, state, way, or condition*—notice that word *any*; temptations come in a myriad of forms: your television, your neighbor's car, the attractive woman at the office, the answer sheet being circulated by your peers during the final exam. A temptation is *any thing, state, way, or condition...*

...that hath a force or efficacy to seduce, to draw the mind and heart of a man from its obedience—that's

temptation's aim, to get you to turn away from obeying God.

...which God requires of him—Obedience isn't optional with God. God requires that we His creatures obey Him, for His glory and our good. But temptation's aim is to seduce us from obedience to God...

... into any sin, in any degree of it whatever. That's temptation's agenda, to turn us from God, to sin. And any degree of sin will work. The tempter is just as pleased with a small sin as a big one, for regardless of its size, every violation of God's law is a slap in the face of the Law-Giver.

Jesus said, "Don't let that happen." He told us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Should we get serious about the removal of sin from our lives? Yes, and sin can be removed by turning to Him. But we must also get serious about the *prevention* of sin, and that means we need to get serious about understanding how temptation works.

Where should we start? Where the Bible starts. At the very beginning of our Bibles the Lord preserved the account of the world's first temptation. He knows that while Satan is many things, including a liar and a murderer, he's not novel. In Genesis 3, the tempter showed his hand and we would do well to study his tactics.

That's our aim this morning. By investigating the world's first temptation and resulting sin as recorded in Genesis 3:1-7, we'll discover how the tempter works. We'll see vividly that the temptation process, then and now, involves three downward steps.

I. The first temptation began with foolish dialogue (1-5).

Verse 1 begins, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made." Let's keep in mind the context. According to Genesis 1:1, in the beginning there was God. Nothing existed prior to God. Just God.

Then, as Genesis 1 records, the self-existent God created the universe. In six days, He fashioned the heavens and the earth, all that is, and then rested. At the conclusion of His creative work God assessed all that He had made and declared that it was "very good (1:31)."

In Genesis 2, Moses, the human author of Genesis, puts the spotlight on the events of Day 6. He explains in detail how God formed the *first man*, and from him the *first woman*, and then how God arranged the *first marriage*. Genesis 2 concludes with Adam and Eve living in a perfect environment, enjoying a perfect relationship with God, with each other, and with the created order. In the words of Genesis 2:25, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

Time passed. How much time? I don't know since the biblical record doesn't say. But one day Adam and Eve woke up and began their routine, not realizing that they were about to enter into temptation.

In the first verse we're introduced to "the serpent." What was this serpent? Moses informs us of some important details concerning this creature. For starters, it was a *creature*. God, the Creator, had made it. In addition, we're told that it was part of the animal world—it was one of the "wild animals" [the term translated "beast" in the KJV]. That's critical to see. The tempter is a creature, one made by God and therefore subject to God.

Was this "serpent" a snake? If so, it was certainly different than the snakes we know today. According to verse 14, the curse changed its physiological and anatomical structure, for in the garden it walked in an upright fashion, but after the curse it crawled on its belly and ate dust.

This was a special creature. Moses says that it was "more crafty" ["subtle" in the KJV] than any of the wild animals. Bible scholars have debated the word translated "crafty." Should this term be understood in a positive or negative light? When it appears elsewhere in Scripture it is used in a favorable sense, and is translated "prudent" or "wise" (Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15). In a few places it's used in an unfavorable sense (Job 5:12; 15:5).

In light of the fact that everything that God made was "very good" (1:31), I'm inclined to understand the word in its positive sense. Whatever it was, this was an incredible creature, perhaps the most skillful creature in the animal kingdom.

The narrative continues, "He said to the woman." Whoa! Here's a talking animal! Don't miss that. Remember, this isn't Dr. Dolittle here. That should have raised a red flag for Eve. A talking animal? What's going on here?

What's going on, as the rest of the Bible explains, is that this animal was being used by another being. That's right. This serpent was merely a tool in the hands of Satan. In Revelation 12:9 Satan is called "that ancient serpent." Jesus called the devil a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Satan is a fallen angel, but he and his wicked followers present themselves as "angels of light" (2 Cor 11:14).

So the serpent came to Eve. Why? Because Satan is the tempter and his strategy hasn't changed one iota. He works the same way today as he did in the garden. The temptation process involves three downward steps, and it started with foolish dialogue initiated by the tempter.

A. The tempter questioned God's Word (1). "He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

The tempter began with a question. He's subtle. He acts like he's merely requesting information, but as will be apparent from his follow-up statement in verses 4-5, he already knows the answer to his question. The tempter knew what God had said. His aim was to initiate a dialogue, and by asking the question to undermine two things.

1. *He undermined God's authority.* "Did God really say?" the serpent asks. The question seems fairly innocent. It's not. Concealed in the question is a malicious craftiness. He's asking the woman to take the judge's seat.

Answer this. Is God's Word subject to our judgment? Do we have a right to evaluate what God says? Is it okay for a creature to inspect the speech of the Creator? Did God really say...?

"Did God really say that sex outside of marriage is a sin? You two are different. You *love* each other. It can't be wrong for you."

"Did God really say homosexuality is wrong? Maybe it's just a cultural thing."

"Did God really say that stealing is wrong *in all situations*? Your situation is unique. You need the money. And your company won't even miss it. Go ahead and take it."

"Did God really say you need to forgive *that* person? That person hurt you and doesn't deserve to be forgiven. What God said doesn't apply in your situation."

Then and now, that's Satan's tactic. He starts by undermining God's authority. Then...

2. *He undermined God's goodness.* "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" In the Hebrew the words are so arranged that the statement can be read in two ways. It can be read, "not from every tree," or "not from any tree."^[3]

What's the devil trying to do? He wants to arouse suspicion in the mind of the woman. Suspicion of whom? Of *God*. Namely he wants to cast a shadow on the *goodness* of God. "From *any* tree, Eve? Is that what God said?" The insinuation being, what a stingy God!

The evil one loves to twist God's Word, doesn't he? That's what makes false teaching so dangerous. It sounds okay at first. In this case, the tempter tries to make God seem miserly. And he does the same in the contemporary scene. "You don't want to be a Christian, do you? You can't do *anything*. It cramps your lifestyle. God won't let you have *any* fun!"

No, the tactics of the tempter haven't changed. Henry Morris remarks (57), "If he can just get a person to begin, even in the slightest degree, to doubt God's Word or His sovereign goodness, then it is easy to go on, step by step, until that person is either openly rebellious against God or else utterly unable to

accomplish God's purpose in his life. How blasphemous for one who is a *creature* of God to question in any respect what his Creator has said or done!"

The foolish dialogue began when the tempter questioned God's Word. It continues in verses 2-3...

B. The woman misrepresented God's Word (2-3). "The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, You must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

Apparently Eve thought she was doing God a favor by entering into the dialogue. "You poor serpent. I'd better straighten you out. You've got your facts mixed up." In the end *she* got mixed up. In her response she misrepresented God's Word in two way.

1. *She misquoted it.* How so? Compare what God actually said with what Eve *said* that God said. In Genesis 2:16-17 we find God's actual words, "And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"

Sidney Harris put it this way, "Once we assuage our conscience by calling something a 'necessary evil,' it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil."

Notice how Eve misquotes God's Word. She calls it "the tree that is in the middle of the garden" rather than "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," as God did. And where as God said you will "surely die," she merely says, "you will die."

What's she doing? She's misquoting God's Word, not in blatant ways, but it doesn't have to be blatant to enter into temptation. There's a warning in this for us. A fuzzy understanding of God's Word leads to foolish decisions. If you do not know the Scriptures *well* you are fair game for the tempter. Eve got into trouble when, first, she misquoted God's Word. Then...

2. *She added to it.* Concerning the tree she said, "You must not eat fruit from it...and you must not *touch it.*" Did God say that? No. What's Eve doing? She's adding to God's instructions, and by so doing, she's making God appear *stricter* than He is.

We get into trouble whenever we add to God's Word. Eve put another command alongside of God's. Is it okay to do that? Be careful how you answer that.

Is it okay to have to have standards in areas where the Bible is silent? Is it okay to have *personal preferences*? Sure, as long as we call them what they are, *personal preferences*. We get into trouble when we attribute our personal preferences *to God*.

Would it be a good idea to touch the fruit? No. If you don't touch it, you won't eat it. But the problem is, Eve attributed her *good* idea to God.

Is it a good idea to touch alcohol? Is it a good idea to touch a substance that is responsible for the destruction of millions of families worldwide and thousands if not millions of lives on the roads, not to mention a host of health complications? No, it's not a good idea to touch alcohol, because if you don't touch it, you won't drink it. And if you don't drink it, you'll never have to wonder what it's doing to your family, or your judgment, or your health, not to mention to your testimony. But did God say not to touch alcohol? No. In Proverbs He said it's not wise to drink alcohol, and throughout the Bible He clearly prohibited drunkenness. But touching it? No, God didn't say not to touch it. Again, should we touch it as a beverage? I certainly don't think it's a good idea, but my point is, neither is it a good idea to equate my personal preferences with God's clear commands.

Eve misrepresented God's Word. In essence, she made the Lord's command *more* severe and the penalty for disobedience *less* severe than what God said.

By the way, how should Eve have responded? Like Jesus did in Matthew 4. Remember what

happened there? The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for a forty day period of testing. At the end what happened to Jesus? Satan *tempted* Jesus with three temptations. Why did Jesus subject Himself to the temptation? Because as the Last Adam He had come to undo what the First Adam did.

And how did Jesus respond to the tempter? Did He dialogue with him? No. He refused to analyze and question God's Word. Rather, instead of debating the Scriptures He *quoted* them. *Three* times He said, "It is written," and He quoted it right!

In many ways the battle was lost by the time verse 3 ended. Eve had entered into foolish dialogue with the tempter. First the tempter questioned God's Word and then Eve misrepresented God's Word. Then came the heavy arsenal...

C. The tempter attacked God's Word (4-5). "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

There's a "No Trespassing" sign in west Texas signed in blood red paint at the bottom by the rancher. It reads: "STOP. I know you're thinking about crossing this gate. What you should know is that if the Coyotes, Cactus, Mesquite, Heat, Dust or Rattlers don't get you, I will."

That's what I call blunt. And blunt is what Satan was in verse 4. He's no longer being subtle. In fact, once Satan gets you to question God's Word and casts a doubt on it, he's got you. Then comes the all out assault. First he questions, then he attacks. In Eve's case he attacked in two ways...

1. *He offered a rival message.* "You will *not* die," he said. Now there's a blatant contradiction. God says, "Eat and you will die." The tempter says, "No, not true. God is lying. He's keeping you from the 'good stuff.'" That's a rival message, isn't it?

There are two rival voices in the world. One says, "If you sin, you will die." And the other says, "If you sin, you will not die." Is the rival voice still speaking? Yes, indeed. Every time you turn on the television you hear the rival's conflicting message, "If you're not satisfied with your spouse, then get another. You've got a right to be happy." But God's voice says, "No, I want you to be holy. Till death do you part."

You turn the channel and hit the commercials. What's the rival voice saying now? "Think of yourself. Buy for yourself—use credit if you need to. Don't deny what your senses crave. You only go around once in life." But God says, "No, don't love the world neither the things that are in the world. Deny yourself. Use your resources to serve God and others. Be a giver, not a getter."

If we don't want to fall into temptation, then we must learn to discern the source of the messages we're hearing. Satan's strategy is to attack God's Word, and in Eve's case he did it first of all by offering a rival voice.

2. *He made sin sound good.* What did he tell Eve? Three *half-truths* in verse 5. One, if you eat your eyes will be opened. Two, you will be like God. And three, you will know good and evil.

There's an element of truth in what Satan said, isn't there? There usually is. Would their eyes be opened? Indeed, they were about to see what they had never seen before—and Satan would laugh all the way. Would they become like God? The fact is, by eating the fruit they would usurp the place of God. And would they know good and evil? Sadly, they who were created innocent were about to experience evil. Oh, how the evil one loves to make sin sound good!

Remember, the serpent is talking to a person who literally had *everything*. A perfect environment. A perfect marriage. An intimate relationship with God. A fulfilling life. Yet in the end she *wanted something more*.

You say, "I wish I'd been there. I'd have handled things differently." Oh, really? The fact is, you face the same decision every day.

But you say, "No. I don't have all the resources Eve had." Really? Do you know Christ? If so, you have *every spiritual blessing* in heavenly places (according to Ephesians 1:3). If that's true—and according to God's Word it is—then the question for you is the same question Eve faced: "Are you be satisfied with what God has given you, or do you *want something more*?"

We're learning how the tempter works, my friend. Here's where the downward spiral starts, with a foolish dialogue. That's step one.

II. The first temptation led to a forbidden decision (6).

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."

We don't know what kind of fruit that tree bore. Legend suggests it was the apple, but the Bible doesn't say so. What we do know is that the foolish dialogue led to a forbidden decision—by two parties.

A. Eve was deceived. The dialogue is over. Eve contemplates the two conflicting, rival messages, and she becomes the judge. On what basis did she made her decision? Based on two factors...

1. *She based her decision on what she saw.* The text states, "When the woman saw." Eve is now doing what she was never created to do. She's judging the validity of God's speech. And she's doing it on the basis of her senses, namely, what she *saw*.

What caught her eye? She saw two appealing features about the fruit. One, it was good for food. Two, it was pleasing to the eye.

But wait. Eve had plenty of other trees from which to choose. According to Genesis 2:9 the rest of the trees in the garden were also "pleasing to the eye and good for food." Why then did Eve entertain the thought of picking the forbidden fruit? According to 2 Corinthians 11:3, she did for one simple reason. She was *deceived*. Tricked. Beguiled.

Here's what Paul said, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." What happened to Eve? She was deceived. Rather than submitting to what God said, she based her decision on what she *saw*. And there was a second factor. 2. *She based her decision on what she wanted.* She saw the fruit was "desirable for gaining wisdom." The word "desirable" comes from the root meaning "to covet," the very sin prohibited in the tenth commandment (Deut 5:21). Eve is now living by her desires rather than God's Word.

Several years ago I met with a man who was leaving his wife. "Why?" I asked. "You know the Bible forbids it. Why are you leaving her?" His response, in essence, was this, "I *want* to be happy, and I'm not." So he made a decision based on his desires instead of God's Word.

I must warn you, beloved. If you are a person who lives by your *desires* rather than God's Word, you will live a roller-coaster life.

Centuries ago Augustine wrote: "Sin arises when things that are a minor good are pursued as though they were the most important goals in life. If money or affection or power are sought in disproportionate, obsessive ways, then sin occurs. And that sin is magnified when, for these lesser goals, we fail to pursue the highest good and the finest goals. So when we ask ourselves why, in a given situation, we committed a sin, the answer is usually one of two things. Either we wanted to obtain something we didn't have, or we feared losing something we had."^[4]

That's when it happened. Eve took the fruit and ate it. Regretfully, she failed to ask God for guidance,

and failed to consult with her husband about the matter. She made the decision on her own.

At this point I want to scream, "Adam! Where are you? You're needed over here, right now! There's a problem on the home front! Get over here and get your wife out of this jam! Where are you, Adam?"

But where was he? Out tending the garden? No. Notice the final statement in verse 6, "She also gave some to her husband, who was *with her*, and he ate it." Where was Adam? The preposition indicates he was *right there* with her.

Let that sink in. The forbidden decision was made by *two* parties. Eve was deceived, but not Adam...

B. Adam was just plain defiant. What is defiance? According to Webster it is "open disregard of or bold resistance to authority."

Lest we place the blame on Eve, realize this. The Bible attributes the origin of sin *to Adam* (Rom 5:12). Why? 1 Timothy 2:13-14 states, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." Adam wasn't deceived. Apparently, he ate the fruit deliberately.

It was to *Adam* that God gave the command, "Don't eat!" (in Genesis 2:16-17). That was *before* Eve's creation. Did Eve know about the command? Without a doubt Adam told her. She was responsible for her actions, certainly. But who does God hold accountable as the most responsible person in this situation? It's Adam. Adam failed in two ways...

1. *He became a passive husband.* He shirked his role as a leader. He should have stepped forward and said, "No, Eve. We must obey God." But he didn't. In fact, they flip-flopped their roles. Eve led, and Adam followed. In other words...

2. *Instead of leading in a godly manner, he became a follower.* Notice the specific transgression of which God confronted Adam in verse 17, "Because you *listened to your wife* and ate from the tree." Adam followed his wife instead of following God's Word. One commentator calls him "Adam Tag-along."^[5]

As a passive husband, Adam failed to lead his wife in a godly manner. Men, are you leading your families or are you shirking your responsibility? And ladies, are you making it easy for your man to be the spiritual leader in your home?

The first temptation involved three downward steps. It started with foolish dialogue that led to a forbidden decision. Where did it end?

III. The first temptation resulted in a fateful discovery (7).

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." For Adam and Eve the forbidden decision resulted in a twofold, fateful discovery.

A. They had changed. How so? In three ways according to verse 7.

1. *Their innocence was gone.* Their eyes were opened, and now they saw themselves in a totally different light.

2. *They felt shame.* They realized they were "naked." Before sin, there was total transparency, total, unhindered intimacy with God and with each other. But that's gone now. The innocence is gone. They're now *guilty*. They felt shame. Consequently...

3. *They tried to hide their shame.* How? They took fig leaves—probably because the leaves were

large—and sewed them together as coverings. Why? Not for warmth, since the climate is still tropical. It was because they knew...

B. They were in trouble. It reminds me of the following story. A drunk husband snuck up the stairs quietly. He looked in the bathroom mirror and bandaged the bumps and bruises he'd received in a fight earlier that night. He then proceeded to climb into bed, smiling at the thought that he'd pulled one over on his wife. When morning came, he opened his eyes and there stood his wife.

"You were drunk last night weren't you!"

"No, honey," he replied.

"Well, if you weren't," the wife returned, "then who put all the band-aids on the bathroom mirror?"

The world's first sinners tried to hide and we've been doing it ever since, haven't we? We may read verse 7 and say, "What do they think they're doing? You can't remedy your guilt with fig leaves." No, you can't. Nor can you fix your guilt with the filthy rags of your own righteousness. But we try, don't we? We try to cover up our sinful hearts by putting on a "respectable" life and thereby patching things up with God.

Just ask the average person on the street how to get to heaven and you'll hear, "Just live a good life, and you'll be okay. Getting religion won't hurt, but the bottom line is to do your best because if the good in your life outweighs the bad, you'll make it."

Where did our friend on the street get the notion that he himself could make things right with God? He inherited it from Adam and Eve. The truth is, we can't make ourselves "respectable" before a holy God. Our righteous deeds, the best we can offer God, are as filthy rags in His sight (Isa 64:6). In reality, we need God to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. We need Him to clothe us with what Isaiah 61:10 calls "a garment of salvation" and "a robe of righteousness."

That's why Jesus came, isn't it? When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty of sin for rebels like Adam and Eve and you and me. Three days later He arose from the dead, and today He offers the gift of eternal life to all who will admit their helpless sinful condition and put their faith and trust in Him.

Back in 1942 C. S. Lewis wrote the now classic book, *The Screwtape Letters*. The book is a series of fictional letters written by a worldly-wise old demon named Screwtape to a novice demon in training named Wormwood. In the letters Screwtape offers counsel to Wormwood on how he can get a young, brand new Christian man to sin. Here's a piece of his advice from letter twelve:

"The only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy [referring to Christ]. It does not matter how small the sins are provided their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one." [\[6\]](#)

That's how the Tempter works, beloved. His aim is to turn us from the Light and it doesn't matter to him whether the sin of choice is big or small, for the safest road to hell is the gradual one. Have you been treating the Tempter lightly, my friend? It's like playing with fire. It's only a matter of time until you get burnt.

Here's the bottom line is this. He's ten thousand times stronger than you and me, but he's not match for the Savior. Therefore, *in order to stand against the Tempter, you must put your trust in Jesus.*

Next time we'll take a closer look at the process the Tempter uses to turn us from God's way. That's in James 1:13-15, if you want to get an early start.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths

of the Word of God.

[1] This message has been adapted from material presented at WBC on 3/5/2000 in a series in Genesis 1-11.

[2] John Owen, p. 96; See <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/temptation.i.iv.html>

[3] Aalders, p. 99.

[4] *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Christian Classics in Modern English)

[5] Claus Westermann, p. 23.

[6] C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, letter #12, pp. 300-1.