

St. Matthew AME Church
Bible Study
May 7, 2007

Temptation

A wise person prepares for what is inevitable in life. Temptation is one of life's inevitables. A plaque I saw once read, "opportunity only knocks once, temptation leans on the doorbell." We are always in arms reach of temptation. This being the case we should do all we can to be prepared.

Temptation generally speaking is anything that is in contradiction to God's Word or God's will. But temptation is also personal. It brings to mind different things for different people dependent upon where and how we are tempted. For some it may be some addiction, others it may be sexual temptation, still others it may be r-rated movies, someone else controlling calorie intake, temptation means a whole lot of things to different individuals. The prospects of overcoming that temptation may seem slim to us right now. We keep saying, "I've tried and failed so many times before." But there are several reasons why we must not give up the struggle against temptation.

First, a defeating habit in our life will rob us of our confidence in the power of God to give people victory over sin. As a consequence we will be hesitant to offer Christ as the answer to others who are controlled by sin. We will feel like hypocrites. (examples: inability to stop smoking or other habits that are sinful and destructive) But one of the immediate benefits of being set free from a controlling habit is the desire to share with others the power of God that we have experienced.

Second, we must not give up the struggle because not dealing with sin ultimately leads to what the Scripture calls a hard heart. A hard heart develops when a person hears the truth, believes the truth, but refuses to apply the truth. Developing a hard heart is a process that takes time. But each time a Christian recognizes sin in their lives, feel convicted and yet does nothing about it, they become less and less sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Eventually they reach a point where they feel no conviction at all over specific sins. They become callous and they quench the Holy Spirit in their lives. (I Thessalonians 5:19)

The Bible warns us that if this process continues God will eventually turn us over to our sin. In other words God will say, "you want to live your way, fine, go ahead without any interference from Me." At this point we lose all moral and ethical direction as far as the Holy Spirit is concerned. We are on our own. (I Corinthians 5)

Third, we must not give up the struggle against sin is because one sin leads to another. Sin is like a cancer in that it spreads. One area of sin leads to other areas of sin. Once we become accustomed to a particular sin, once it becomes entrenched in our lifestyle, it is only a matter of time until other sins become a problem. Most of the counseling I do deals with some small sin that was not dealt with. This one area opened the door for other things that soon blossomed into major problems.

A final reason we must continue the struggle against sin, against even the smallest sin is that sin always results in some kind of death. (James 1:14-16) The Epistle of James gives us an equation: Temptation + Sin = Death

Wherever there is sin, there is always death of some kind. Sin brings death to relationships, emotions, passion, commitment, creativity and a host of other kinds of death, including physical. Something is always destroyed by sin.

Be Realistic

Some people come up with excuses for sinning. One of the most common is that "I'm human, and besides, nobody's perfect." There is some truth to this statement, but the problem is that it confuses present character with potential behavior. We are saying, "since I am not perfect internally, don't expect perfect behavior externally." But with temptation, character is not really the issue. The issue is whether or not at a given moment in time people (in this case believers) have the potential to do the right thing. God says we do. (I Corinthians 10:13) All believers have the potential to say no to temptation, regardless of whether or not we are perfect. Pointing to character is only an excuse for giving in to temptation.

A second excuse is that we will always be tempted so why should we fight it. The problem with this excuse is that in both our victories and defeats God is at work. He develops in us patience, endurance, sensitivity to others and most of all a moment by moment trust in the sufficiency of Christ. (James 1:2-4) The Apostle Paul understood the value of unrelenting trials in regard to developing dependence on Christ strength. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

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.