

When We Are Tempted

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James wrote, *"Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God;' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15)

Temptation itself is not sinful, but yielding to it is. This does not mean that we do not commit sin in our hearts? We certainly can sin in our hearts without participating in any overt action. Jesus said that the man who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her *"in his heart."* (Matthew 5:28) There is nothing innocent about a lustful person. This man about whom Jesus spoke isn't one who just happens to see a member of the opposite sex and admires her beauty. He is one who is looking, gazing, and staring at a woman with the attitude, "If I had opportunity to have her, I would."

The seventh commandment, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* must be explained in the light of the tenth, *"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife."* (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:18) It then becomes abundantly clear that, that, *"Out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings ..."* (Matthew 15:18-19). Yes, Jesus spoke of sin that originates in the heart. In Proverbs 4:23, we read, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."*

Paul commanded, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."* (Philippians 4:8) It does not take overt action to be guilty of sin! There must, therefore, be some way to reconcile how we can be tempted, yet not yield to sin. Jesus was tempted, but He did not sin (Matthew 4: 1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Clearly, He *"hath been in all points tempted like as (we are, yet) without sin."* (Hebrews 4:15)

Consider that James said one is tempted when (a) he is drawn away (b) by his own lusts and (c) enticed. James used hunting and fishing language in this narrative. Desire, seeking satisfaction, prompts an individual to sin; and he is caught, trapped, ensnared, or as we sometimes say, he swallows the bait, hook, line, and sinker. Indeed, he is hooked! We must exclude forbidden pleasures from our lives, lest Satan catch us in his snare. (See how the adulterous woman of Proverbs 7 tempted the young foolish man.) Just as a fisherman uses his most attractive bait to induce the fish to strike, so Satan tempts us by means of those things that are, to us, most desirable.

It is interesting to note that desire must first draw us away before there is enticement. The fish is safe as long as he remains under the rock or in the brush, but when he leaves the safety of his protection, he is vulnerable. This is why we must heed the words, *"Be careful little eyes what you see; be careful little hands what you do, and be careful little feet where you go,"* lest we be drawn away and make ourselves vulnerable to sin. Jesus, in Matthew 5:29-30, described how to avoid committing sin. *"And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell."*

In a similar passage, Jesus said, *"Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!"* (cf. Matthew 18:7-9) We learn therefore, that the eye and the hand that lead a person into sin symbolize and represent *"occasions of stumbling,"* or enticements to do wrong. No, we are not to literally cut off our hands or pluck out our eyes, but we are to take drastic action to rid ourselves of whatever might tempt us to sin. That is what it means to *"Keep thy heart with all diligence."*



James also noted, "*Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin:*" Lust is evil desire, and when it unites with a yielding will, a conception occurs. The horrible offspring is sin. James did not say that sin springs to life at the moment we experience desire. Here is where the difficulty occurs. Sometimes fleeting desires, improper thoughts, and maybe even questionable ideas come into our minds. These may be unwanted, unwelcome, and without warning. We must then, at that moment, exclude them, controlling our thoughts to bring them into captivity (*2 Corinthians 10:5*). We must not allow ourselves to dwell on them.

Someone has suggested that the steps of sin are:

1. Temptation begins when we are drawn away from the right course.
2. That which prompts us to move away from the position of safety and into an area where danger exists is the enticement that Satan dangles.
3. The lust that influences us conceives in the union between the evil desire and the will's submission to Satan.
4. Sin is born.
5. This sin grows to full stature.
6. Its consummation is spiritual death.

Never flirt with sin! It is a very destructive force. In fact, we must "*put it to death.*" (*Colossians 3:5*) Fling temptation aside immediately and decisively. Halfway measures do not work. Radical surgery is required. At this very moment, and without any hesitation, burn the obscene book, destroy the scandalous picture, unplug the computer and disconnect the internet, condemn the soul-destroying film, break the intimate social tie, and discard the deadly habit. He who dwells upon evil, nourishes it in his heart, and allows it to settle down in permanent abode will eventually yield to his desires and translate them into action. In the battle against sin, believers must fight hard! It will not be easy. Paul said, "*I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.*" (*1 Corinthians 9:26-27*)

Normal desire is not sinful. When desire gets out of bounds (lust), continues unrestrained (evil thoughts not brought into captivity), and begs for satisfaction, sin has begun in the individual's heart (*Matthew 15:18-19*). It will press its possessor into a course of action, the design of which is to achieve satisfaction. Now we have progressed to the *overt* practice of the sin. The end is spiritual death (*Romans 6:23*). Let us take comfort in God's promise, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.*" (*1 Corinthians 10:13*) Let us prepare ourselves to seek the way of escape, for indeed Satan is a formidable foe.