

Guidelines for Subduing Sin

James 1:12-16
10/03/1999

The book of James, chapter 1. We are preaching consecutively through the book of James, and we have come to this section in chapter 1, verses 12 through 16, that deal with the subjects of temptation. And so let us read the passage together, review our study of it from last Lord's Day, and then proceed with further application of it. James, chapter 1, beginning at verse 12 through verse 16.

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. And when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren.”

Now last Lord's Day, as we expounded this passage dealing with the issue of temptation, we saw that temptation is something that we struggle with constantly, and therefore we need to be prepared to defend ourselves against it. And so by way of introduction, last week we considered together, first of all, the source of temptation. And we saw that the source of the temptation was not God—God cannot be tempted with evil, neither *tempteth* he any man—but rather, the source of temptation is *us*. Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his *own* lust and *enticed*.

And so this tells us two things with reference to the *source* of temptation: that we are responsible for our own temptation and sins; and that we can have hope, because it is not *God* who is tempting us. For if He were tempting us, there would never be any hope of ever overcoming those temptations, for who could withstand God? But rather, these temptations arise from within us, so we have hope that God then is able to give us victory over them.

And then, having considered the source of temptation, we considered the *dynamic* of temptation. And we looked at its *method*—how does it work? Well, it works by first of all drawing us away from God. Every man is tempted when his is *drawn away*. And so the first thing temptation does is try to cut us off from God, from thoughts of God, from our closeness with God, from the means of grace. And then secondly, it says, he is *enticed*—that is, sin and temptation hold out false promises to us of the blessings and advantages that we will receive if we give *in* to it.

And then we considered, not only its *method* of drawing us away and enticing us, but then we considered its *mastery*. When does it win? Well, it conceives when it obtains the consent of the will. When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin. And so sin is born when there is the combination of the two elements of our sinful desires *plus* the consent of our will. And at that moment, sin is born into existence.

Then, having considered the source of temptation and the dynamic of temptation, we then considered together the *consequences* of temptation. There are bad consequences. It says, “Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” And so those who give in to temptation as the habit and pattern of their life will suffer *eternal* death. And anytime we as believers give in to sin, it works a type of death in us, a deadening of our hearts towards God. It works in us a destruction of our relationships with other people, and it works in us the consequence of the destruction, ultimately of our physical being, through the chastisement of God if it extends to that point.

But there are also *good* consequences if we *endure* temptation, as verse 12 says, “Blessed is the man who *endures* temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him.” And so if we endure temptation, blessedness comes to us, assurance of eternal life comes to us, and an opportunity to demonstrate love to God comes to us. And so in that light, temptation can be seen as an opportunity, not as a curse—an opportunity to demonstrate love to Christ and to gain blessing and assurance of eternal life.

But the question that remained in our minds last time was this—how do I *endure* temptation? If the man who *endures* it, that is, doesn’t give in to it, is blessed, how do I go about enduring it? How do I *keep* my sinful desires from *conceiving* and bringing forth sin? We, as believers, want to have victory over temptation. How do we achieve it?

Well this evening I hope to give us, by way of application of our message last Lord’s Day, some guidelines as to how we might *endure* temptation and resist it and obtain victory over it. But before I do, I want to qualify these guidelines by saying four things about them.

First of all, these guidelines that I’m going to give you—and there are seven of them—are not exhaustive. Many more could be added to them. I do not claim to be covering all of the means of sanctification and deliverance from temptation as we cover these seven points.

Secondly, these seven methods, or guidelines, for overcoming temptation are not guarantees. God must bless them and empower them and own them, or they will fail. They are not merely means that can be carried out in the strength of the flesh.

Thirdly, these guidelines are not something that are *easy*. Overcoming sin is never easy. We have to fight the good fight of faith, and in fact it *is* a battle.

And then fourthly, these are not instant cures. It is not like oven cleaners, where you just spray it on and wipe it off and it’s all over with. But rather, overcoming sin is more like remodeling a house—bit by bit the transformation takes place and, ultimately, the new product comes forth. God Himself set forth this pattern of overcoming enemies in Exodus 23 and verse 30, when He said with reference to the Canaanites in the land of Israel, “By little and little will I drive them out.”

So with reference to these guidelines, we need to remember they are not exhaustive, they are not guarantees, they are not easy, and they are not instant. But they are genuinely helpful. And so in the first place then this evening, I want us to consider together some general prerequisites for subduing sin—some general prerequisites for subduing sin—and then we will consider together specific guidelines.

First of all, then, if we are going to subdue sin—if we are going to be able to endure it and not allow it to conceive in our lives, and gain victory over it—the first prerequisite that there must be for subduing our sin is that we must be a *believer*. That is, we must be a saved, regenerate, born-again Christian. Because you cannot be delivered from the *practice* of sin if you have never been saved from the *power* of sin. Romans 8 and verse 7, which we read this evening, says, “The carnal mind”—the fleshly mind, the unsaved mind—“is enmity against God and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed *can* it be.”

So it is impossible for an unsaved person ever to subdue themselves and bring themselves into conformity to the law of God. The only remedy and cure for sin in our lives is Jesus Christ. And if you have no *faith* in Him as your Savior, then you can have no help from Him as your deliverer. In Matthew 1 and verse 21, it says, “Thou shall call his name Jesus, for *he* shall save his people from their sins.”

And so if you do not have Him working in your life to save you from the practice of your sins, you can *never* hope to have victory over them. In First John 1 and verse 7, it says it is the blood of Christ, his Son, that cleanses us from all sin. And if there is no application of the blood of Christ to our lives, there can be no victory over sin. And so if you are troubled by a sin and you desire victory over it, then the power and dominion of sin in your life must be broken through regeneration and salvation.

And so part of the reason why some people never do get victory over their sins, who claim to be Christians, is because they’re really *not* Christians. And so the power of sin has never been broken in their life, and they never do achieve victory over their temptations.

Secondly, the second general prerequisite for subduing sin is not only that you must be a believer, but that you must be vitally joined to a local church. You must be vitally joined to a local church. And the reason for this is because the local church contains most of the means that God has given for us to overcome *sin*. God has given us a whole tool box of methods with which we can overcome sin. And if we do not have access to three-quarters of that tool box, then we are not going to be able to have victory over sin. The vast majority of the tools that God has provided for us to obtain victory over sin are deposited in the local church.

For example, in the local church you have the guiding work of the pastor of the church; you have the cleansing work of the Word of God; you have the supporting work of fellowship; the correcting work of discipline; the reminding work of the Lord’s Supper; the protective work of sound teaching. All of these things are in the church. And if you’re not vitally involved in a local church, then you’re going to wind up missing out on most of the means that God has given to overcome sin.

Trying to conquer sin without being a vital part of a biblically functioning local church is like trying to fly to the moon without a space ship. The lack of proper environment and support systems make the journey absolutely impossible. You can’t complain about starving if you don’t put a fork of food to your mouth. And in the same way, you can’t complain about being overcome by sin if you will not be vitally involved in a biblically functioning local church. And so, another reason why people forever struggle with sins and never seem to gain victory over them is because they are not participating in a biblically functioning local church, wherein most of the tools and methods are deposited for gaining victory over sin.

And that brings us, then, to our second major point this evening. Having seen the general prerequisites for overcoming sin—you must be believer; you must be involved in a biblically functioning local church—in the second place, let’s consider together specific guidelines for subduing sin—specific guidelines for subduing sin. And there are seven guidelines.

The first guideline I would give us for enduring temptation and preventing sin from conceiving is by meditating on its consequences and fruits—by meditating on its consequences and fruits.

Now our sinful desires do two things. It says in our text that every man is tempted when he is *drawn away* and *enticed*. And so this evil desire seeks to *draw* us away from God and it *entices* us. And the picture here, as I said last time, is that of a baited fishhook. It gives you a false picture that if you will indulge in this, you will get something very beneficial, when the reality is, is that there is deceit that is being involved there, and it's always in a hurry to get us to embrace that deceit lest we see through it. And so temptation seeks to get you to give in quickly before you see the true consequences of it. It wants you to see the short-term benefit of it, but not the long-term destructiveness of it.

Now for an example of this, turn in your Bibles to Proverbs, chapter 5. The book of Proverbs, chapter 5. In Proverbs, chapter 5, and verses 3 through 13, we have here a description of a temptation that arises that is particular to men, and that is the temptation of the strange woman. Now the strange woman here is simply the equivalent of a harlot, or of a prostitute, or of a seductive adulteress. However, the principle that is contained here could be applied to *any* temptation that we have.

Now notice if you will, verse 3 of Proverbs 5. It says, "For the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil." Now honeycombs are sweet and oil is smooth—these are things that are attractive, short-term benefits, if you will. But notice verses 4 and 5. "But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell." And so he begins to talk about the *long-term* destructiveness of falling into a sinful relationship with something that *appears* to have very wonderful, short-term benefits. Verse 6, "Lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that you cannot know them. Hear me now therefore, O you children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not near the door of her house." Now here's another consequence, verse 9, "Lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labors be in the house of a stranger; And you mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed."

And so what he is doing here is he's saying, Yes, there is some attractiveness to sin. But when you *meditate* on the long-term consequences and *fruits* of that sin, you realize that this sin isn't so attractive after all. And so one of the things that helps us to not give in to temptation is to *unmask* its deceit by meditating on its consequences and its fruits.

And so when you have any temptation of whatever sort it is, ask yourself, What are going to be the long-term consequences if I give *in* to this? How will this affect my relationship with God? Well, it will harden my heart, it will cause me a loss of peace with Him, and I will grieve the Spirit of God. How will it affect my relationship to my family? What impact will it have upon my children and the trust and peace of my home? What effect is it going to have on my church, my usefulness to God and its health and blessing?

You remember the man Achan should have thought of all these things before he stole the Babyloniash garment and the wedge of gold. What happened to his relationship with God? Well, he was cut off from God. What happened to his family? They were all stoned. And what happened to his church—the nation of Israel? They were defeated in battle at Ai, were they not? And you see, all he saw is the short-term benefits—I can be *rich*! But he didn't think about the long-term consequences, and so he was ensnared in a sin and he was destroyed *by* it.

And so one of the things that we can do to keep from giving in to temptation is to meditate on its consequences and fruit, and suddenly, that which seemed so attractive in the short-term soon becomes distasteful and contemptible when you think about the ultimate outcome of it. So seek to gain time when you are tempted for these considerations when sinful desires arise. Think of how it's going to affect you in all of these areas, and as you think about those things and how *unpleasant* they are, then the sin itself loses its attractiveness.

The second guideline that I would give you for subduing sin is not only meditating on its consequences and fruits, but secondly, *cut off* your sinful temptations at its first appearance. Cut off your sinful temptations at its first appearance. In other words, we need to nip in the bud while it is still small and manageable, and has not gained the upper hand. When temptation first comes to us, usually it doesn't come to us real strong. It will come to us subtly, it will come to us in small ways, and then as we entertain it and as we think about it, it grows and enlarges and ultimately overwhelms us. It's quite easy to put out a match. But to put out a raging forest fire is quite another matter.

And so this is why Proverbs 4:23 tells us, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." And so a small sinful desire entertained in the mind is very soon a raging monster that controls the mind. As First Corinthians 5 and verse 6 says, "A little leaven can soon leaven the entire lump." And you keep a baby tiger kitten at home, and pretty soon you've got a man-eating lion [sic] on your hands.

And the point is this, most temptations are easily managed when they first present themselves. If at that moment you crush them, you will be far safer than if you allow them time to grow and to gain strength by fooling around with them and entertaining them and going back and forth as to whether or not you want to deal with them, and ultimately you wind up becoming consumed *by* them. So when they first present themselves, be ruthless. Crush the life out of them at that moment, and cut them off when they first appear.

The third guideline that I would give to you in dealing with temptation and sin is find Scriptures that apply to your particular temptation and memorize them. Find Scriptures that apply to your particular temptation and memorize them. In Psalm 119 and verse 11, it says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." Having God's word in our heart, it says, is a *means* of avoiding sin against God.

Psalm 119 and verse 9 says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking *heed* thereto according to thy word." And so these passages that you remember that relate the particular area of temptation that you struggle with will *help* you to meditate on the consequences and fruits of your sin. They will provide you with reasons and motives for cutting *off* sin when it *first* appears, and it will help you to refuse that sin because it provides you with a biblical perspective upon it.

You know, if you're on one side of a wall and your enemy is on the other side of the wall, and he's trying to get you. You know, when he jumps up on the wall and he has his fingers on the top of the wall, it's a lot easier to take a hammer and smash those fingers and keep him on the other side of the wall than it is to allow him to climb *clear over* and then have to deal with him, and *throw* him back over the other side. And in the same way, it is a lot easier to take God's

word and use it to smash the fingers of sinful desires. As Jeremiah 23:29 says, “Is not my word like a hammer that breaks the rock in *pieces*?”

And so, when we take those passages that we’ve memorized, and when our sinful desires first present themselves, we beat them back with the perspectives of God’s word. That’s a lot easier to overcome them at that point and through that method than it is once they have obtained a foothold in our life. In Ephesians 5, verses 26 through 27, it says, “Christ cleanses and sanctifies his church by the washing of the water of the word.”

And so specifically, it is the word of God that is the *means* of sanctification. Jesus said in John 17:17, “Sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is truth.” And so if we want to be holy and without blemish; if we want to get rid of the spots and wrinkles in our lives, then we need to read and meditate on what the word has to say about our particular sinful temptations. Psalm 119 and verse 104 says, “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.”

And so the precepts of God give us understanding of sin and of its consequences, and of our *particular* sins and of their *particular* consequences, and enable us then to build an attitude of *hatred* towards that sin and its consequences. So what you need to do is memorize specific scriptural passages that relate to your specific temptation and evil desires, and bring those to bear when you are tempted. And you also need to memorize *general* passages that relate to temptation in general.

For example, in James, chapter 1 and verse 15, it says, “Sin when it is finished brings forth *death*.” And so you need to remember that with reference to *any* sin, that it’s going to bring destruction into your life. So if you struggle with covetousness, then memorize some of the verses in First Timothy, chapter 6. If you struggle with *pride*, memorize some of the verses in Philippians, chapter 2. If you struggle with sexual *impurity*, memorize some of the verses in Proverbs 5, and 6, and 7.

And so whatever the area of your particular temptation is, the Scriptures have very specific things to say about it, warnings with reference to it, and encouragements regarding *overcoming* it. And so as we meditate on and memorize those Scriptures, the washing of the water of *that word* will help us to be delivered from those temptations.

The fourth guideline I would give you, and that is for overcoming your particular sin or temptation, is to cultivate the opposite, positive virtue—to cultivate the opposite, positive virtue. Romans 12 and verse 21 says, “Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” And so one of the ways in which we avoid being overcome by evil, and one of the ways in which we *overcome* it is by doing something *good*. In other words, take your particular temptation or evil desire, whatever it may be, and seek to *cultivate* the *virtue* that directly *opposes* it.

Now, we looked at Proverbs, chapter 5, and we saw that here’s someone who was being tempted with reference to adultery—with reference to this strange woman. As so this individual meditated on its consequences and its fruits. He determined to cut it off at its first appearance, verse 8, “Remove thy way far from her and come not *near* the door of her house.” Here is someone who was memorizing Scripture in *relationship* to it, but there is more than that. In verses 15 through 20, it says, “Drink waters out of your *own* cistern, and running waters out of your own well...Let them be *only* thine own, and not strangers’ with thee. Let thy fountain be

blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?"

So what he is saying is that not only do you *do* these previous three things that I talked about, but then you cultivate the opposite positive *virtue* of adultery, which is cultivating your relationship with your own marriage partner. And so what we need to do if we have a problem, for example, with *stealing*, as Ephesians 4:28 says, "Let him that stole, steal no more: but rather let him *labor*, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to *give* to him that is in any need." And so if we have a problem with *theft*, we not only need to meditate on its consequences and fruits—cut it off at its first appearance, memorize Scripture to combat it—but we need to start giving stuff *away* instead of stealing from people. We need to start *giving* to people. Ephesians 4:25 says put away lying, "speak ever man truth with his neighbor." And so if our problem is telling lies, the solution is not just to then go to *silence*, but to start telling the truth, under every circumstance and in each and every situation.

And so, whatever our sin is, it is simply a reverse image of some biblical *virtue* or principle that we ought to be practicing. And so, if we are doing good, then it will *squeeze* out and *push* away the evil that wants to arise.

The fifth guideline that I would provide for overcoming temptation is to avoid the places, people, and situations that provide occasion for sin. Avoid the places, people, and situations that provide occasions for sin. Romans 13 and verse 14 tells us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." And one of the ways in which we make *provision* for the flesh in order to fulfill the lusts thereof is by putting ourselves around people, in places, in situations, that provide us with occasions for *sin*. And so to the extent that we are able, we must avoid occasions of temptation because they then become occasions to sin.

Now we are not always able to cut ourselves off from every place, every person, and every situation that could possibly provide an occasion for sin. If we were going to do that, we'd have to leave the world. But to the extent that we *can* do that and *minimize* those negative influences, we ought to. And when we can't, we need to pray for the grace to *endure* them. And so if we have a problem with a particular sin, it is usually associated with a particular circumstance. Avoid the circumstance and you will avoid the sin.

So, for example, if we have a problem with lack of self-control when we are around bad company, First Corinthians 15:33 says "bad company corrupts good morals." And so if you're around people who tend to provoke you to sin, stay away from those people. If there are places and circumstances that are occasions for and attendance to a provocation for sin, cut yourself off from those places and circumstances.

The point is simply this: whatever your sin is, it *usually* is associated with a circumstance. Cut off the circumstance, and you cut off the occasion to sin, because if you play at the edge of temptation, it will not be long before you fall off the cliff of sin. Matches and gasoline make a dangerous combination, and your sinful desire combined with a provocative circumstance or person could easily blow up into sin. John Owen said, "He hates not the fruit who delights in the root." And so the root of our sins are usually tied to something outside of ourselves which is

avoidable. And so if we continue in the circumstances of our sin, then we will usually continue in the sins themselves.

The sixth guideline that I would give for avoiding temptation and giving in to temptation is to seek out opportunities for mutual exhortation and intercession with fellow believers. Seek out opportunities for mutual exhortation and intercession from fellow believers.

First of all, seek out opportunities for mutual exhortation. Hebrews 3 and verse 12 says, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” Well, that’s a *problem*. We have a problem with tending to have an *evil* heart of unbelief, which departs from the living God. What’s the remedy for that problem? It says, “But exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” And so it is the deceitfulness of sin, it is this enticing aspect of sin that James speaks of. “[E]very man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”—that’s the deceitfulness of sin. In order to avoid being *hardened* by that, it says “exhort one another *daily*.” And so there is a powerful restraining effect on sin when in the presence and under the counsel of godly Christian brethren.

Now I know that we are always in the presence of God, and it seems like that that alone should be sufficient to motivate us not to fall into sin, but there is something about being around other people that provides an additional bulwark against falling into it. Other people provide us with encouragement, with instruction, with example, with exhortation, with accountability—all of which flow out of Christian fellowship and open sharing of the struggles that we deal with. And it is not without reason that when Jesus sent out His disciples, He sent them out two by two; He didn’t send them out alone. Proverbs 13 and verse 20 says, “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed.”

And the point is simply this: Sin has such a *deceitful* way, and it has such a *hardening* effect, that we cannot cope with it *alone*. We need the help of other people in overcoming our sin. And so we need to seek out opportunities for mutual exhortation and accountability with reference to our particular areas of temptation.

And then, we need to seek out opportunities for intercession—for mutual intercession. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins one to another and pray one for another, that you may be healed.” The clear implication here is that folks are sick; they are sick because they are struggling with sin. And the remedy for the illness, or sickness of sin, under the image here, is that if we confess our sins one to another and pray one for another, we will be healed. And why will we be healed? Because “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous avails much.”

And so if prayer of the brethren avails much, then we *miss* much when we do not request it and partake of it. And I am not saying that we need to confess *all* of our sins to every single person in Christianity, but we do need to find someone with whom we can share our sins, perhaps a wife or a husband or a parent or a fellow believer in whom you have confidence, and we must then share those things and pray for one another and exhort one another with reference to them. This is a divinely ordained method for obtaining victory and healing from our sins and temptations.

And so it requires of us humility and trust and wisdom. It requires humility in terms of admitting that we have a problem. It requires trust and wisdom as to who we share with and what we share.

And we must be careful not to think less of someone or look down on someone who struggles with this sin or that sin, because we also struggle with *our* sins, and everyone struggles with *some* sin, and so therefore we ought not to think ourselves superior to others because we don't have the particular struggle *they* have, or think their particular sin is *way more evil* than the sin that we happen to struggle with ourselves.

And so I think you can begin to see why being joined to a local church is such a vital prerequisite to overcoming sin, because it is in this context that we find occasions for mutual exhortation and mutual intercession. But if we're out there all by ourselves and we have no vital relationship of trust and confidence in another Christian, how can we ever carry out this guideline?

The seventh guideline for overcoming our temptations and enduring them is that there must be regular fervent prayer with reference to our temptations. There must be regular fervent prayer with reference to our temptations. When Jesus was counseling His disciples in Matthew 26 and verse 41, He said to them, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And how well we know how weak the flesh *is*. And one of the remedies for overcoming the weakness of the flesh is not only to *watch*, which is the previous six things I have talked about, but also to *pray*, which speaks of our need for God's *help*.

You see, these previous six things that I have talked about are six things that are things for us to do. *We* are to meditate on the consequences and fruits of our sin. *We* are to cut it off at its first appearance. *We* are to find Scriptures that apply to them and memorize them. *We* are to cultivate the opposite positive virtue. *We* are to avoid places, people, and situations that provide occasion for sin. *We* are to seek out opportunities for mutual exhortation and intercession. But then we must, having done all we can do, turn to God and cry out mightily to Him that He would do what *we cannot* do. We must work to overcome our temptations. But God must also work if we are to overcome our temptations. And it is precisely praying with reference to our particular sins to God and asking His help that is this final guideline and means for overcoming our sins.

You see, if we *watch* and don't pray, then that is presumption. It's saying, I'm going to put enough guidelines and rules and procedures down in my life to where I'll never fall into sin again. And we're depending entirely upon ourselves and our methods. And that, of course, is utterly inappropriate.

On the other hand, if we just *pray* and don't watch, that's hypocrisy. That's saying, "Well, God, I'm praying to you. You take care of my sins and take them all away," and we don't do the previous six guidelines, then that is really an expression of the attitude that God has to do it all, and there's nothing for me to do, and it's asking Him to do the extraordinary when we won't do the ordinary. It's putting God to the test. It's tempting God.

And so when Jesus taught the disciples how to pray in Matthew, chapter 6, one of the petitions that was contained in that prayer in verse 13 was this, "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." So Jesus specifically guided His disciples with reference to the *content* of their prayer, and part of their prayer had to do with asking God to deliver them from their temptations. And so if that is to be part of the prayers of the disciples, certainly it ought to be part of our prayer as well. We pray specifically with reference to our particular sins, and ask God to deliver us from them. You remember that even our Lord Jesus Christ, before His great temptation at Mt. Calvary was found doing what in the Garden of Gethsemane? He was *praying*.

And He was asking God for help with reference to that. And if Christ before His temptation at Calvary felt the need to pray, then how much more do *we* need to pray as well.

And so prayer is simply the recognition that we have no power in ourselves to endure temptations, and it is the pleading with God to supply that power. John Owen has said, “He that would be little in temptation, let him be *much* in prayer.”

And so after all, who is it that is going to subdue your iniquities? Is it you, or is it God? Well, it is precisely God who is going to do that. In Micah, chapter 7, and in verse 19, it says God “will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; *he will subdue our iniquities;*” and He will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea. And so God is the one who’s going to subdue our iniquities, and the way in which He is going to do it is through these *means* that He has provided for us to employ, and for Him to bless and own and energize.

And so we need to flee to Christ with our sins. He was made like us in all things that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest. He Himself has been tempted, and He is able, therefore, to give help to those who are tempted. And so we need to come, therefore, boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain *mercy*—that is, deliverance from the distresses of temptation—and find grace to help in time of need.

But if we will *not* come to the throne of grace, and we neglect to pray with reference to our temptations, there will be no mercy, there will be no grace to help in time of need. Christ was touched with the feelings of our infirmities and He was in all points tempted like as we were. And He *will* have mercy, and He *will* give grace to help. But we’ve got to *ask*. And we have not because we ask not. And when we neglect this particular guideline, the words of Jesus to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane apply here. You remember what they were doing when they should have been praying—they were sleeping. And He came to them, and He said, “Sleep on. The hour is at hand.” And what happened? The disciples fell in the time of temptation because they had neglected their opportunity to prepare for that temptation by preventative prayer.

And so if we do not do our homework, we will fail when the test comes. And if we have not done our preparatory work of praying with reference to our temptations, then when the hour of temptation arises, we shall certainly fall. And so the battle is often lost before we *ever* face the particular test that comes to us.

So these, then, are the seven guidelines. Meditate on its consequences and fruits. Cut it off at its first appearance. Find Scriptures that apply to our particular temptation and memorize them. Cultivate the opposite positive virtue. Avoid the places, people and situations that provide occasion to sin. Seek out opportunities for mutual exhortation and intercession. And engage in regular fervent prayer with reference to your temptation.

There are three things that I would like you to remember by way of conclusion. Remember first of all that this struggle against sin is a life-long battle. It’s never going to be over until we die. And so we’ve got to settle in for the long haul and realize this isn’t something we can just put up with for a while and then we’ll get over it. We’ve got to recognize we’ve got to fight against sin *all the days of our life*.

But secondly, we also need to realize, it's not only a life-*long* battle, it's also a very *difficult* battle. A great deal of hard work is demanded. Now the seven guidelines I gave you this evening are not easy things. They require diligence; they require reflective thought; they require a degree of *intensity* and *fervency*; and there are no easy solutions. We can't just cast out a demon, or speak in tongues, or get baptized by the Spirit, and suddenly we don't have *trouble* anymore. It's just not the way it is.

But it's not only a life-long battle and a difficult battle, thirdly, remember it's a *victorious* battle. Romans 6 and verse 14 says, "Sin shall *not* have dominion over you." Second Peter 2 and verse 9 says, "The Lord knows *how* to deliver the godly out of temptation." He knows how to do it. He can do it. And He *will* do it. In John 17:15, Jesus prayed that we would be kept from the *evil*. And we *shall* be kept from the evil, because God will keep us and preserve us from it.

So we are told in First Corinthians 15:57, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And there he was speaking about victory over death, because we have victory over its *cause*, which is sin. And so he which hath begun a good work in us *will* continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. And you see, that's the encouragement you have in the struggle. When you realize this thing is bigger than you are, when you realize this thing is very hard and it's going to last all of your life, the hope that you have is that God is going to sanctify you.

You remember Paul said in First Thessalonians, chapter 5, now may the God of peace sanctify you *wholly*, and I pray God your whole body and soul and spirit be preserved *blameless* unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then the next verse says, "Faithful is he who calleth you, who also *will* do it."

And so Christ will do it, and what we need to do is understand that, believe that, and *embrace* that, and use that as our beacon of hope. And as we struggle, in due time, applying these principles, we *will* see gradual victory over the sins that do so easily beset us.

Well, let us pray together. Father, thank you so much for the divine remedies that you have provided for us in battling against sin, and thank you, Father, that you have made those remedies so easily available to us through your church. Lord, we pray that those remedies might be frequent and faithful in their exercise and expression in this assembly. And, Father, may each of us do our part in applying ourselves *diligently* to these principles and guidelines, that we might learn and grow and gain victory, with reference to our sins and temptations.

Father, we pray that you would have mercy on us and give us grace to help in time of temptation. Lord, you know each particular temptation that is a source of irritation to each person here this evening. Lord, have mercy on us, and give us grace to stand strong in time of need.

Lord, we pray that we *would* watch and that we would pray. Father, give us help and strength, for we know that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. And may He strengthen us through these means that we apply ourselves to this evening. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.