

How to Tell the Difference Between Temptation and Sin

A misunderstanding of the difference between temptation and sin has caused many people to believe they are losing their wilderness battles when they are actually winning.

The writer of Hebrews said that Christ was “in every sense tempted like we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). It is important for us to understand that temptation is not sin. For something to tempt us, we have to have a natural desire for it.

For example, if I had not eaten all day and you left me alone in a room with a platter of sushi, it would not tempt me because I hate sushi. On the other hand, if I were hungry and you set a nice, hot, juicy lobster tail in front of me, I would be tempted! We cannot be tempted with something we have no desire for. That is why the devil tempted Jesus with “turn these stones into bread”—he knew Jesus had not eaten in 40 days. It was the fact that Jesus was hungry that made the suggestion a temptation.

Where is the Line?

You are probably asking yourself, “When does a temptation become a sin?” Temptation becomes a sin when you agree with the suggestion instead of resisting it. If a beautiful, naked woman ran out in front of a crowd, every normal man in the mob would be tempted because God gave men a sex drive. But it is not until they choose to agree with the temptation that they have sinned.

If one of the men in the crowd said to himself, “I really would like to have sex with that woman,” now he has crossed over the line of temptation and entered into the world of sin. Even though at that point he has done nothing physically

wrong, he has already sinned in his heart.

I recently had a conversation with a high-profile leader who told me that he sinned every day. I was stunned. When I asked what was meant by sin, he began to describe several different temptations that he faced from day to day.

“Do you agree with those temptations in your mind when they come up in your heart?” I questioned.

“No, of course I don’t. I know better than that,” he answered.

“Then you haven’t sinned; you’ve only been tempted. Temptation is not sin,” I explained.

The leader was shocked by the true definition of sin. In that moment, that person was set free from a lifetime of guilt over feeling as though he had continually failed the Lord.

For more on this subject, check out my book *Spirit Wars*.

Do you know the difference between temptation and sin? Let me know in the comments below.{eo}

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