

Pay Attention to Yourselves!

Introduction

The Text

¹ And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. ³ Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.” (Luke 17:1–4)

- A. I don’t have much by way of introduction for us this morning other than to simply give you the two headings under which I am going to be organizing my thoughts: (1) Temptations to Sin (vv. 1-2); and (2) The Disciples Self-Watch (vv. 3-4).

(1) Temptations to Sin (vv. 1-2)

Bait on a Hook

- A. In v. 1, Jesus begins to warn His disciples (and us) about what is here translated as “temptations to sin.”
1. Now, the Greek behind this translation is a single word, perhaps you’ve heard of it: skandalon. It’s where we derive our English word “scandal.” Originally, the word referred to the bait-stick of a trap.
 - a. The idea, then, is that a skandalon is something which first entices and ultimately triggers the stumbling and downfall of the one who takes the bait.
- B. If I could put another image on this for you . . .
1. During a recent family reunion for Megan’s dad’s side up in Tahoe, we went to one of those stocked fish ponds—where the idea is you’re just giving your kids the experience of fishing, without really having to deal with the complexity and often letdown of truly fishing. You know, where you get up at the crack of dawn, get all your gear together, make sure you have your fishing license, you stop to get some bait, you drive out to the lake or whatever, and then you just sit there all day getting nothing but a few nibbles and a whole lot of snags. You thought you were going to come home and put fish on the grill, but instead you come home with like a Little Caesar’s pizza.
 2. Well, these stocked pond places exist to ensure that doesn’t happen. So we come in and you can literally just see all the fish just swimming right there—there’s so many of these things they’re just bumping into each other and stuff. I probably could’ve just reached down and grabbed one, put in my pocket and called it a day. It honestly felt like fishing in someone’s coy pond. It felt wrong.

3. But what do you do, they hand you this janky little rod, they've already got the bait right there for you, so you put it on the hook, and then you just drop it in right into the middle of the crowd of fish. And within a minute or two, wouldn't you know it, almost every kid at the place had one on the end of their line.
 4. And, can I just say, I didn't know this going in, but I guess when we pulled out the fish, we were supposed to bop the poor, helpless little thing in the head and put it out of its misery or whatever. And, of course, when my daughters pull these things up, I'm the man of the house, right, so they're all looking to me to take this pipe and smack them. And, I kid you not (please don't judge me as less of a man), I couldn't do it. Listen, I'm a pastor. I don't kill things, I save them. I don't bring down God's judgment, I bring the message of grace. I'm supposed to unleash wrath on these poor creatures, but I couldn't do it. I've never been a big fan of things like hunting or fishing. I'm just not a big fan of killing stuff in general. I'd rather like go out into the woods and take pictures of the animals. I'll shoot them, but with my camera or whatever.
 5. Now I know I'm a hypocrite, because I love a good tri-tip like the rest of us, and I went out to dinner and got fish just this last week, but I just don't want to be there on the front end of it. I prefer to just pick my meat up from Costco, right? It's already killed, cut, packaged . . . thank you very much!
- C. Now I say all of this, because that's the sort of image I want you to have in your head here. With this idea of "temptations to sin" Jesus is talking about a bait stick—a hook that's dangling down right in front of you, hidden inside something that otherwise looks pretty good. And He's got some things to say about this. He's warning us about this. Because He knows if we bite on that hook, soon enough our head gets bashed in, right?

3 Observations

- A. So there are three things Jesus is going to bring out here concerning these temptations to sin: (1) The Inevitability of It; (2) The Personality of It; and (3) The End of It.

Observation #1: The Inevitability of It

- A. This is what comes out first as we keep reading there in v. 1: "Temptations to sin are sure to come . . ." Jesus wants us to know that when we come Him, when we bend our knee to Him as Lord, Savior, and Treasure, it's not as if we just kind of skip off from there into paradise.
1. In some ways, of course, life gets a lot better, because now you know and have relationship with the one for whom you were created and you know you're a beloved child of God—there's something inside that just shifts in a massive way.
 2. But in another sense (we know from experience, don't we?!), life on this side of heaven at least, often gets a lot harder.
- B. It makes sense when you really think of it. Before coming to Christ, the idea of temptation to sin is, in many ways, a foreign concept. You didn't feel the need to fight or resist these things. You did what you wanted. When you sinned you were acting in accordance with your fallen nature. It all just felt natural. You were just going down with the current of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

1. But then, suddenly, when you come to Christ, it's as if everything turns. In Him you have a new nature, a new Spirit, a new life-governing principle. And now, what you come to find is that, in many ways, you are swimming upstream.
 - a. Now, you are no longer on the devil's team, you're on his hit-list.
- C. Life, in one sense, gets easier, but, in another sense, it also gets much harder.
 1. It's as Jesus said elsewhere in [John 16:33](#): "[I]n me you [will] have peace. [But] [i]n the world you will have tribulation."
 - a. "Your siding with me puts you at odds with all else. Therefore, '[temptations to sin are sure to come . . .](#)'" There are baited hooks hanging all about us. When you come into Christ you come into a war!

Observation #2: The Personality of It

- A. As we continue reading, we see the manner in which these temptations are to come, and it is quite surprising I think: "[Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!](#)"
 1. What we first begin to realize here is that these temptations to sin are going to come at us through others, through people.
 2. But, the second thing we see here I think, and this is the surprising part, is that these people through whom temptations to sin are sure to come are often leaders, people of significance, within the church.
 - a. I think this is what comes into view when we consider the surrounding context. Remember that Jesus, for quite some time now, has just been at odds with the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders there in Israel. And I think here He's hinting at the fact that these dudes are up to no good and God is going to bring it back down upon their heads in the end.
- B. Now think about this with me for a moment.
 1. In one sense, resisting these temptations would be less tricky if they were coming at us directly from Satan himself, right? It would be quite simple to detect if the devil was just sitting above the pond, dangling the hooks in. We just trace up the line and . . . "Ah, I see that pitchfork and those horns, man. You're not going to fool me."
 2. We also wouldn't be all that surprised to hear that temptations are going to be coming to us from people outside the church. Of course, that dude you used to go out drinking with every Friday night is going to be tempting you towards stuff you shouldn't be getting involved in. We get that. We expect that. We know to look out for that.
 3. But that is not the sort of thing Jesus is talking about here I don't think. I think Jesus is referring to the idea Paul touches on when he tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and he comes into the church veiled under the form of those who would seem to be righteous and knowledgeable and trustworthy.

- a. That's the scandal in all of this. It's not the dude with a pitchfork in his hand. Nor is it the guy with a cold one in his hand. It's the guy up front with a Bible in his hand. That's the guy to watch out for!
- C. If you read your Bible carefully, you'll notice that the Apostles are constantly having to push back against false teachers and their false teaching. These corrupt guys are always infiltrating the local congregations and trying to tempt those in the church away from Christ and the gospel and the way of life that flows out from it.
- D. Let me just give you one example. In 2 Cor 11, Paul writes this to the Corinthian church there: "² I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. . . . [He carries on in this manner, but drop your eyes now to vv. 13-15, which really takes us to the text I was alluding to earlier] . . . ¹³ [S]uch men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds" (vv. 2-4, 13-15).
- 1. Did you catch that last line there? I hope you did, because he's talking about the very next thing Jesus is going to bring out in our text. This nonsense is going to be brought to an end and it not's going to be pretty.

Observation #3: The End of It

- A. So we continue reading in our text: "¹ . . . Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin" (vv. 1-2).
- B. It's a frightening image. A millstone was a massive stone disk used for grinding grain, often so big that it would require an animal, such as a donkey or something to even move it.
 - 1. And Jesus is saying: "Listen to me, if you're going to step up and lead these little ones, my little flock, my children, my disciples, astray, if you're going to lead them in the way of temptation, it would be better for you to have one of these stones hung around your neck and to just be dropped into the sea to drown, then to face My Father and give an account for what you've done."
 - a. One commentator sums it up well: "Better to be dead than to be a false guide!" (PNTC).

(2) The Disciple's Self-Watch (vv. 3-4)

“Pay Attention to Yourselves!”

- A. Now, the interesting thing is that Jesus goes from here, not to simply say: “Watch out for those guys somewhere out there.” But rather “Pay attention to [or ‘watch’] yourselves!” (v. 3a).
1. I think the idea here is both: “Don’t be led astray by one those guys.” But also: “Don’t become one of those guys.” Don’t be led astray and don’t lead others astray. “Pay attention to yourselves!”
- B. Here, of course, naturally I thought about my own ministry, I thought about the gravity of being a pastor/elder.
1. I thought about how the author of Hebrews says that I am “keeping watch over your souls . . . [and] will have to give an account [to God for how I’ve led you]” (Heb 13:17). I may be able to get an awful lot by you, but I will get nothing by God.
 2. I thought about what Paul says to Timothy in 1 Tim 4:16: “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” It’s a trembling thing.
- C. I remember a while back, sitting around the table during one of our Elders’ meetings and—somehow or other (I think another well-known pastor in the evangelical world had just fallen into infidelity or something)—we got to talking about all the stories we’ve heard over the years of pastors falling into sin and just leaving all out wreckage in their wake. Jerry had been around this area for quite some time and he was able to tell me about this church and that church, and just the garbage that’s gone on. And, man, I’ve sat with so many of you, hearing your stories and things, and it’s probably well over half of this church that has been seriously wounded by just wicked guys, leaders in the church involved in all manner of nonsense. Praise God you didn’t walk away from Christianity or the church because of it. Because some do!
1. But, anyways, it was during that meeting as we were talking about these heartbreaking things, that it just dawned on me. I needed to redefine a bit what I thought successful ministry looked like. Let’s just set aside the normal metrics for a moment—like I want to pack out a big building or something. A lot of these guys were doing that, and it went to their head or something, and they just blew it.
 - a. So I started thinking: Forget this idea of numbers! Do we want to reach the city and see this church grow. Yes, of course we do. But I was realizing, man, if I just don’t cheat on my wife, that’s already a huge success. If I don’t water down the gospel for the sake of filling the pews, that’s a big win. If I don’t start twisting things to get into your pocketbook, I’ll count that as a major victory for the kingdom.
 - i. My goodness, I started realizing successful ministry would just be making it to the end still in love with Jesus—not making shipwreck of my faith and bringing a whole boatload of folks down with me. I know that sounds a bit grim or pessimistic, perhaps, but I think it’s true.
- D. I just want to be able to say at the end of my ministry what Paul said at the end of his. From a prison cell there in Rome, Paul wrote in 2 Tim 4:6-7: “⁶ I am already being poured out as a drink offering,

and the time of my departure has come.⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

1. I don’t care whether there’s ten people in my congregation at the end or ten thousand. If I can say what Paul says here, I have made it!
 - a. So I’ve got to pay attention to myself.
- E. And this is important for me as a leader in the church, but it’s important for every one of us, isn’t it? Every disciple is to be a disciple-maker. Every saint is sent. Every one of us who takes on the name of Christ is leaving some impression of him with those we rub shoulders with—whether for good or for bad.
 1. We are all needing to pay attention to ourselves lest we either be tempted or become the tempter, right?

3 Suggestions

- A. And so the question that we come to now is: How?! What does it mean to pay attention to ourselves? How do we do this? I have three suggestions for us.

Suggestion #1: Make Space in Your Life for God’s Word

- A. I’m just going to let Paul make the case for this in [2 Tim 3](#). Listen to how his logic works here. He talks about the war around us and the temptations and things and, in light of that, he moves towards the importance of spending time in God’s word: “¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶ For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. ⁹ But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:1–17).

1. Did you hear that? In the context of this great spiritual conflict and war that we find ourselves in, give yourselves to the reading of Scripture. That’s going to be one of the best

ways you can pay attention to yourselves. That's going to be one of the best ways you can keep from being led astray and leading others astray.

- B. So what about you? Are you making space for this? I know it's Silicon Valley. I know everything is so important. But you're in a war. I don't know if we really realize that. And the word of God is called "[sword of the Spirit](#)" ([Eph 6:17](#)). What kind of soldier forgets to bring his weapon to the battlefield? Your life hangs on this!

Suggestion #2: Make Space in Your Life for God's People

- A. Really, this point is what Jesus begins to address next in [vv. 3-4](#). Look at it real quick: "[3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.](#)"
1. Now, I'll come back to these verses next week to deal particularly with the subject of the Christian community and the way of forgiveness, but for now at least just notice the flow of thought.
 - a. The idea I think, quite plainly, is that paying attention to one's self, while in one sense it is an individual matter between me and God, in another sense, it is a community project. I need others on this with me.
- B. "[Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him . . .](#)" ([v. 3a](#)). Did you catch that? I'm not just watching out for me. I'm watching out for you!
1. Now we hear "[rebuke](#)" and immediately something in our stomach turns, right? We think it sounds a bit smug and self-righteous. But we miss the heart of it when we read it this way. Another way to render the word in the Greek could be "warn" and I think that brings out the nuances Jesus is after here—nuances of care, concern, compassion, love.
 - a. This is not communicating I am somehow better than you. This is communicating I am with you. I am watching out for you. We've got to have each other's back if we're going to win this war.
- C. I think part of what Jesus is getting at here is that it's part of the nature of sin to numb as it kills. What I mean is often when we're in the thick of it, we don't even know we're in the thick of it. We're so busy enjoying the bait, we don't even realize we're on the hook. And we need our brothers and sisters in Christ to help.
- D. Let me just pause here and ask a few questions for you to reflect on:
1. Do you have any other Christians in your life who can help keep you on track, who can call you out when you're wandering into doctrinal or moral error?
 2. Do you have people who know you well enough and love you well enough to get into it with you for the sake of Christ and the good of your soul?
 3. Do you seek people out?
 4. Do you let people in?

5. Are you actively caring for others in this way and helping them along in their discipleship to Jesus?
 6. Are you running with others in the family?
 7. Or are you just kind of going it alone?
- E. Listen, if you're going—"Whoops, that's me; I'm kind of running solo here"—let me just say that's why we've created spaces in our church like Home Groups. I know Fall is here and everyone's kind of getting settled into their new routines and things. So it's a good time to stop and consider: Are you in a Home Group here? If not, why not? This is one of the primary places we're going to try to do this life on life stuff with each other. And Jesus is saying we need this if we're going to make it on alright.
1. And, one more thing, I realize there are some for whom a Home Group might not work, or maybe you actually want to do something in addition to that and go a little deeper. Well, that's why we're rolling out DNA Groups. They're even smaller so they can be flexible and tailor-made to your schedule and things. If you want to get in on one or you want to facilitate one let me know or check it out online. I'm training a few ladies after the service today so they can head up some of these and I'll be looking to do the same with some guys soon.
- F. Now, again, I know this is Silicon Valley and we're all strapped for time and exhausted and just trying to get by at work and home and things. But this is a war. And we desperately need each other. What kind of soldier goes out to the battlefield alone?! It's suicide!

Suggestion #3: Make Sure You Get the Gospel!

- A. The last suggestion I'll give you is to just make sure you get the gospel. The gospel is, as Paul says, ["of first importance" \(1 Cor 15:3\)](#). Everything hinges on this. All attacks from the enemy zero in on this. If the gospel can be distorted then the Christian can be discarded.
1. When we make space in our lives for God's word, well His word is all about the gospel.
 2. When we make space in our lives for God's people, well this is a community centered around the gospel, constantly ministering and living in light of the gospel.
- B. So we've got to know what the gospel is. And one of the ways to get clear on this is to make sure you know what the gospel is not. I'll quickly give you four common distortions that have just wreaked havoc in the church through the years. And, as we do this, my hope is that we'll come to get a sense of the real thing.

Distortion #1: The Graceless Gospel

- A. This distortion says that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are not sufficient grounds for our salvation. We've got to add our own good works to the mix. We've got some serious cleaning up to do if God is ever really going to receive us back.
- B. Some of us are going to be tempted in this direction. You see all these pretty, smiley church people and you think I've got to be like that. I've got to memorize Scripture, and serve in this ministry, and go on this missions trip. And you're doing it not as an overflow of love to God for what He's done,

but because you're trying to get God to love you by your own good deeds. You're trying to atone for the stuff that still has you feeling condemned.

1. But He's already atoned for it, and He already loves you and receives you in Christ!

Distortion #2: The Lawless Gospel

- A. This distortion moves in the complete opposite direction. This one says, okay so if I'm justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone—if His grace really is sufficient for my salvation—well then my works don't matter at all. I'll just keep on sinning so that grace may abound. "I raised my hand. I said a prayer. Heaven's mine. Now let me go on living like the devil."
- B. Some of us are going to be tempted to overplay grace in this way.
 1. But we forget that grace doesn't nullify the law it helps us fulfill it. Grace transforms. It sets free. Sin is destructive to God's original design for shalom and wholeness. Any gospel that doesn't set free from sin isn't gospel. It's isn't good news.

Distortion #3: The Social Gospel

- A. This distortion moves away from spiritual and eternal realities and maximizes in concern for society here and now. The gospel is not so much about heaven and hell and sin and salvation and all these things, but about social justice, and racial reconciliation, poverty alleviation, politics, and the like—here and now.
- B. Some of us will be tempted to think that the church wastes too much time talking about an old Book when she should be out really making a difference in the world.
 1. But we forget that all these social ills have at their bottom sin to blame. The spiritual dilemma is the more fundamental one. Sin is the great disruption that threw the world out of whack. And Jesus came to deal with that! Should we be concerned for social reform and justice and things? Certainly! But our deepest concern underneath all of it is that people come to know Christ—the only one who can truly make things right, and will, in the end.

Distortion #4: The Prosperity Gospel

- A. This distortion reduces God into a sort of sugar daddy in the sky. You may do some Christian things, but it's not to get more of God. It's to get more of His stuff. It's religious activity powered by greed. It's worship of self masquerading as worship of God.
- B. Some of us will be tempted to treat God in this way.
 1. But God wants to give us so much more than just His stuff. He wants to give us Himself. That's what the gospel is. It's not just Him opening up His wallet. It's Him opening up His heart!
- C. So Jesus is saying: "Pay attention to yourselves. This is a world at war. Temptations are all around. Get in the word. Gather with God's people. And root yourself deep in the gospel."