

“The Source of Temptation”

James 1:13-18

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(Sexuality; Temptation)

In the 1991 movie “Grand Canyon” an attorney attempts to bypass a traffic jam only to find himself in a very bad neighborhood when his car stalls.

Waiting for a tow truck he is surrounded by a group of young thugs who threaten him.

Just then the tow truck arrives and as the truck driver hooks up the car the young thugs complain that he is interrupting their fun.

The truck driver then takes the leader of the gang aside and attempts to give him a lesson in life.

“Man, the world ain’t supposed to work like this. Maybe you don’t know that, that this ain’t the way it’s supposed to be. I’m supposed to be able to do my job without askin’ you if I can. And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you rippin’ him off. Everything’s supposed to be different that what it is here.” (Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, 7)

Something has “messed” up life. And that something is sin.

The world doesn’t talk much about “sin” anymore but we all certainly live in the midst of it.

Whether it is on the school playground where children exclude another or in the office where false reports ruin a career, or worst of all, in the home where what ought to be the safest relationships turn out to be the most treacherous, we live in a world polluted with sin.

But we cannot simply dismiss sin as so common that nothing can be done about it.

The most damaging trials we face in life are not brought on by natural disasters or even disease but are those perpetrated by one person on another.

It is our sins against one another that destroy the most.

In our on-going study of the book of James we read: James 1:2-3, 14-15 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance... When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

James says that in the midst of life’s hardships don’t blame God. And especially, don’t you dare blame God for the sins you commit.

Nate Larkin was raised in a religious home.

He graduated from seminary and began to pastor a local church.

He was successful in the eyes of his congregation as the ministry flourished.

Four years into his marriage, Nate mentioned to his wife that he struggled with pornography.

When he didn’t mention it again, she assumed he had gotten over it.

But Nate’s use of pornography, which began in adolescence, intensified over time.

His double life is illustrated by his paying for sex while on his way to lead a candlelight Christmas Eve service at his church.

It was when his wife found condoms in his possession that she blew the whistle and Nate was ready to begin changing. (From Christianity Today, March 2008, 34-35)

I can so clearly hear Nate’s thinking:

- “God made me this way! How can I help it?”
- “God gave me this sex drive. It is perfectly natural to express it.
- “Why would God give us such a demanding appetite for sex, if he didn’t intend for us to satisfy it?”
- “I need more than my wife can provide.”

- “If God doesn’t want me to do these things, he can take away my desire.

James wrote, “When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”

To say “the devil made me do it” may be ridiculous but to say “God made me do it” is blasphemous.

Proverbs 19:3 “A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.”

It is not God, it is not Satan, it is not some outside force – it is us.

Romans 5 makes it clear that in Adam we all sinned and we became sinners.

We may have a legitimate longing for pleasure, for security, for significance or whatever, but we pervert it by consuming others on the way to meeting our own longings.

Our evil desires imagine all kinds of “good” outcomes if we do certain things.

We imagine how good it will feel, how alive it will make us feel, and the like.

At first we know that what we contemplate doing is wrong.

But the more we mull it over, the less evil it appears.

In fact as we turn it over in our minds, it begins to look better and better.

We consider its advantages rather than its dangers.

Very quickly, what we knew to be wrong, we now imagine being no big deal.

- “It is a small thing, it can’t cause much harm.
- “I won’t go very far with this thing. I’ll just indulge it a little and then quit.
- “God won’t mind, after all, he made me this way.

Then we become obsessed with it.

It becomes, in our thinking, the only thing that can give us the pleasure we seek and imagine we deserve.

Again we see that our problem is not the tempter from outside but the traitor within. (John Owen, Sin and Temptation, 111)

Then James writes, “**after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.**”

The sin was not in the temptation – we are all tempted.
 The sin is when we engage the thought rather than dismissing it.
 When we ponder it and savor it, any desire becomes more powerful.

James compares the desire to a parent that gives birth to sin.
 And sin when acted out gives birth to the grandchild, death.

We’ve all experienced it.
 We entertain the desire and we become increasingly desensitized.
 We become dehumanized – living less as we were designed to live, in giving and loving, and more corrupted until it is only our own perceived needs that we demand to fulfill.

Cornelius Plantinga wrote that “We become internally lawless; like some mad charioteer, we now run our lives with more speed than direction.” (Plantinga, 48)

And the end of it all is death – death of conscience, death of emotion, death of relationships, death of the society, and finally the disintegration of the human spirit.

It is nothing but the common and special grace of God that has kept the human race from annihilating itself long before now.

James 1:16-18 “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting

shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”

All sin perverts what God intended, pollutes what was to be pure and finally kills the very life it pretends to offer.

Today, as some of you already know, we intend to give our attention to one killer in particular.

The God-given gifts of sexuality and sex have been perverted and polluted like few others in our culture.

As we wrote to some of you earlier, “Sexual sin is pervasive in our culture. It is as if sensuality and perversion have been unleashed in our country and across the globe, and it is leaving a path of sin and destruction in its wake. Nearly every week we, on staff, are dealing with the effects of such sin. We can no longer remain silent.” (GLN letter to leaders, April 2008)

The issue is pornography.

40 million Americans regularly view Internet pornography
 Every second 28,000 people are viewing porn.
 20% of men and 13% of women admit to viewing porn at work.

In 1998 there were 72,000 pornographic Internet sites.
 Today there are over 4,000,000.
 25% of all online searches are porn related.

U.S. annual sales of pornography top \$13 billion.
 It is \$96 billion worldwide.

In a Christianity Today Leadership Journal survey:

- 37% of pastors say porn is a struggle for them.
- 51% say it is a temptation
- 25% of all calls to Focus on the Family’s “clergy care line” were porn related.

And most surveys say that problem is even more pervasive among others.

Here is why this matters to every one of us:

- Average age of 1st exposure to Internet porn is 11 years.
- 90% of 8-16 year olds have seen online porn.

Sources for the above statistics:

2008 Top Ten Reviews <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html#anchor1>

August 25, 2005 *Christian Science Monitor*

Leadership Journal Winter 2005 p8

Pornography touches every family.

Pornography is shaping and thus destroying relationships.

It affects how every woman in our culture is perceived.

Whether we are 12 or 92, man or woman, it is, unfortunately, a subject with which we must deal.

This isn't just the stuff of mass-murderer Ted Bundy or Law and Order – Special Victims Unit.

- This is the stuff of soft-core porn we so readily watch in many PG13 and R rated movies today;
- It's the stuff used by Christian couples to stimulate their sex lives;
- It's the stuff people are surfing on their computers.
- It ensnares, desensitizes, dehumanizes and destroys.

And today we want to say there is something that you can do about it.

By God's grace boys and girls, men and women, can be made more aware and some can be set free from the bondage they are in.

Today we want to address this subject, not crudely but candidly.

To that end we wish to separate the men and women.

Speaking to the women will be Dee Dee Woodman, a long-time friend of ours and counselor in our city.

Speaking to the men will be Jason Martinkus with New Life Ministries.

We believe strongly that the message today needs to be heard by everyone 7th grade and older.

The presentations by Woodman and Martinkus were not recorded.

BUT a very helpful article has been written by Pastor Mark Driscoll (Mars Hill of Seattle, WA): “A Timely Subject – Porn and Masturbation” (see it at www.Soundliving.org – “Articles” “Sexuality”

Parents please read the article and decide if your children are mature enough to handle the straight-forward descriptions.

Other Sources and Notes:

Books on the subject of sin:

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, Eerdmans, 1995

Joseph Pieper *The Concept of Sin*, St Augustine Press, Translation 2001

John Owen, *Sin and Temptation*, 1665 reprinted 1985

The English words “trial” and “temptation” are taken from the same Greek word. A “trial” can become a “temptation” when v14 applies. Financial hardship can make us question God’s providence.

The death of a loved one can make us question God’s love.

The suffering of the innocent can make us question God’s justice.

(Moo, PNTC Romans, 72)

The same experience may result in perseverance and increased maturity or it may result in sin and death.

“evil desire” = “any human longing for what God has prohibited” Moo, PNTC, Romans, 74

1 Peter 2:11 “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

The “dragged away and enticed” is probably a way of talking about the seductive power of our desires. We are enticed like bait on a hook and then when we swallow it, we are hooked and led down the path.

The “dragged away and enticed” is explained further here in 15.

Desire (the temptation) is not sin but when it has conceived, it gives birth to sin.

“One can almost envision three generations here: desire as a “parent,” sin as a “child,” and death as a “grandchild.” Centuries ago the Venerable Bede suggested that there were “three stages in temptation. The first is suggestion, the second is experiment, and the third is consent.” Once we reach the consent stage, we have been carried away by sin, we have willingly left the path of righteousness and we deserve to be separated from God. Blomberg, unpublished manuscript, 74

Notice the complete absence of “the devil made me do it?” in this text. Satan cannot make a believer do anything. James places the blame for our sinful actions squarely and only on our own shoulders. Demons are sometimes displayed in NT as giving people unnatural power or unnatural speech but never are they depicted as responsible for the usual human sins of greed, lust, hatred, etc.

Repentance and changed behavior form the appropriate Christian response to sin--not blaming God, seeking exorcism or (esp. in our therapeutic society) blaming one’s upbringing or one’s friends or the government, and so forth! Blomberg 83

“How, in an age when people sue the restaurant for serving fattening food and the teacher for their poor grades, but excuse themselves for not choosing salads over French fries or for not studying for the test, can we help but not finally blame God for any and every circumstance not of our liking? And if we do, how shall we understand true evil and develop the endurance to handle real temptation?” (Brosend, *James and Jude*, 47). In Blomberg 83