

Temptation Part 2 Subtle And Beguiling

We return today to our study of a phenomena that I believe to be the most formidable enemy that our human souls will ever encounter. It is that of "temptation", "temptation". And I believe that to be so because "temptation" is most often so subtle and so beguiling, that it is able to catch us "off guard", that while we are simply getting about the usual matters of our ordinary daily lives, temptation is able to wedge its way into those matters and we suddenly and unknowingly find ourselves "knee-deep" within the lure of its wrongful and sinful behavior, and we seem always ill-prepared to know exactly how to respond to it.

If we are of the belief that "things just happen to us", that all of the matters of daily life are just random happenstance or chance or coincidences, then our lack of preparation can be even more difficult for us.

But in our study of these scriptures, we have found that there really is no such thing as random happenstance or chance or coincidence. And we know that one of those mysterious "laws of physics" is always involved within every circumstance, the "law" that tells us that for every "effect" there is always a "cause". And that is without exception.

May I say that again because this is such an important concept to understand. The concept is that for every "effect" that takes place, there is always a "cause". Always! Nothing ever takes place on its own.

And further, there are no "random, uncontrolled, maverick molecules" floating around out there just aimlessly bumping into other things, accidentally causing miscellaneous events to take place.

And then further, if we subscribe to the understanding that most all the matters of life are of a "spiritual nature", that God is always involved, even guiding and directing the paths that we are on, then those seemingly random occurrences can be understood from a very different perspective.

And yes, in God's sovereign management of the daily affairs of this earth, He often does allow other influences and causes to be involved in those matters. These scriptures tell us that if we will carefully examine some of the particularly difficult situations we get involved in, especially this matter of temptation, we will almost always find that the "cause" is coming from one of three sources, the

world, the flesh or the devil, and oftentimes, even from a combination of the three.

In our scripture text, here in Luke chapter 4, we find that God has chosen to engage His own Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus in one of those very difficult situations. And His situation will involve those very same causes and effects, the world, the flesh and the devil. Read with me beginning in verse 1.

¹Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. ³And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*'" ⁵Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." ⁸And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, '*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*'" ⁹Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written: '*He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,*' ¹¹and, '*In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*'" ¹²And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, '*You shall not tempt the Lord your God.*'" ¹³Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)

To say that temptation is "wicked" and "evil" would be a statement that we can all agree on. And it truly is! But at the moment that a temptation is doing its most effective work within our souls, it might not seem so wicked or evil to us. In those moments, it may actually seem to be the most logical and appropriate path to follow.

Recall from our last message, that one of the realities regarding the nature of temptation is that we, in our human condition, are almost always being tempted to do a thing that we already have a desire to do. And there are almost always two forces at work at the same time, one from the outside, the other from the inside, both working together to draw us along a pathway towards a sin that we already desire to do.

And recall again from James chapter 1, how that “inside” force is a step-by-step enticement down a pathway that eventually leads to spiritual death. Those words . . .

14 . . . each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

There is a natural desire that was born into us at birth, a desire that inclines our hearts towards sin. And each of us, without exception, has it. And until we receive the salvation that the Spirit of Christ brings to us, we are powerless to resist that natural desire.

But may I hasten to say again, that as we consider this encounter that Jesus has here with the devil, such inborn inclinations were not present within the Lord Jesus. He was not like you and me. He was not born with a corrupt sinful nature as we are. He was born, pure and Holy. And though, as these scriptures tell us, “He was tempted in every way as we are”, I have no doubt that His temptations were on a whole other level, a level that we might never comprehend.

But again, that is not so with you and me. There was a natural desire that inclines our hearts towards sin born into us at birth. And each of us, without exception, has it. And until, we receive the salvation that the Spirit of Christ brings to us, we are powerless to resist that natural desire.

Thankfully, as we do surrender our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit, the one who is called to come along side of us to be our helper, fills us with His presence, joining with us to help us to resist the lure that comes from temptation.

And the ministry of the Holy Spirit is absolutely vital to our perseverance. It is God’s Spirit who quickly warns us away from the subtle, beguiling ways of temptation. He gives us a moment of “hesitation” and a means of “escape”. Listen to the way that God words that promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13. He tells us that,

13No 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 Corinthians 10:13)

God will always do this! He will always provide us with a warning, and a way of escape. But we must know also that His warnings will very often come using only

a “still small voice”. That means that our hearts and minds must always be listening for the “whisper” of the Holy Spirit, in even the most common, ordinary matters of daily life. And the more we develop the habit of seeking the guidance of the Lord in all those ordinary matters, the more likely we are to “have ears to hear” His “still small voice” as He speaks.

And God's Spirit gives us that same help whether our temptations come from within our own souls or from some outside source, especially those that come from the spiritual realms. And that is comforting to know because those outside forces of evil, the devil and his helpers, are formidable foes who are never ceasing in their efforts to tempt and to beguile us. Those words from Ephesians chapter 6,

¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Folks, let me say again, as I have said so often, these forces of evil are all very real. These powers of darkness truly do roam to and fro throughout the earth seeking whom they may devour. And you and I are their sole aim and goal. And they will use whatever “subtle” tactics necessary to lure you and me along those steps toward sin.

Let me pause for a moment to emphasize this word “subtle”, because “subtlety” resides at the very core of temptation. Subtle ways and mannerisms have a way of disarming a person's guard. My dictionary defines the word “subtle” as being “delicate”, “nice”, “refined” and “sensitive”. One, or all, of those subtle mannerisms will almost always be the demeanor of a person who wants to “beguile” you and me into doing something that we ought not to do.

They themselves might not know that they and their behavior are being used by the devil to tempt you or me. They are simply responding wrongly to their own temptation. But nonetheless, you and I get tempted, and too often, we fail.

The ways of “subtlety” were introduced to us when we received our first glimpse of satan in the Book of Genesis. There, satan is described using that word, “subtle”. Listen!

¹Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. (Genesis 3:1)

The word “subtle” is translated in the Greek Lexicon as a behavior that is “crafty” and “cunning”, “smooth” in its manner. Notice that this original Greek definition is not nearly as “kind” as today’s dictionary definition of “refined, and “nice” and “sensitive”. And we must understand that the original Greek definition of “cunning” and “crafty” is far more accurate.

Let me also take a moment and restate the “word picture” that’s being given to us here today! Satan and his demons use circumstances and cleverly “smooth” words to draw you and me along pathways where we should not go, their beguiling ways reaching deeply into our souls and appealing to those sinful desires that already reside within us, convincing us that our decision to follow their leading is the right and natural thing to do.

These thoughts remind me of a popular secular song of a few years ago. One of the lines in the song asks the question, “How can it be wrong when it feels so right?”

Note, that as satan and his forces seek to take control over our thoughts and behaviors, they seldom ever use force. Yes, they might, at times, do that, but “subtlety” and “beguiling” far better fits their purposes. Why, because force often only reaches to the surface of a person’s being, and satan wants to win a person’s heart. And subtle beguiling wins the heart.

That is what took place with unsuspecting Eve in the Garden of Eden. We are told in 2 Corinthians 11 that “the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty”, and he won her heart over to sin.

Let me repeat all of this again. The most effective way for satan to reach his desired goal within a person’s soul combines the use of both the inside sinful desires of a person’s own heart and the outside subtle, beguiling of the evil one, convincing us to fulfill a lust that we already want to fulfill.

And here, I also want to warn you and me that we ourselves are sometimes the ones that satan will use to beguile and tempt another person. We most likely, at the time, won’t realize that it is taking place. That again is the nature of “beguiling”. But that does not matter. We are still accountable for our own actions and behavior. And taking part in the “beguiling” of another person is an especially wicked thing for us to do, and we must guard ourselves against it.

We must continually check our personal behavior. Are we doing any of the things that might beguile another person? Do we ever try to entice, lure, woo,

charm, captivate, mesmerize, fascinate another person? Those are all words that the dictionary uses to define the word "beguile".

I have no doubt that those very elements of behavior are being carried on in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, in casual settings all around us every day, even within our own homes and families.

One person can beguile another person into believing and doing things that they should not do, a man or a woman beguiling the other into immoral behavior, one man beguiling another into a business transaction that is unethical or will harm the other person. A family member beguiling another family member, especially an elderly loved one, into a business transaction that has little or no possibility of succeeding.

Again, "beguiling" takes place all around us daily and in subtle ways, each of us unknowingly participating in the wicked plans of the devil.

My question for you today is, "In what ways are you most easily beguiled and tempted?" And "In what ways do you beguile other people?" I believe that we need to ask ourselves that question because that is the question that Jesus would ask.

It is one thing to consider matters as general principles, but it is another thing altogether to apply those thoughts directly to our own souls. And we must!

As for me, in my times of prayer, God will often bring to my mind some sins that I need to repent of. I can recall on one of those occasions that God brought to my mind the manner that I have of making a convincing argument with my sweet wife.

Thankfully, my wife and I don't fuss much anymore. But that was not so in our younger years. In those days, after we would have fussed about a matter, I would then think of all of the ways that I was right in the fuss. And then, I would use my beguiling tongue to convince her how she was wrong, and how I was right. And it would often work.

But thankfully, God got hold of my conscience and my tongue and convinced me of how wrong I was, and I began to repent of those sinful behaviors. And though I still at times falter, in these present years, if I sense that natural inclination to begin to rise within me, I now know what to do with that emotion. I repent of it.

Now, such ways may not be the inclination of your heart. Perhaps with you it is a wrong desire towards money and financial matters. You either spend too freely or you, under the guise of “stewardship”, refuse to cast your bread upon the waters.

One way you can check yourself is to ask the question, “Do I almost always buy things just for myself, things that I like and enjoy?” And do you ask your spouse before you buy those things? After all, every dollar you spend affects everyone in your family.

Another question, how “giving” are you with your money? Do you simply look at what you have, consider your own needs first and then give what’s left to the church and to missions? Do you even support missionaries in their efforts to give the gospel to the unsaved world?

These two matters that I have just mentioned are two of the favorite “lusts” that satan uses to beguile each of us, self and money. Are you being “beguiled” in your handling of those things?

God wants you and me to “check” ourselves carefully. But how do we do that? We do as the Psalmist did. We ask the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts and if there be any unclean thing in us, then to bring us to repentance and to change.

Let me close with this reminder about the beguiling nature of temptation that I mentioned earlier. Temptation is designed to reach deeply into our souls and to provoke us to do a thing that we already have a desire to do, two forces, one from the outside, the other from the inside, both working together to draw us along a pathway towards fulfilling a lust that already resides within us.

Folks, though the subtle and beguiling nature of sin can be so very tempting to us, God reminds us clearly that, as believers, we do not have to give in to it. Listen to these words in Romans chapter 6, beginning in verse 12.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you. (Romans 6:12-14)

Let's Pray!

