

3. Temptations – Part 1

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Temptation is the oldest of all the inner conflicts in the human heart. It started from the Garden of Eden when the serpent tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. There is not one person, including Christ, who hasn't struggled with it. And, except for Christ, there is not one person who hasn't suffered the consequences of yielding to it.

We often think that temptation is limited to sexual lust. But there are many other ways in which we can be tempted. Let's look at two others as well as the sexual kind:

1) Material temptation: This is a lust for things, money and possession.

2) Personal temptation: This is a lust for status, position and fame.

If you think I am making this up, just watch morning news shows or football games on TV. When TV cameras pan and zoom to the people, they act like total idiots in front of cameras for 15 second fame – including calling their buddies from their cell phones for them to see while they are jumping up and down with silly grins on their faces.

3) Sensual temptation: This is the lust for physical sensual pleasure.

The three chapters of the Book of Proverbs, from chapter 5 to 7, with the exception of a few areas, are dedicated to sensual temptation – how it comes to us, how we often fall for it, the horrible consequences for walking into the temptations and how not to get tempted. However, this morning we are not going to jump into Proverbs, rather we will study two contrasting characters from the Bible – the one who gave into a temptation, the other who successfully resisted the temptation.

You may say, "I am a godly person. I don't have sensual temptation to worry about." If that is the case, you have an issue with pride, first. We all face temptations throughout our lives. Let's make it clear. Temptation itself is not a sin, but going for the temptation is a sin. In other words, the problem does not lie in the bait, but the bite.

I believe that the Lord has a great lesson for all of us to learn and apply it in our lives.

A. THE TEMPTATION THAT ENDS UP IN DEATH

Eskimo people have a very effective and special way to hunt those infamous Alaskan Wolves. First, they sharpen their knives extremely sharp, especially around the tip of the blades. Then they apply fresh blood of sheep on them and allow them to be frozen. They repeat this same procedure for several times.

After that, they take these knives to the wolf's frequent trail and bury the knives with the handles in the ground and the blades sticking out. Even though the sheep's blood is frozen, the fresh blood smell can not escape a wolf's ultra sensitive nose.

A wolf comes over and starts to lick the blood covered frozen blade. Because the blade is so cold it numbs the wolf's tongue a little, but it still can taste the fresh blood. As the wolf licks the razor sharp blade, its own tongue starts to bleed. But he doesn't even notice it.

Now, the wolf can really taste the warm blood that is his own and it drives the wolf to lick the blade more vigorously. The wolf doesn't even realize that he was killing him-

self. Next morning, the eskimo hunter goes out to the wolf's trail and find the wolf bleed to death by a simple blade without a fight or chase.

B. THE FOUR POINTS TO MAKE

Please note what I said about this Eskimo people's hunting method:

1) They put their blade in the area wolves are familiar with.

The devil does not tempt us while we are in the fighting mode. He realizes that we are in full alert spiritually. So he waits for opportune times when our guards are down in our own familiar territories.

2) The wolf's tongue becomes numb as it licks the frozen blade.

When we get into temptation, nothing matters to us. We completely forget about our families, the people whom we have fellowship together and most importantly we forget our God Jesus Christ. In other words, we become dumb, blind and stupid.

3) The wolf starts to bleed and doesn't even realize that he is bleeding.

When we walk into a devil's trap, we don't even realize that we are in trouble. All we are concerned about is that we want our carnal desires to be met.

4) The wolf gets killed by bleeding to death.

As time goes by, the longer we are in temptation, the harder it is for us to get out. Pretty soon, we are completely trapped inside and become another victim of satan.

Whether you are tempted by pornography, gambling, alcohol, drugs or whatever, if you are a born-again Christian, you have God-given power within you to resist and fight back. Because Almighty God, the Holy Spirit lives in you as a guarantee for your eternal life.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 John 4:4b He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

However, if you depend on your own strength to fight back against the devil's temptation, you will lose every fight. But with God, we can overcome his temptations and traps.

C. THE KING WHO CHOSE NOT TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST TEMPTATION

2 Samuel 11:1-5 It happened in the spring of the year, (1) at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 Then it happened (2) one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And (3) from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 Then (4) David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child."

We find four faults one after another by king David that led him to sin against God and against the people God entrusted with.

1) At the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him.

Why in the world was David not going out to the battles and sitting around in the house? He got too confident in his own leadership and capability. He thought his general Joab was enough to handle any battle. He felt that he didn't need to get into the battle. But what he didn't realize is that he was right smack dab in the middle of spiritual battle and about to lose it.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

2) One evening David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house.

When we have too much time in our hands, we all have tendency to get ourselves into trouble. This is a case in point. David was bored out of his gourd. His spiritual guard was completely down. He was a sitting duck and an open season for the devil.

3) From the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.

The great reformer Martin Luther said, "There is nothing you can do to stop a bird flying over your head, but you can certainly stop the bird making a nest on your head." We can accidentally get to see or do something we should not. We can ask God to help us move out of that situation and stay away from it. But king David was staring at this woman bathing and desiring her.

Even though king David had 300 wives and concubines at his disposal, he wanted this woman. Because he didn't control his passion before by having that many women, and he didn't obey to God's command for one wife, he was already failing in this battle. David and Solomon show us that if one woman isn't enough, 1000 women aren't enough. 300 wives and concubines meant 300 mother-in-laws. No wonder why he was in serious trouble.

Bathsheba's great beauty made the sight very tempting. But the real strength of temptation often does not lie in the quality of the tempting object, but in the state of heart and mind of the one being tempted.

Our carnal desires can not be satisfied. The more we get, the more we want. If you used to be involved in illegal drugs, alcohol, gambling or pornography before, you know what I am talking about. You cannot satisfy with one line of cocaine, one can of beer, one puff of marijuana or one glance of pornography. Your body demands more. At this point, your body dictates your spirit.

While you are being sucked into temptation, God becomes quite unreal to us, we lose all reality, and only carnal desire is real. Satan does not fill us with hatred against God in the beginning, but he helps us forget about God. King David chose to forget everything including his loving and holy God.

Our God is so gracious to all of us. He wants to stop our sins before it gets worse. If king David stopped here and asked God to forgive him from having a carnal thought, it would not have been a big problem. God used a soft-footed servant to remind the king that Bathsheba was the wife of his own soldier, Uriah.

4) David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her.

King David still had a choice. But he would not stop at this point. Nothing matters to him. We should not put all the blame on David. No holy woman would take a bath on the rooftop where she could be seen from the king's castle. And I don't see her resisting the king's invitation either.

King David's sin brought a terrible consequence to his family, to his kingdom and the most of all it gave opportunities to the enemy of God to blaspheme His name.

D. THE YOUNG MAN WHO CHOSE TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST TEMPTATION

Genesis 39:7-12 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8 But (1) he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. 9 There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. (2) How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10 So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that (3) he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. 11 But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, 12 that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But (4) he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

What this young man Joseph was doing is opposite of king David:

1) He refused and said 'no' to his master's wife

Please remember that Joseph was a young man just like any teenager in America. He could have his hormone to override what the Lord spoke to him in his heart. But He wouldn't allow himself to fall for his master's wife's temptation.

Joseph was living in a foreign land where he had no contact with his Hebrew family. Actually, his father thought he was dead and his 10 brothers could care less if he was actually dead.

2) How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Unlike king David who forgot his God Joseph brought God in this situation. He thought about the consequences of his action that would bring shame to the name of our God.

But Mrs. Potiphar was not interested in the sanctity of her marriage or the trust between her husband and Joseph. She is interested only in gratifying her physical lust – NOW. Nothing else.

Many times sex between unmarried or extramarital adultery is nothing more than gratifying physical lust, not true love God wants us to have between husband and wife.

When you were tempted, did you bring God in that situation like Joseph did? If you did, you could have deflected satan's attacks like Jesus did against satan in the wilderness. Each time when He was tempted by satan, each time He declared, "It is written..." Jesus brought the Word of God into the situation. The Bible verses we memorize each will come to your rescue some day.

Psalm 119:11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!

3) He did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her

Joseph didn't take a chance of being with Mrs. Potiphar. He stayed away from her. Because if he stuck around her, he knew he would fall for her. Joseph could have come up with an excuse that it was not him who initiated this.

When you know that a temptation is ahead of you, what would you do? Do you walk right into it because you think that you can handle it with your willpower? We can learn what we must do from Joseph in next sentence.

4) He left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside

Joseph didn't care if he had to leave his cloth behind or not. He resisted her and ran away from her.

In almost every instance where the issue of sexual lust is dealt with in the New Testament, we're told to flee, to get up and run. Some temptations we're to stand and resist. But when it comes to sensual lust, we're told to do exactly as Joseph did – Get out of there. If we stay, we're likely to give in.

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Do not give yourself any opportunity to be in temptation. But if you, somehow, end up there, run away from it. If you linger, you will fall for it.

2) There is a strong demonic power against you while you are being tempted or sinning if you keep it in secret. If you inform other brothers or sisters in the Lord that you are being tempted or in the process of your sin, you will notice that the power of temptation and sin is gone and you will be able to escape from that temptation.

If you want to be continuously tempted and head for troubles, you may remain in silence. But if you want to be set free, you need to confess it to someone you can trust.

3) By yielding to temptation, we may lose in a moment what it takes a lifetime to gain.

4) Satan does not fill us with hatred against God at the time of temptation, but he helps us forget about God.

5) The temptations we experience are not more than we can handle. We have the Helper from heaven to overcome and resist – the Holy Spirit within us.