

Lent I

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[0 : 00] Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Worship this morning's holy gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. What is temptation? Temptation is a thought, a feeling, an inclination, or a tendency that solicits us to violate the law of God for our own satisfaction.

Temptation in and of itself is not sin. Scripture teaches us this. Hebrews 4.15 says Jesus was in all points tempted, like as we are, yet without sin.

If temptation in itself is sin, then the temptations Jesus endured in today's gospel would have been sin also. While temptation in itself is not sin, it will certainly lead us into sin if we allow it to.

There are three stages whereby temptation devolves into sin, a process that often takes merely seconds to complete. So we must be aware and prepared.

[1 : 17] Stage one is suggestion. Here a proposition of sin is made to the soul. Suggestions are external to the soul.

They are a voice calling to it from our senses or from external stimulus, which is heard but not acknowledged. Like if someone said, go jump off that bridge.

We hear it, but we give no consideration to it. Stage two is delectation. At this stage, the soul gives some consideration to the suggestion, and it becomes a proposition.

We begin to weigh it out in our minds and sort of make a plan of, should I do it, should I not? The voice is heard and the head turns towards it. We are now giving some consideration to jumping off that bridge, but yet we've not made the choice.

Delectation is the crossroads of temptation. If the soul takes pleasure in the proposition, if it internalizes the proposition, the line from temptation into sin is crossed.

[2 : 27] If it doesn't, if the temptation is dismissed, sin is not committed. Stage three is consent.

Here the soul agrees to the proposition and moves forward with it. The voice is heard, the head turns towards it, and now also accepts it. We make the decision to actually jump off that bridge. What was initially external to the soul has now been internalized and acted upon, even if it's only within our mind.

So stage one is not sin. Stage two can become sin. And stage three is sin. A seminary instructor provided the following analogy for these three stages.

Let's say I live in a house on a very busy street. Day and night, traffic was by the front of my house. Just back and forth, back and forth. I could do nothing to stop it.

[3 : 31] This traffic is the normal passing thoughts that take place continuously within our minds, none of which are sins. Every once in a while, one of the cars passing by catches my attention.

Say a green Ford. I see it. I'm aware of it. But that is all. As long as I allow that green Ford that has caught my attention to pass by, it remains only a suggestion.

It's in no way sinful. But let's say I allow that green Ford to pull into my driveway. Here I have a choice. I can say to the green Ford, get out of my driveway.

Or I can check it out and start considering what to do with it. I'm at a crossroads, whether to dismiss it or not. This is, again, delectation.

If I continue to check it out, I am heading in the direction of sin. But if I tell it to get out of my driveway, or I turn my back on it and walk away so that it leaves my driveway, I have not sinned.

[4 : 42] Consent comes when I not only allow the green Ford in my driveway and don't dismiss it, but I open my garage door and let it pull into my garage. Once the green Ford is in my garage, what was temptation has become sin.

This analogy makes two points. First, we need to avoid being over-scrupulous with the passing thoughts that come to our lives. That they are, just because something passes through my mind, it's

sinful.

But second, we have to be mindful of what we do with the constant bombardment of suggestions that we do encounter. We need to let them pass or consciously dismiss them so they do not lead to sin.

In understanding temptation, we also need to know the distinction between temptations and trials.

Trials are given to us by God. Temptations are from Satan.

St. James 1, verses 2 and 3 states, My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

[5 : 58] And then later in that chapter, verses 13 and 14, James states, Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted from God. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone.

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. We see the distinction. God allows us to encounter trials, to test, to prove, and to grow our faith.

Satan tempts us so we might fall into sin. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for a 40-day trial. After 40 days, Satan came to Jesus and tempted him.

The trial was from God. The temptation was from Satan. One more thing. We are never compelled to act upon temptation.

Our ability to endure it is an important part of the grace given to us in baptism. No matter how strong a temptation may be, there is always a way out.

[7 : 09] 2 Peter 2, 9 states, The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations. 1 Corinthians 10, 13 states, There is no temptation taken you, but such is common to man.

But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.

In every situation, as soon as we become aware of temptation rising up within us, when suggestion is becoming delectation, we need to look for the way of escape God has prepared for us.

Let me use one more analogy. Say I'm in a basement that is flooding fast with water, and across the room I see there's a door that I can get out of the basement with.

I need to get over to that door as quickly as I can and escape, so I do not drown in that basement. God will always provide us a door so we can escape the flood of temptation.

[8 : 19] As soon as we feel it rising within us, we need to pray immediately that we see the way of escape. And once we see it, we must use it.

Temptations in themselves are not sin. Also, they are not a sign God has abandoned us, or that we have walked away from Him. Well, we always need to be cautious not to place ourselves in situations that cause temptations to rise, that provoke temptations, being idle, you know, places where we may go, things we may watch, things we may read.

We should not fear the thoughts that continually pass through our minds. Temptation often comes when Satan sees we're being faithful and wants to stop us.

Job is the biblical case in point. Satan will use false guilt to try and shut down faithfulness. Don't listen to him.

He is a liar and the father of lies. Brethren, let us be ready then for when temptation comes. And when it does, let us find the way of escape and use it.

[9 : 36] May we, as Jesus did, overcome temptation, and in doing so, bring glory to God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.