



OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Since Christ defeated Satan on the cross, Christians do not have to live under the devil's domination. (Romans 6:11-14) It is possible to live in victory over Satan because of what Jesus has done for us. The victory isn't automatic, however. It requires effort on our part. In order to live in victory over Satan we need to learn how he operates. His major ploy is temptation. This lesson will guide you to a better understanding of temptation and how to overcome it.

1. UNDERSTANDING TEMPTATION

An important key to overcoming temptation is understanding how it operates. Once understood, it can be attacked and broken at its weakest links. The Bible has given us a detailed view of how temptation fits into the sin process.

Read James 1:13-15

According to these verses, is God responsible for tempting us?

Who tempts us? (See Matthew 4:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5)

What is it that resides in us that Satan plays to when he entices us by temptation? (See James 1:14) Note: The word "lust" here simply means "strong desire."

Notice in this passage that a "life cycle" of sin is described. James uses the language of reproduction. Temptation, which is from the devil, unites with our lust (strong desire) to conceive sin. Sin is born, lives out its life, and then brings forth (gives birth to) death. Once we understand the process, we can determine how best to stop it. The diagram in **FIGURE 1** (see attached) will help you visualize this "life cycle" of sin.

After studying the diagram and comparing it with James 1:14-15, note the following observations:

TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN. It is the *cause* of sin, but it is not sin. We must not allow guilt feelings that usually accompany sin to cripple us when we have been tempted. Jesus was "tempted at all points as we are," yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

LUST, IN THE SENSE IT IS USED HERE (STRONG DESIRE) IS NOT SIN. Desire for the opposite sex, hunger, desire to be loved, and many other needs and emotions are God-given. They fill important roles in our survival. God intends, of course, for us to control these desires and channel them properly, according to the guidance of His word (more on this later). It is only when temptation causes us to direct these needs and emotions into the wrong channels that sin is conceived.

WHEN STRONG DESIRE GIVES IN TO TEMPTATION, SIN IS ALWAYS THE CONCEIVED RESULTS. Thus, unless somehow the process is stopped (we have the responsibility to stop it) temptation will always result in sin.

UNLESS SOMEHOW STOPPED, SIN ALWAYS BRINGS DEATH. See Romans 3:23; Ezekiel 18:20.

How can the process be stopped? There are two points at which the life cycle of sin can be stopped. A description of each follows:

- **STOP LUST AND TEMPTATION FROM UNITING.** Thus, sin is not conceived. (See **FIGURE 2**) This is what Jesus always did while He was on the earth. Examine Matthew 4:1-11 carefully. Notice that sin was never conceived though “strong desire” (“He then became hungry”) and temptation were present.
- **STOP SIN FROM LIVING OUT ITS LIFE AND BRINGING FORTH DEATH.** What should Christians do when they have slipped and allowed sin to be conceived? They must break the cycle by confession and repentance. (See 1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22) See **FIGURE 3**. It is important that sin be stopped as soon as possible after it has been born in us. The longer we wait, the more we risk allowing sin to gain a foothold. Repentance becomes harder if we wait.

We now turn to a more detailed consideration of stopping lust and temptation from uniting. See **FIGURE 2**. This is always the best and least risky way to overcome sin. Once sin is conceived there is the danger that it will quickly gain strength and overcome our desire to repent. It is always best to stop sin before it is born in our lives. See **FIGURE 4**.

2. OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Realizing our own strong desires (these will vary among us) and that Satan will try to lure us into sin by using things that appeal to our desires, what can we do to keep him from being successful?

- **KNOW GOD’S WORD SO YOU AREN’T DECEIVED.** (See Psalm 119:11) Satan will try to deceive you into believing that giving in to a particular temptation is not really wrong. Remember he is called a “liar” and a “deceiver” in the Bible. “You don’t need to worry. It won’t hurt you,” is one of his usual ploys. “It’s not really wrong for you to do this thing,” or “God is too strict,” may also be used. Examine Genesis 3:4-5. Eve allowed Satan to convince her that it was permissible to eat from the forbidden tree when God had said it was not. This is also what Satan tried when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. But it didn’t work. Jesus had memorized God’s Word to the extent that He wasn’t deceived. (See Matthew 4:1-11)
- **TRY NOT TO PUT YOURSELF INTO A TEMPTING SITUATION.** This principle appears several times in God’s Word. In the space below, put 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 into your own words:

How does Romans 13:14 apply to this idea of not putting yourself into a tempting situation?

How does Ephesians 4:22 sum this up?

It is good for every Christian to sit down and look at his or her life with a view toward minimizing occasions of temptation by careful forethought. He or she should ask, "Are there things I need to start doing or discontinue in my life that are causing me to be exposed unnecessarily to temptation? It would be good for you to do this as soon as you have completed this lesson.

- **LOOK FOR AND PLAN WAYS OF ESCAPE.** If you have tried to avoid temptation yet it has come, you need to look for an escape. What does God promise He will provide when you are tempted according to 1 Corinthians 10:13?

How does the story of Joseph in Genesis 39:7-12 illustrate this principle of a way of escape?

What is the way of escape described in 2 Timothy 2:22?

- **RESIST SATAN WHEN HE DOES TEMPT YOU.** You may strive to know God's Word, minimize the number of tempting situations you encounter, and plan ways of escape, yet still Satan will get through sometimes to tempt you. At that point you are in for a fight.

What does James 4:7 say will happen if you resist the devil?

How did Jesus put up a fight and what was the outcome in Matthew 4:10-11?

What must you say to your own desires if you are to resist Satan? (See Titus 2:11-12)

- **MAKE UP YOUR MIND AHEAD OF TIME WHAT YOU WILL DO WHEN TEMPTATION COMES.** What did Daniel do ahead of time that helped him resist the temptations of Pharaoh's court? (See Daniel 1:8)
- **REDIRECT STRONG DESIRE INTO GODLY CHANNELS WHEN POSSIBLE.** Your strong desires may not be wrong in themselves. They may have a corresponding godly purpose. It is only when Satan entices you to direct them toward the wrong things that they

become sin. It is your responsibility to channel them into the purposes for which God intended them.

What is the proper channel for desire for the opposite sex in 1 Corinthians 7:9?

What is the proper channel for desire to fill your needs in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12?

Consider what other godly channels might correspond to your particular needs.

- **UNDERSTAND THAT GOD EXPECTS YOU TO STAND WHEN TEMPTATION COMES.** You cannot legitimately say, “I can’t.” God says you can. Paraphrase 1 Corinthians 10:13 below.

Look again at this verse. Can Satan tempt you beyond what God allows? See also Job 1:6-12.

Can you ever rightly say, “This temptation is just too much for me so I’m justified in giving in?”

- **CAREFULLY PLAN FOR ACCOUNTABILITY DURING LEISURE HOURS OR AT OTHER TIMES WHEN YOU KNOW YOU WILL BE TEMPTED.** Jesus was careful to send His men out in pairs. The resultant encouragement and accountability helped them do what He called them to do. We always do better when we know others are watching. Use this principle by finding a trusted brother or sister who will hold you accountable for your actions. Give them permission to “intrude” in your life when necessary and call you to account.

SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM THIS LESSON ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE. COMMIT 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 TO MEMORY.

FIGURE 1

Life Cycle of Sin

James 1:14-15

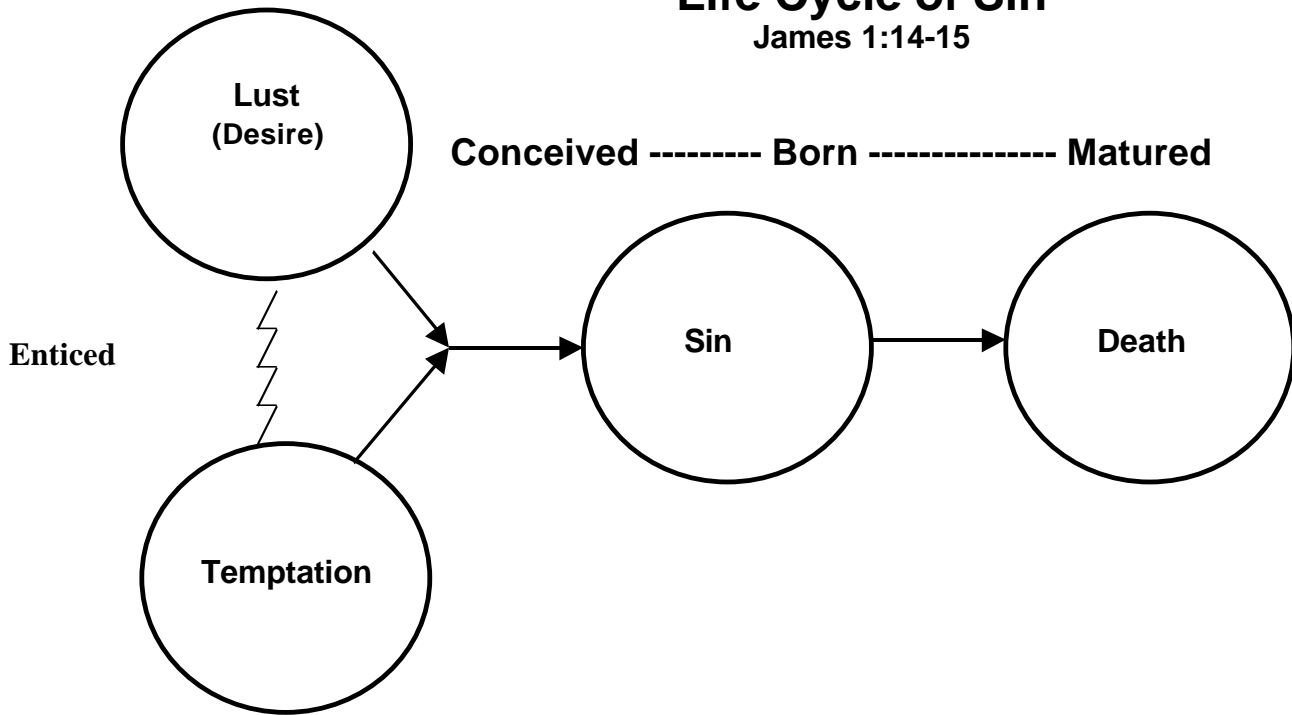


FIGURE 2

Preventing Sin's

Conception

Matthew 4:1-11

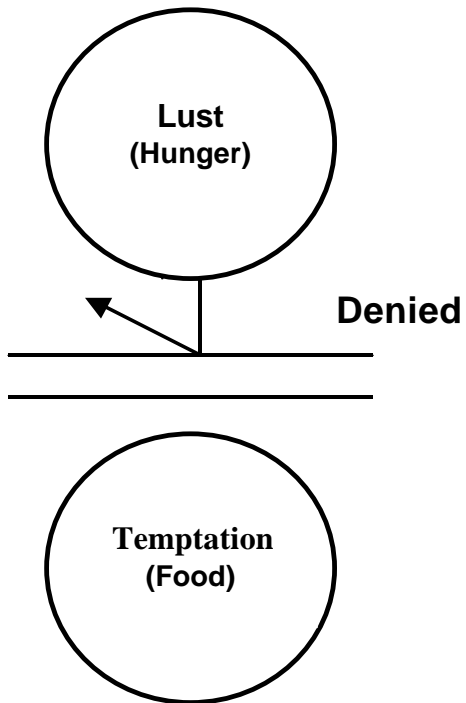


FIGURE 3

Stopping Sin before it Grows

1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22

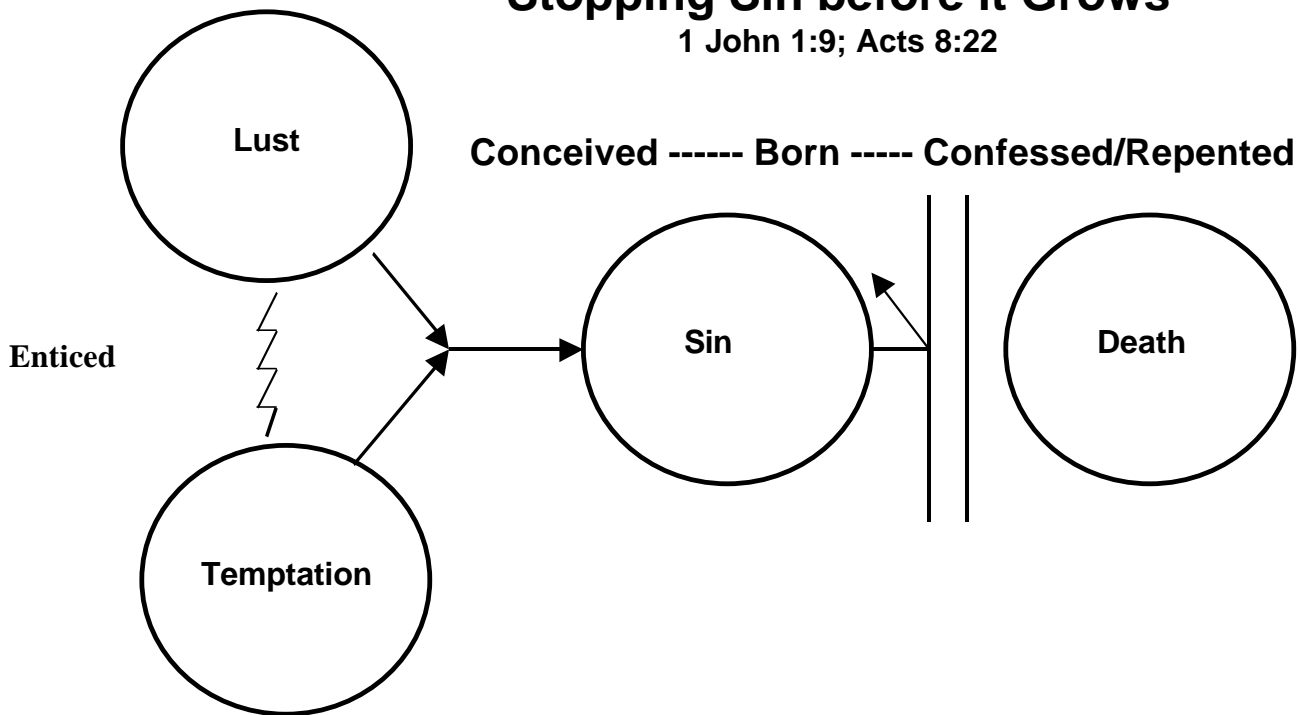
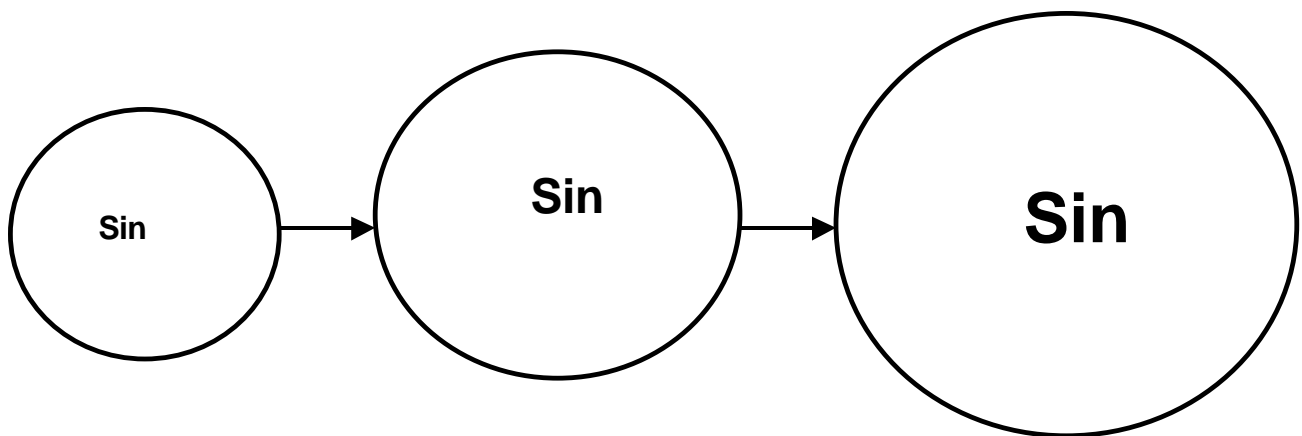


FIGURE 4

The Danger of Delay



As time passes, sin grows, and our ability to resist and overcome diminishes. Even worse, our desire to repent weakens. Eventually we are “overcome.” See also 2 Peter 2:20.