

St. Matthew A.M.E. Church
Bible Study
Monday, May 4, 2009

Temptation
James 1:14-16

When we hear the word temptation it brings to mind different things for different people. For one it's the man or woman who has become the focus of secret fantasies at the office. For the woman who long ago lost her zeal for being a wife and mother, it may be the corner drugstore where she knows she can get that prescription filled one more time. For the traveling salesman, temptation may mean the R-rated cable movies so readily available in hotels and motels today. For the teenager, it may mean a can of beer or a pack of cigarettes or a member of the opposite sex who has been declared off limits by parents. For many of us it is something to eat that we know is not good for us. In a word temptation conjures up many things for each of us.

Overcoming temptation is hard and many of us have tried and failed many times, and now we have resigned ourselves to the fact that we don't want to try anymore. We don't want to frustrate ourselves anymore. But there are several reasons why we must take up this struggle again.

First, a defeating habit in our lives will rob us of our confidence in the power of God to give people victory over sin. We will be hesitant to offer Christ as the answer to others who are controlled by sin. A sinful habit in our lives will destroy our incentive to share our faith. We will feel like a hypocrite. But one of the immediate results of being set free from a controlling habit is the desire to share with others the power of God that has been experienced. Satan loves to keep us in bondage to sin because it greatly diminishes our potential for the kingdom of God.

Another reason we must take seriously those areas of our lives that we allowed to slip is that choosing not to deal with sin ultimately leads to what the scripture calls a hard heart. A hard heart develops when people hear the truth, believe the truth, but refuse to apply the truth. Developing a hard heart is a process that takes time. Every time we recognize sin in our lives, feel convicted and yet do nothing about it, we become less and less sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we reach the point where we feel no conviction at all over particular. We become callous and quench the spirit in our lives. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

The Bible warns that if this process continues God will eventually turn us over to that particular sin. In other words He will say, "you want to live your way? Fine, do so and without any interference from Me." At this point we lose all moral and ethical direction so far as the Holy Spirit is concerned. We are now on our own. (Example 1 Corinthians 5) man involved in incestuous relationship without remorse and eventually was turned over to Satan.

A third reason we must we must take up battle against sinful elements in our lifestyle is because one sin always, and I repeat always leads to another sin. Sin is like a cancer in that it spreads. One sin area not dealt with opens up other areas. Most of the counseling I do involves what is considered some “small” sin which opened the door to other sins and major problems.

A final reason we must take seriously what we consider even the “smallest” sin is that sin always results in death of some kind. (James 1:14-16) James gives us an equation:

$$\text{Temptation} + \text{Sin} = \text{Death}$$

Wherever there is sin there is always death of some kind. The most obvious example would be physical death as the result of an alcohol related automobile accident or suicide. Other sins result in physical death after a prolonged period of time. These examples would include smoking, excessive alcohol or drug consumption, and various eating disorders. However, sin results in death on another level and brings death to relationships, finances, careers, opportunities, etc.....

Think for a minute, are we allowing sin to destroy what is most important to us? Are our vices or “weaknesses” as we call them, slowly sapping the life out of our relationships with the people we love, and destroying what God wants to do for us?

Some, if not many of us sometime develop the attitude that since our struggle with temptation is continual why not just accept certain things as a part of life and not worry about them? Oftentimes we forget that in the process of struggling with sin-in both our victories and defeats-God is at work. Through the trials of temptation He develops in us patience, endurance, sensitivity to others and most of all trust in the sufficiency of Christ. (James 1:2-4, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

The never ending process of combating temptation is God’s means of maturing and conforming us to the image of Christ. To throw our hands up in defeat is to abandon the process and miss out on life’s most important lessons. To grow is to be tempted. We can’t have one without the other. As long as we take a stand against temptation, even if we fall momentarily, God will use the struggle to make us into the men and women He wants us to be.