

“WISDOM FOR SAYING NO TO TEMPTATION.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for Sermon: Proverbs 1:10; 4:14-15; 14:16; 16:17-18; 22:3

Introduction.

We need wisdom to live wisely and well in a foolish and fallen world. This fallen world is all around us and it is constantly trying to press us into its mold.

Proverbs is a call to wake up and live with a conscious awareness of God's presence with us and around us, to live before the face of God, coram deo, burning eternity into our eyes.

Will you take to heart this call to rise above our complacent, compromised sleepwalk through life, and see the glorious vision Christ has for us in His Word?

Proverbs is a call to lift our eyes up from the mundane affairs of earth, from the temporal, carnal distractions and attractions and temptations that fill our vision day after day.

Proverbs has strong and remarkably practical wisdom for resisting temptations voice, for resisting evil, refusing sinful influences, and choosing the path of wisdom.

Temptations.

You have heard the old joke, “I can resist everything but temptation.” The problem of course is how much truth there is in that statement. Every one of us faces multiple temptations every day. They are endless and countless.

It was the very first bad thing to happen in the Garden of Eden. Ever since then Satan has been tempting us. All of us, all the time. Even Jesus, Satan took his best shot, three shots actually.

It is so frequent that most of aren't even aware half the time. Let me prove it by casting a net that catches all of us. Listen to this list of temptations and you keep track of yours.

The temptation to laziness, sloth. Stay in bed a little longer, cut corners, skip worship. Spend evenings or weekends binge watching.

The temptation to unkindness. Being grumpy in the morning.

The temptation to selfishness. Arguing over chores, changing a diaper, cleaning up a mess, taking a kid to school, sports, doctor, etc. Wanting the last piece.

The temptation to pride. Boast, brag, think too highly of ourselves, or to try to impress someone.

The temptation to power. To want to control others, throwing our weight around.

The temptation to impatience. Losing our temper with spouse, kids, co-workers, other drivers.

The temptation to lust. Flirting with that good looking woman, taking a second look at that good looking guy, clicking on that click bait online, or worse.

The temptation to sloppiness. Dress carelessly, immodestly; leave messes uncleaned.

The temptation to malice. Refusing to speak to that person who has hurt you or you don't like.

The temptation to gossip. Repeating some juicy story or recounting a person's past misfortune.

Sharing information that is not ours to share.

The temptation to envy/jealousy. To want what someone else has.

The temptation to greed. Holding tightly to money, not being generous, sharing, wanting more.

The temptation to drunkenness. Having one too many or sneaking another.

The temptation to impurity. Giving free reign to sensual thoughts and desires.

The temptation to cruelty. Taking our frustrations/impatience out on family members or friends.

The temptation to gluttony/overindulgence. Taking that third helping or fourth chocolate cookie.

The temptation to self-indulgence. Justifying purchases when you can't afford it/don't need it.

The temptation to revenge. Firing off that hasty email or social media post. Retaliate.

I could go on and on. Temptation is part of the air we breathe, part of the foolish, fallen, sinful world we inhabit. The issue is not if we will face temptations. We all do, we all have already today. The issue is not the temptation itself, the issue is what do we do with them, how do we respond to them.

And here again the world tells us how to respond to them in a variety of ways.

The world says follow your heart. The world says if it feels good, do it. The world says you only live once, so why not. The world says everybody does it. You say it's just the way you are, the way you were raised, you can't help it. You say you have tried to change but it's hard or doesn't stick. You say I can handle it, it's not that bad or big a deal.

The wise person learns to recognize the voice of temptation the moment it speaks and recognize the lie it is speaking and where it wants to take us and learn to stop it before it entangles us in its snare again. Let's look to our texts for this morning, a few among many in Proverbs.

***Proverbs 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.**

When Satan fell the first thing he was, was a tempter and he has been tempting everyone ever since. He is really good at it. Sometimes he is blatant, usually subtle and sneaky.

But he can only tempt, he cannot force us to sin. He entices, he lies, he whispers, he makes it look good, he appeals to our self-interest or selfishness or pride, he sets the trap, he baits the hook, but he can't make us take it.

The choice to sin is always our personal choice. We can't blame Satan. The famous old line "The devil made me do it" is not true and always false. Eve tried that legal defense in the garden and it didn't work, it didn't get her off the hook.

If you commit a sin, the devil did not make you do it. He may have tempted you to do it. He may have influenced you and even set you up with a great opportunity. But he did not make you do it. You still had a choice. God holds us personally accountable for what we chose to do.

When we fall into his traps, or take his bait, or get caught off guard, we have only ourselves to blame.

James 1:14 Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his *own* desire.

We are tempted by our own sinful desires which are a product of our own sinful nature.

One of Satan's favorite tools is through other people or influencers. Friends, coworkers, classmates, family, social media, cultural voices.

David began the Psalms with a caution about bad company and sin and sinners. It is interesting that David's son, Solomon, begins his Proverbs with the same wisdom. Be especially aware of those who are not only content to sin, but who want to get others to join them.

Bad company corrupts good character (I Corinthians 15:33). Bad company corrupts our thinking, judgment.

Proverbs says don't negotiate with temptation, don't consent. It comes as an invitation. Consent is the first step in falling into temptation. Don't give in, don't yield to their strong enticements, be deaf to their invitations no matter how persuasive.

***Proverbs 4:14-15 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. 15 Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.**

Notice how seriously this is treated, not once, not twice, six times the warning is given. Whenever there is a piling up of words, that is a good time to take notice. This is not just a warning, but a serious, strong warning.

Notice the verbs: Do not enter, do not walk, avoid, do not go, turn away, pass on. Don't just get away, get far, far away, the farther the better. Don't ever think you can get far enough away. The question should never be how close can I get, but how far away can I stay?

Proverbs teaches that temptation rarely begins with the act itself. There is a progression, a slippery slope. Invitation → curiosity → approach → participation → habit → bondage → destruction. Proverbs wants us to interrupt the process at the beginning. The easiest way to win the battle, is to never enter in.

The wise person doesn't enter or go near sin or evil, doesn't even go near the appearance of evil. If you avoid appearances, you avoid the real thing. Avoid the edges of sin and immorality, even the borders of it. Don't try to be close to the fire, thinking you won't be burned.

It is easier to resist at the very beginning, than once you are in the sin. You don't know where that path leads or how long it is, or if once you start if you will be able to stop or go back.

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

Treat it like an infectious disease. The biblical strategy is not merely resistance. It is avoidance.

Temptation is from Satan, it is never innocent or trivial or a small thing. Think about what is going on in every temptation. All temptation has one end, one purpose, Satan is on a mission to ruin your soul and turn you of God. Satan is out for your never-ending misery, to abuse you and destroy you. Slowly, subtly, secretly, his goal is your death.

Why do you think this is worded so strongly?

Temptation is strong in our lives because it's not just about us. Temptation is an assault by the demonic powers on the kingdom of the Messiah. Satan hates Jesus and hates those who bear His image. Temptation is never a small thing. Heaven and hell are at war. And humanity is caught in the crossfire.

***Proverbs 14:16 One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless.**

It is the true mark of wisdom to fear what is truly fearful, what can destroy our soul and lead to our destruction. To fear sin and evil is to be wise. Fear evil more than you fear death.

Like the three men about to be thrown in the fiery furnace. They feared sinning against God more than they feared be thrown into the fire.

Fear God and fear sinning against God. A holy fear fears every unholy thing. This is not a paranoid person, this is a realistic person who understands human weakness and sins power. He knows he is capable of falling. His humility is his protection.

The fool never fears anything, he rushes in where angels fear to tread. It is folly to like sin, to delight in sin, to be fearless in the face of evil and death and hell, to not think about the future. It is utter stupidity to ignore God and His Word, and the good advice and counsel of family and friends.

Every temptation has a moment of decision, a choice. Often that decision time is only seconds. Everyone who uses a computer or smartphone knows the split-second choices between clicking that link, that site, that reel, that thread.

The wise person learns to recognize the voice, understands where the path leads, and turns away before he is entangled. The wise person does not merely resist temptation at the moment of decision. Wisdom recognizes temptation before it becomes sin, refuses its invitation, avoids its path, turns away from evil, and takes seriously the danger that sin poses to our souls.

***Proverbs 16:17-18 The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life. 18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.**

Ask every temptation where does this lead. Temptation only wants you to know the beginning, never the destination. It only wants us to see the bait, never the hook.

The wise, upright person turns away even from the appearance of evil, even the taste. He looks not to the left or to the right, but keeps his eye fixed straight ahead.

Sort of like how I walk through rows of kiosk in tourist sites, stay in the middle, keep moving, don't look to the left or the right, don't make eye contact. Avoid temptation.

We didn't do that on our first night at the fair. We got enticed and drawn in by those fancy adjustable beds. We didn't do Psalm 1. Not only did we walk, then stand, then sit.

We laid down. She just about got us. Adjustable beds are not evil, we may get one, just not at fair prices. But the principle holds, we must be alert to the dangers, snares, enticements of sin and the lure.

Take your soul more seriously, guard your soul, guard your heart, guard your path. To preserve your soul is to preserve your life.

And do not proudly, presumptuously say you can handle it. Those who smugly think they are better than everyone else, are in for a rude awakening. A person full of himself is not full of God. Remember Peter saying he would never deny Jesus.

God will not have us proud. He humbles the exalted. God sees it as His personal responsibility to deal with the proud and bring down those who think themselves above reproof or correction or discipline or accountability.

Let us fear pride in ourselves. And when God humbles us, receive it as grace from His hand for our good.

I Corinthians 10:12 Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

The strongest man in the Bible fell into temptation, more than once.

The greatest king in the Bible, a man after God's own heart, fell into temptation more than once.

The wisest man in the Bible who wrote these proverbs fell into temptation more than once.

The man closest to Jesus fell into temptation more than once.

Do you think you are stronger or wiser than them?

***Proverbs 22:3** The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

Who is this prudent man? What makes someone prudent?

The word prudent means more than seeing danger or evil, he foresees it. He looks ahead, uses good judgment, anticipates and avoids danger. He is cautious, circumspect, careful, in a word, wise. He sees the danger of bad company.

Noah foresaw the flood, Joseph foresaw the years of famine, and provided accordingly.

Prudence is contrasted to one who is simple, meaning he is foolish, naïve, careless, not wise. Fools rush into trouble, unconcerned about sin or long-term consequences, thinking nothing of disobeying God, going from smaller sins to greater and greater sins.

I Thessalonians 5:21-22 Test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

Don't be wise too late, be wise early and often. Prove before you move.

Don't be foolish, don't continue in sin and disobedience when you have heard the warning, when you have been told the danger.

Temptation comes → don't consent. Proverbs 1:10

Temptation invites → don't enter the path. Proverbs 4:14–15

Temptation entices → don't go near it. Proverbs 14:16

Temptation appeals to your heart → guard your heart and life. Proverbs 16:17-18

Prayer:

Jesus, we call to you in prayer. You are our great high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses for you too were tempted as we are and yet you resisted Satan and did not sin. It's with confidence in you and not in ourselves that we draw near to your throne of grace "that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Grant this we pray for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.