

**Soteriology**  
**Lesson 7**  
**Temptation Part One**

By  
**Dr. David Hocking**

Brought to you by  
**The Blue Letter Bible Institute**  
<http://www.blbi.org>

A ministry of  
**The Blue Letter Bible**  
<http://www.blueletterbible.org>

All of the ideas and principles conveyed by the instructor in this course  
are not necessarily held by the Blue Letter Bible ministry

Father, how thankful we are that when we open this wonderful Book we have the truth. Sometimes it's hard to accept it, to be confronted with it and to deal with it. Lord, I pray by the power of Your Holy Spirit You would give us a teachable heart. We know the enemy is working overtime to destroy the people of God. His temptations and enticements and baits are everywhere. And Lord, I pray that You would give us a heart after You. Lord, we love You because, in spite of our many mistakes, in spite of the sinful attitudes and actions of our hearts, You are a God of grace, and love, and forgiveness and we thank You. Help us not to sweep things under the rug. And as we look at them Lord, may we look at them in truth, Your truth. And Lord, I pray that You would bring us continually by our discussions to the glory of the cross. That we may never forget that it was there that sin was dealt with. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Take your Bibles please and turn to Matthew chapter four, as we come to our next doctrine of salvation and that's the problem of temptation. Sin and temptation usually in the theologies are in the same chapter. If you get a little book on systematic theology and it might say *harmar* theology. That's just a Greek word, one of the Greek words for sin, doctrine of sin. Temptation and sin are usually in that same chapter, if you want to do extra reading regarding it.

Interestingly in our time for some reason, I had not known this among evangelicals all of my preaching ministry, but now there has been some discussion and disagreement over temptation. And it's kind of taken a lot of us by surprise! I don't know where it's coming from because a lot of the evangelical teaching today is really shallow. And I'm not being critical of just an isolated case. We have some real serious problems going on. One of the reasons why you're here, I'm sure, is to get straight what the Bible actually teaches. And not to go to the Bible is very

dangerous. Or to just take a text out of the context and make it a pretext for something can really destroy your life.

A lady called me just the end of last week, after I was here in the class teaching on sin. It's really interesting, God gave me another illustration. A radio listener had called about most of the things we had discussed in our class. And she had a list of what a given TV personality was teaching. And she had made a list of them. And I don't know the accuracy of those statements, but if they were said, then he's a heretic.

But you see, people are not looking things up in their Bibles. They're trusting speakers. That's why even in this class when you hear me teach something, I'm not the authority, God and His word is. You should go back, check it over, read it over, and examine it carefully, in the light of Scripture. That is what the problem is here. And I see people in the very area of need like sin and temptation, which is bombing people out right and left, they're getting confused about doctrine.

This lady was very confused about depravity. Very confused! And the speaker that she had heard, at least what she thought she heard...that depravity occurs because you sin. This is why little children are not sinners and why they go to heaven. It's like trying to explain something without being accurate with the Bible. And then that leads to another thing. Then that leads to another thing. And before you know it, you're really wiped out. You don't even know how you got there. Well, back in a root somewhere somebody said something that wasn't accurate and then one thing led to another. And it gets worse and worse.

So, on the area of temptation, I never take that first. And I recommend if you have Bible studies, or Sunday school classes, or pulpits where you're going to teach or preach, don't start with temptation. Start with sin and depravity. Otherwise people won't identify with it when you get to the temptation. The problem with temptation becomes rather easily understood, though difficult to deal with, but easily understood if you begin with depravity. See, the devil knows you. He knows you quite well. He can't read your thoughts by the way. He's not omniscient. But he

knows you. He knows human behavior. He's got lots of strategy, lots of methodology that he can use to trip you up because he knows your depravity is there, as well as your new nature in Christ. And that's why this is so important.

In Matthew 4, we have the classic text that also appears of course in other gospels. But we'll look in Matthew's first. In Matthew 4 we have the classic text on temptation. The first thing that I'd like to say to you is that the common way of treating this, as there are three avenues of temptation: the world, the flesh, and the devil, I want to get out of your mind. Not because there aren't problems with the world, flesh, and the devil, but there are not three temptations called the world, flesh, and the devil. This is an old time way of dealing with temptation that's not true. It's not true at all. First of all, the world includes the flesh. And the devil is using all of it to entice and bait you. They aren't separate kinds of temptation. The devil is behind it all and we're going to see that here in just a moment.

Matthew 4:1, let's look at our Bibles while I read this. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

Now right away there's a lot of argument over the word order of this verse. Why? Is the verse saying that He was led of the Spirit to be tempted? Or is it saying He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness? And the fact of being tempted occurred where He was led. The problem is the Greek grammar here necessitates us arguing that the purpose of Him being led into the wilderness was to be tempted. Now, from that some people say then "the Holy Spirit led me to be tempted." Do you understand how easily you can kind of twist that just a hair? Is it a true statement that the Holy Spirit led Jesus to go into the wilderness, in order to be tempted by the devil? And that's a true statement. It's all for our benefit. It was all a plan of God. And yes, it was His purpose. Is it correct to say that the Holy Spirit, who is God, that God in fact leads us to be tempted? Now if you mean solicitation to do evil, the answer is no! How can you say so quickly, "no"? Because of James 1:13! "Let no man say when he's tempted, I am tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."

So you see what I mean? Right off the bat, just reading the opening verse of the temptation, we could easily be led astray. Is it a true fact that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness in order to be tempted but the devil? Yes. Does that mean God always does the same for us? No, it's just a fact about that that was done for our purpose and our benefit. Of course, God would know the outcome of it before it happened.

Matthew 4:2, "And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights." Now when somebody comes to you and says that they are practicing Lent, which basically is fasting during the day, or just drinking liquids or something. When they say that, they may be very sincere and they may be trying to follow Jesus. What we don't understand in this culture is where that came from. And I want to explain it. In liberal theology, salvation is acquired, if I can put it that way, or received by following the example of Christ. That's the heart of liberal theology. They're sincere people. There are many sincere people that are in religious groups who really believe that this is what they're doing and it's right before God. They want to "be like Jesus, so He fasted; we fast." That's the general argument there. So, try to have an understanding heart when you see somebody doing that.

On the other side of it, it might be a good idea to fast, but is a fast for forty days and forty nights commanded here? No. You see, the problem of verse one, we just mentioned. We've got another problem with verse two. It's not setting up a tradition here. It's just stating a fact, that's what occurred.

Now, why did it occur? Well, we know that there's no other purpose stated in the Bible except this scene of the temptation. So why did Jesus fast forty days and forty nights? Why?—to show us the extent of temptation, the pressure of temptation, the subtleties of temptation...all of it. He, in fact, set Himself up to experience all of this in our behalf. He was tempted so that, in that we can be succored and comforted says Hebrews 2:18. So we need to, you know, keep our head straight as we walk through this. There's no traditional rule here that we all fast forty days

and forty nights. However, in the early church they did fast and pray for several key issues. One was selection of godly leaders.

Matthew 4:3, “And when the tempter came to him...” Who was that?—the (definite article) tempter. Not a tempter, *the* tempter. So it wasn’t one of the demons, it was Satan himself as we know from the text. He is called “the tempter.”

Now the source of temptation, is not God, as we mentioned from James 1:13. You are led away of your own lusts and enticed. Well who’s doing the enticing? Who’s baiting you? Who’s tempting you? And of course the answer is “Satan” here, the tempter. Look down to verse 5 please, “the devil.” So there’s a parallel, the tempter - the devil. And verse 8 again, “the devil.” And verse 10, “Get thee hence, Satan.”

Now in Revelation 12:9 it says that “the old serpent who is called the devil and Satan who deceives the whole world.” In 2 Corinthians 11:3 it says, “I fear as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” So, there’s some proof text to put together of who is the source of temptation. It is not God. It is the tempter, the devil, Satan.

Now, let’s keep reading. Verse 3, “Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If thou be the Son of God, . . .’”

People, read that and say, “Well the devil really didn’t know whether He was or not. That’s why he was tempting Him because he thought maybe He could fall. Folks, a lot of questions are answered in Greek that are not answered in English; this is one of the them. In Greek there are four ways to express if in English, an “if” clause. Which suggests probability, doesn’t it? We have one that says, “if and it is so.” This isn’t an interpretation, it’s grammar. There are two little words for if. One is called “a,” which is spelled E-I, if you want to put it out in your notes. The others one is “ean,” which is spelled E-A-N in English. Those are two words for if.

Now the words that follow are the key to interpreting them. If what follows is what we call the indicative, in other words, a statement of fact, then the if “ei” means “if and it is so.” Or we would translate in English, “since.” That’s what we have here. We have if and it is so. If, ie, with the indicative cause. It means, since You are the Son of God. In other words, don’t you ever doubt! The devil would love to have you be deceived on this. He doesn’t doubt one bit who Jesus is. He (Satan) knows who Jesus is better than most people who talk about Him. “*Since* you are the Son of God.” He knew exactly. Remember when the demons said, who Jesus was going to cast out, “Are you come to torment us before the time, Thou Son of the Most High?” (Mark 5:7). See, even the demons recognize who He is and His power.

So, “since You are the Son of God,” that right away affects your view of the temptation. “Since You’re the Son of God.” He knows He is the impeccable Christ, meaning He cannot sin. So this is a very interesting thing. In some respects the devil himself is deceived.

Now let’s just keep reading. Matthew 4.

3 If you be the Son of God, [Or since You are the Son of God] command that these stones be made bread.

4 He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (cf. Deuteronomy 8:3)

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, [Since You are] cast thyself down: for it is written, [He quotes from the Psalms, 91:11-12] He shall give his angels charge concerning thee.

Now this is an interesting thing to me. You know I have talked to people who cannot see the Messiah in Psalm 91. I just want you to know the devil did. The devil read the passage and he

knew exactly who it referred to. And some people say, “No, that’s referring to King David.” No, it’s not. It’s referring to the Messiah. Historically maybe it would be applied to David, but the devil knew exactly what the passage meant. So He said (Matthew 4)

6 It is written: He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him...

He didn’t comment on the Psalm passage. He quotes again from Deuteronomy, which He did the first time, which is interesting because it’s the law. I like a commentary I have on Deuteronomy. It’s called “The Favorite Book of Jesus.” He quotes more from Deuteronomy than from any other book, at least that’s recorded in the New Testament.

Now He says, “It is written again, ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’” (cf. Deuteronomy 6:16)

Wait a minute! The devil knew the passage referred to Him as the Messiah. You’ve got to keep thinking, folks. There’s so much weak theology on the matter of temptation.

Let’s go to verse 8.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, [Some say Mount Hermon. Some say a mountain down in the desert. I don’t know where it was.] and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, [Here He goes to Deuteronomy 6:13 again.] Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”



Remember in Revelation we learn that John fell down at the feet of the angel to worship him for this marvelous vision he had given. And the angel said, “Don’t do that. I’m one of your fellow brethren. Worship God.” And yet the Bible says in Hebrews 1:6 that “All the angels worship our Messiah, the Son of the Father.” Interesting, isn’t it? So he would say to him, you’re supposed to worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaves Him. Has the devil ever left you? Bible says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Matthew 4:11 “...and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

Would they do the same to you? A moment of weakness and temptation and a real pressure deal in a battle with the enemy. Do you think the angels of God might be sitting around wanting to comfort you? The Bible says in Hebrews 1:14, “Are not they all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation.”

I happen to believe that some of us need more of those angels than others do. But, it would be interesting wouldn’t it, if just for one moment God would pull back the curtain of our three-dimensional world to which we are subject and limited, and allow us to see the spiritual world. It would be interesting what we would see. The Bible speaks of the titanic struggle going on all the time, but “we wrestle not against flesh and blood.” (Ephesians 6:12). Yet that’s what we wind up doing. Getting mad at one another, ticked off, hurt by each other. But the Bible says that isn’t where the fight is. What we’re wrestling against is “spiritual wickedness in high places, principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this world.” Very interesting!

So, this is the temptation, this is the key passage and from this everybody starts waxing eloquent about what they think is the issue of temptation. So, let’s see if we just can’t break it down, take a little harder look at it.

First of all, we’ll call this the “scope of temptation.” How extensive is it? What is really involved here? In the case of Jesus Christ there’re probably at least three simple things we can conclude. One would be to satisfy His physical needs. Everybody reads this. They know He’s

hungry and the devil says, "Turn stones into bread." Now, isn't it interesting that the devil did not say, "Go down to the store." I mean, these merchants, just like today in Israel, they're everywhere. You can buy bread on the street. There are open markets everywhere! Why didn't the devil say, "Hey you're hungry man, You're God! Just whistle and it will come up to You." Do you understand what I'm saying? Why would the devil say "Turn the stones into bread?" Can God turn to the stones of the wilderness into bread? Sure He can! It became manna. It was everywhere.

You see, what he's doing is he's challenging who he knows He is. "Hey You can do this! Do it man, You're hungry. Do it!" You see the devil is trying to get Jesus to stay away from the mission as to why He came into the world. "God became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). He was to live like a human being and suffer as we suffer. He was "In all points being tested as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He was to go through that. The devil would love to sidetrack Him.

Doesn't it cross your mind; why didn't Jesus do it? See, some sermons that you hear are centered in that maybe He couldn't really, and that is where we see the liberal theology of our day entering in, even to evangelicalism. It's something that a lot of people do, but they don't realize what they're doing. You see, the argument was that because He became a man, He lost the ability to do this. Watch out, folks! It's a subtle undermining of who Jesus is.

Jesus, listen to me, never stopped being God ever. According to the Bible, "He emptied Himself" (Philippians 2:6). He laid aside the exercise of His divine attributes for us. "Humbling Himself to become obedient to the cross." He never stopped being God . He was in the form, *morphe*, exact essence of God, (Philippians 2:6). Be careful. It's easy to get tripped up by what's actually happening here.

It was a satisfaction of physical needs the devil was appealing to Him. But it was also appealing to Him to exercise His deity and His power to produce what He Himself needed.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that God could answer any need you have, just like that, any time? Just say, "I'm hungry. Give me something." Shoom, there it is! "I'm thirsty." Shoom, there it is! Can God do that? Yes, He certainly can. Now, do you know that it's been my experience that God requires us to go and get those things? This takes time. It costs money. Be very careful because you might not see the devil's tricks in using the same thing with you. How many people get burned out because they pray and ask God to demonstrate His power and He decides not to? It's easy to get tricked! God literally wants you, as the old time evangelist said, "God wants you to do a lot of things for yourself." But it is not true doctrine that the Lord helps those who help themselves." That's not in the Bible, in case you're wondering.

Anyway, people say, "I believe you've got to do it. You've got to roll up your sleeves and God will bless...." Wait a minute! God doesn't need you. He could do it without you. Our problem is why doesn't God do it in the way that would be, in our opinion, better, more convenient, more efficient, quicker, etc? Because He wants you to do something...do what? Go through temptation. He doesn't tempt you, but He's going to allow it to occur. Why, to wipe you out? To give you something you can't handle? No. He says He'll never do that. Because actually through this is how He makes us stronger. And we're going to see this in just a moment.

That's how God does it. So He doesn't do what you want Him to do, because you would never learn through that to trust Him. He's not a genie at your bequest. He's not a puppet on a string. And Jesus gives us a clear example of how to handle it. What was His answer? "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." I don't care if I'm hungry. I don't care if I can turn stones into bread. I'm going to trust God and His purposes no matter what. I'm going to live by what the word of God says and I'm not going to compromise just to meet a temporary physical need. Does that sound like it might affect you? I'm going to walk with the Lord and I'm not going to buy into this.

Was it or is it sin for the Son of God to turn stones into bread? Yes or no? No! Did you think everything that the devil's tempting you to do has to look grotesque and sinful? No. He

comes at us in more subtle ways than that. He can even come at you through spiritual ideas and your walk with the Lord. And he'll trip you up because your mind will get away from trusting what God says and all of a sudden, you are trusting how you feel and what others have said or something else.

Could that temporary need of yours be even a need to know God's power in your life? And what you are doing is falling into the devil's trap with many other people. I don't care what happens. I don't care how many people in true faith and trust believe in the power of the Lord and receive it, I still say that the devil knows us. He knows he can get us to cut a corner here and there all in the name of knowing God's power in your life.

Or, the young man, who with a broken heart, told me in private that all of his tongue speaking was fake. He made it up just to get people to stop pressuring him. Folks, I don't know if you understand what the devil can do, but he can really do a number on us. We can cut corners so that the reality of our walk with God, it isn't there. We're making it up. We're going along with the show. We feel the pressure of the crowd. We're trying to do what everybody thinks we're supposed to do. It's not real. It's not coming from the Lord!

Hey, don't tell me this temptation doesn't happen. It happens all the time. You might have a particular need. Maybe you want to be loved, noticed, appreciated, and adored. I don't know. But sometimes we compromise in order for that to occur. There wasn't anything wrong with it in and of itself. That's the problem with temptation. We always see it as some grotesque thing. No, it comes more subtly than that.

Well, let's hit number two. What is He doing in number two? Is there anything wrong with Jesus jumping off of a temple and having the angels come and rescuing Him? Is there anything wrong with that? No, in fact, that's a promise of how God will protect the Messiah (cf. Psalm 91:11-12). Then, what is the problem here? See, when Jesus answered the devil he said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:7). You're testing God. You're saying, "Well God, said He'd take care of me, so let's see if He will. I'll jump off."

This is the same argument. You're driving down the street. God knows everything and He's all powerful and His angels are guarding me. So, I'm not going to put my hands on the steering wheel. Going down this mountain, I'm going to just trust God. "Let's see you do it, God." Can God protect a person who doesn't have their hands on the steering wheel going down that mountain? Yes, He could. But His normal procedure is—because of your presumptuous sin—is to allow you to go over the mountain. You can learn the easy way or the hard way. That's the hard way! Am I not trusting God because I'm going to put my hands on the wheel?

The devil knows the verses in Psalm 24:1, it's repeated many times in the Old Testament especially in Psalms, "The earth is the Lord's and all of its fullness." The devil knew that. So what is he selling to Him? It's got to be the kingdom he rules over, namely the world of unbelievers; as though somehow he could deliver them to the Lord...that He needs help, He doesn't need to go to the cross...just come to me and I will give them to you.

False doctrine says the devil rules this world. No, he doesn't. God rules this world. The devil is the chief prisoner. What is the devil ruling over, according to Ephesians 2:2? He's the prince of the authority of the air, the misty atmosphere of sin itself, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. The one from Adam all the way down—our own depravity—that's the arena, this present evil age. He's the god of this age. Who blinds the mind of them that believe not. He's not running New York. He may have a lot of demons working there, but he's not running it. He doesn't own the trees and the mountains and the snow and the rain. All of that is fulfilling God's word and the Bible says so.

So, let's get back to it again. What would be the subtlety of what the devil is actually doing here with Jesus? He's getting Him to avoid the cross. "You don't need to go to the cross. You want all these unbelievers in my kingdom? Just fall down and worship me. I'll give them all to You." Really?

When we try to acquire worldly possessions or position or people or whatever without doing it God's way, we're going to get ourselves in big-time trouble.

Go to 1 John chapter two. Do you suppose that the devil could be working on you right now while we're talking about it? Could thoughts come into your mind like: "Who does he think he is up there, teaching like that? I know there are other views of this. You're not telling me anything I don't know. It's kind of simplistic. I mean I've heard this before."

You know the enemy is so subtle. We don't come with open hearts to God saying, "Teach me, Lord." Instead we're examining what we're hearing. Not by the word of God, but by our own feelings and commitments. "You know, I really don't like the way you said that." Well, that could be. That very well could be. And I may have a problem. And God may have to deal with me about that. But did you hear what was said?

You see, I find that even when I listen to pastors in church sometimes I'm thinking about the way they're communicating instead of what's being said. Did you ever find yourself doing that? Or do you find yourself looking at him... "Does he know his shirt tail is out? Can you believe it? His socks don't match and look at that, he has one brown shoe on and one black. I wonder if he knows that? I wish he'd stop pounding the pulpit all the time. Why doesn't he look over here where I'm sitting? Is he looking right at me? I think he is. He probably heard something."

These thoughts go through our minds and are we really open to the Lord? Hey, the devil's got us right where he wants us. He knows what we are like. And that's the difficulty here. That's why I find that the only peace comes when I look directly at God's word and say, "Lord, what is it that You want me to know?" I've got to know this Book. You may have really personal, very sensitive feelings about all of this, but I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in what God says.

So let's just look at this again. 1 John 2:15-17. "Love not the world..."

You say, "You bet. I don't love the world. I've been healed. Amen." No, in Greek it says "stop loving the world." It assumes that's your natural tendency. You do love the world. He's asking you to stop doing it.

Okay. How do I do that? Well, first of all, you've got to know what's in the world. Okay, what's in the world? Las Vegas? No, no. You've got that wrong. By the way, this is very serious. "If any man continues to love the world, the love of the Father isn't in him" (1 John 2:15). Wow! So if you like all that the world is, you don't struggle with it, you don't have a problem with it, you aren't pained by it, there's something wrong.

Now what's in the world? "For all that is in the world, [Here it is. All. What's that word? All. All that is in the world. There aren't any extras here. All that is in the world.] the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, [Must be some connection there because it's the same words, the lust of.] and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Well boy, I hope John's listening right now because I saw him in front of the mirror the other day. He really admires himself. The way he walks around. Have you noticed that? Has his head up...

It isn't talking about that. Did you think that is what it was talking about? It's not talking about that at all. The word pride is the Greek word for boasting or confidence. Self-confidence. The word life is not *zoe*, from which we get zoology, essential physical life. We have the word *bios* here, from which we get biology, which does confuse the issue because it doesn't mean what it did at the time of the Lord. *Bios* is referring to a man's occupation; in other words, his means of livelihood. So what we have here, that's described as being the world, is a self-confidence in one's means of livelihood. In other words, the things of life become your trust. Jesus said a man's life does not consist of the abundance of things that he possesses (Luke 12:15). But they provide a certain security to us.

"Okay, who took my shirt?"

"I don't know."

"Well, that's my shirt, man. I paid good money for that shirt. That's my shirt!"

"The longer you talk, the more I hear the world. Maybe God wanted the thief to have your shirt."

"Why would He do that?"

“Well, because He knows you are trusting the shirt too much and the thief didn’t have anything to wear?”

“God wouldn’t do that. That’s a nice shirt. I paid a lot of money for that.”

I tried to give you something that’s a little foolish or simple so we’ll all ease up. You know I could start talking about the cars out in the parking lot. The truth of the matter is we have this constant problem of trusting the things that we have. We trust it. They become what we are. It’s true, people. Either what you have or what you don’t have—sometimes the lack of it. Because it isn’t just those who are rich; it’s those who desire to be rich who fall into many a snare.

“If I only could have this then my life would really be...”`

No, no. This is all a part of the world, every bit of it. And guess what? The world is in you. That’s why you have to start with sin and depravity, you see. This problem of temptation, loving the world, is coming out of your own heart. You can’t blame anyone. You can’t blame the environment. You can’t blame your parents. You can’t blame anybody at all. It’s coming out of your own heart.

And you see what Christians did throughout church history, and they still do in many countries of the world, including our own, is they decide that the way to handle this is to not be worldly. Which in their idea is depriving ourselves of something. I’m going to wear black every day of my life and prove I am not worldly. I’m going to take all the chrome off my car. I will no longer wear jewelry. Now there are people who believe this. You understand that? There are people who really believe this. But I’m going to tell you something, the problem is in your heart. It’s in your heart.

Now, let’s just try to break this down a little bit more. You have first of all a definition of the lust of the flesh. The “flesh” is used in two ways in the Bible, if you want to make a note of that. It refers to your physical body and it refers to your old sin nature, your depravity. And of course the latter is under discussion here. Sometimes the context reveals which one. But most of the time the word “flesh” refers to your old sin nature.



It is the desire to have what does not belong to you, or the desire to commit sin against God's holy and righteous standards. Now, we learned last week that you and I have a natural tendency to do this. When you ask most Christians, "Do you desire to disobey God?"

"Oh, are you kidding, no! I've fallen, of course, but I have a real dedication to the Lord. I don't desire to disobey God."

That's kind of funny, because God says you do. You have a desire to disobey God. See a lot of us don't want to handle that.

"My desire is always to love the Lord with all my heart."

"I'm glad you have that desire. God bless you, but watch out for that other one. You have a desire to disobey God." That's why many songs in the old hymn books used to deal more with this than we do presently. "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." That's the truth.

I want to serve the Lord with all my heart. But you see half the problem is I don't want to deal with that little three letter word called sin. I don't want to see it like God tells me it's there. I don't want to look at it. Give me the big five; I can handle that if I'm really a great Christian. But don't give me the intricacies of my motives and intents. It gives me a bad day and I don't sleep well. I'd rather be in some sort of Christian denial here. I'm a lot happier.

The devil knows how to work on us. The very fact of lust is a sin, Romans 7 tells us that to covet is in fact, sin! Sin is a transgression of God's law. We have a desire that rises out of our sin nature.

Jesus said in Mark 7 (audio verse inserted),

Mark 7:21-23,

21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries,  
fornications, murders,

22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Jesus said in Matthew 12 (audio verse inserted),

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

He tells us it comes out of our own hearts. All these evil thoughts and sinful actions, we created them ourselves. Now, the devil knows that exists, so all temptation is baiting your sinful desires.

Well, what's the lust of the eye? That's the desire to have the things that you see that don't belong to you. Do you have to have physical eye sight? No, you can see without being physically able to see. Blind people still have the lust of the eye. You can visualize while you have your eyes closed. You can visualize sin against God.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:28, "If a man lusts in his heart over a particular woman, he's committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Lust of the eyes, lust of flesh...man, if that wasn't enough; we have the pride of life. Boasting over what one possesses, worldly security, the world of things, desire to be rich. And yet, Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:6-7, "We brought nothing into this world. It is certain we will take nothing out. Godliness with contentment is great gain."

I don't know about you, but I think temptation is a very serious problem. What do you think? And we get so mixed up. That's why we never get victory over this. See, we can blame almost anything and everything except what God said. No, it's in your own heart. It's in your own heart. And that's why we need to talk very seriously about how to have victory.

Lord, I pray by the power of Your Holy Spirit, You would give us a teachable heart. And Lord I pray that You would bring us continually to the glory of the cross; that we may never forget that it was there that sin was dealt with. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.