

Being Tempted Isn't Sin—Surrendering to It Is

“When the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from Him until another time” (Luke 4:13).

One simple story illustrates an example of an opportune time, “Alexander was trying to save all the pennies that he could in order to buy a baseball bat. But he had a hard struggle. One night when he was saying his prayers, his mother heard him say fervently, ‘O Lord, please help me save my money for a baseball bat. And, God, don’t let the ice cream man come down this street anymore!’”

Isn’t that true of temptation? It takes from us, while at the same time, it looks so appealing.

Commentator Klyne Snodgrass states it well, “Mention of the ‘schemes’ of the devil reminds us of the trickery by which evil and temptation present themselves in our lives. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap.”

That’s important to note: We can miss evil for what it really is until after it has accomplished its purpose. Only by comparing thoughts and actions to God’s Word can we have the insight to see beyond the circumstances.

Being tempted isn’t sin—surrendering to it is. Temptation is also an opportunity to do what is right by turning from it. First Corinthians 10:13 states, “No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.” The door of temptation swings both ways—you can enter or exit. If we choose to enter, once inside, we may

not see the exit sign so clearly again.

Consider these points:

1. The flesh is in rebellion against God.

Puritan author, John Owen, writes, "Secret lusts lie lurking in your own heart which will never give up until they are either destroyed or satisfied." The flesh—although it feels comfortable and natural at times—is not a friend to be trusted: "The carnal mind is hostile toward God" (Rom. 8:7a). Enmity is not just an enemy, as an enemy can be reconciled. Enmity is in direct opposition to the will of God.

In short, the flesh says, "Feed me so I can destroy you—destroy your health, your relationships, your soul." C.H. Spurgeon warned, "Beware of no man more than of yourself; we carry our worst enemies within us."

2. The devil doesn't make us do anything; he simply presents the bait.

For example, the devil doesn't show a young couple the pain and anguish and the years of regret that premarital sex brings; he deceives them with temporary enjoyment and a false sense of freedom from responsibility. He has been deceiving since the beginning of time.

In Genesis 3:6, when Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasing to the eyes and a tree desirable to make one wise" she succumbed to temptation (took the bait) and rejected God's Word. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate it. Nothing has changed. The devil still presents the bait, but instead of taking responsibility for actions, many blame the devil for their poor choices. "The devil is coming after my finances," they say; yet they fail to budget, give to those in need and spend wisely. "The devil is trying to destroy my marriage," is another common statement; yet spouses fail to truly love and serve one another.

Although the enemy will come against our families and our finances, we cannot blame him. We must take responsibility for our own poor choices when warranted. According to 1 John 2:16, the devil entices through the lust of the flesh (unbridled passions), the lust of the eyes (covetousness) and the pride of life (boasting of what we have and/or do). Another step toward victory is to take responsibility for our actions, submit them to God, and resist the devil: "Therefore submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

3. Be aware of "opportune times."

Recall Luke 4:13, which says, "When the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from Him until another time." In battle, the enemy attacks at opportune times. "Opportune times" in the Greek language is like a favorable wind blowing a ship toward its destination. Again, 1 John 2:16 reminds us that the world entices through cravings for physical pleasure and through covetousness, and through pride in our achievements and possessions. These are the three areas where the enemy will concentrate his focus. Be aware of these "opportune times."

4. The source of our strength comes from the food that we choose.

What we feed grows, and what grows becomes the strong and dominating force within our lives. Sin never stands still—it either grows or withers, depending on whether we feed or starve it. Our thoughts become words, our words become actions, and our actions become habits. Who is shaping your thoughts? A daily diet of violence, lust, anger and depression will fuel those very things in your life.

Again, the devil doesn't make us do anything; he simply presents the bait. James 1:14-15 says that each one of us "But each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and

enticed. Then, when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and when sin is finished, it brings forth death.” In other words, temptation says, “Feed me so I can destroy you.”

In closing, be encouraged. Recall 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

When you truly seek God’s help, you can control temptation instead of allowing temptation to control you. The key is to pray for strength and wisdom, and to be mindful of the warfare and the weapons of warfare (see Ephesians 6). When we yield to temptation, we walk willingly into the enemy’s camp. An immediate exit at the first sign of temptation will encourage victory. {eoa}

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