TITLE: TEMPTATION

TEXT:

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about temptation. How many of you this morning find that you struggle with temptation at times?

How many realize that temptation is, or at least can be, a good thing?

Do you realize that Scripture never says that temptation is bad?

The fact is temptation can be a very good thing.

Rick Warren points out in his book, The Purpose Driven Life, that every temptation is an opportunity to do good..

*On the path to spiritual maturity, even temptation becomes a steppingstone rather than a stumbling block when you realize that it is just as much an occasion to do the right thing as it is to do the wrong thing.*

*Every time that we choose to do good instead of sin we grow in the character of Christ.*

So, let’s take a minute to define the character of Christ….

**Galatians 5:22-25 22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,****23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**

**24Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.****25Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

The Character of Christ is here referred to as the fruit of the Spirit.

Fruit= ***kar-pos'***

***fruit* (as *plucked*), literally or figuratively**

Fruit that is plucked is the product of maturity.

Fruit is picked when it is ripe, when it is mature. Fruit represents the finished product.

The fruit of the Spirit being referred to here is the fruit of the Spirit of God, The fruit of the Spirit of Christ.

Fruit and character are the same thing---the product of maturity.

The fruit of the Spirit and the Character of Christ are one and the same thing.

The fruit of the spirit, the character of Christ is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control.**

These are the inherent character qualities of Jesus.

They are not the inherent character qualities within you and me.

Paul lists our inherent character qualities in the previous verses….

**Galatians 5:19 – 21 19The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;****20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions****21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

Scripture says that all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God.

We are all sinners! We all have a sinful nature!

The character qualities of that sinful nature Paul lists here as: **sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.**

The character qualities of Jesus are: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control.**

When we call ourselves a Christian what are we in fact saying?

Greek word for Christian is: ***khris-tee-an-os'***

**; a *Christian*, that is, follower of Christ:**

Comes from the root **Khris-tos**

**an epithet of Jesus**

An epithet is a term used to characterize a person or thing, A term used as a descriptive substitute for the name or title of a person.

When we call ourselves a Christian what we are saying is that I am someone who is a Christ like one. Or I am like Jesus.

If we are going to really be like Jesus, then what do we have to do?

We have to take on His character qualities.

What are the character qualities of Jesus?

**Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control.**

What are our inherent character qualities apart from Christ?

**sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.**

What we can conclude is that our inherent character qualities are the exact opposite of His..

So, what is the answer to our problem here?

As a Christian we have been called to be like Jesus but the fact is that we are an exact opposite to Him..

This kind of goes back to a portion of Scripture that we talked about last week….

**Romans 7:14 - -25 (NIV) 14We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.****15I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.****16And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.****17As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.****18I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.****19For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. …..**

**24What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

**So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.**

**Romans 8:1-2 (NIV) 1Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,****2because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.**

The answer to our problem is placing ourselves IN Christ Jesus and remaining in that place. As we talked about last week it is to abide with Christ. To stay put with Him by living our lives according to the Holy Spirits direction.

So where does temptation enter into the equation?

Temptation is the proving ground of obedience!

Temptation is the testing ground of faith!

Temptation is the modern-day tree of the knowledge of good and evil!

Have you ever wondered why God put the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil in the Garden of Eden in the first place?

I mean, wouldn’t it have been easier on Adam and Eve if the tree had not been there?

Creation was perfect! There was no sin in Gods originals design…

Adam and Eve enjoyed one on one fellowship and relationship with God. There was no sin to separate them from God.

So why did God put a tree in the garden that man was not to touch?

CHOICE! God had created man with a free will and being created in the perfection of God and then placed in a perfect creation there would have been no ability for man to exercise that free will if there wasn’t an alternate choice to God provided.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was that alternate choice that God had to provide in order to give man an opportunity to exercise the free will that he was created with.

Why was free will so important to God?

Because free will, choice, is necessary, it is essential for relationships!

Scripture tells us that God is love. God is the embodiment and personification of love.

In order for love to be expressed it has to have the potential of being received or rejected. And that will require choice on the part of the one being loved.

We were created for relationship and fellowship with God.

Relationship and fellowship require someone to first love and then you got to have someone to receive that love and have the choice of loving back or rejecting that love…

Without choice love is not possible… Or at least it is meaningless!

The tree of the knowledge of Good and evil was not a mistake on Gods part. It was not a bad thing. It gave man the opportunity to exercise the free will that he was created with and receive Gods love and love God back because it represented a choice.

It didn’t become temptation until the deceiver of man made it a temptation.

**Genesis 3:2 - 8 (NIV) 1Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”**

**2The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,****3but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”**

**4“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman.****5“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”**

**6When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.****7Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**

**8Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.**

Satan does what Satan will always do…Take what God has meant for good and try to pervert it and use it to fulfill his evil purposes.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was created in the perfection of God just as all the rest of creation was!

Standing there representing choice it gave man a way to exercise his free will and experience the love of God.

Adam and Eve were getting along just fine with the tree in the garden until the deceiver came along and used it as a temptation to break the fellowship that man was enjoying with his creator.

But, none the less, the sin wasn’t in the temptation.. The sin was found in yielding to the temptation.

If Adam and Eve would have exercised their will in the opposite direction and said no thank you, sin would not have entered the equation.

Why is all this important?

Because Satan still uses the same game plan to destroy us today that he did clear back in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve..

He still takes what God has meant for good and tries to pervert it and make a temptation out of it.

And what we need to understand is that the temptation is not sin unless we yield to it…

Example: God has created within us our senses, our emotions, our desire to love and be loved. God has created us as sexual beings. God has created us with sexual desires.

These are all God given and they are, in themselves, all good and wonderful things.

Temptation happens when the enemy of our souls tries to use these God given things in a wrong or inappropriate way.

Most married couples, if they are honest, would admit they were physically attracted to one another before they became emotionally attracted to each other.

I was physically attracted to my wife before I became emotionally attracted to her.

That is not a bad thing! In fact that is how God has programmed us..

Without physical attraction to kick off a relationship most relationships would never get off the ground.

Without sexual attraction and sexual desires the birth rate would probably be somewhere around zero.

The point is Satan will often use what God has meant for good as a temptation to do bad.

These things only become temptations when we take them outside of the confines that God intended..

A man cannot be tempted to lust after his own wife. That is not a temptation ---that is a natural God given desire.

A man can be tempted to lust after a woman that is not his wife.. Lust of a woman who is not your wife is a temptation because it takes natural sexual desire outside of the perimeters that God originally intended.

You cannot be tempted to love your husband but you can be tempted to love someone else’s..

You can’t be tempted to get angry at injustice but you can be tempted to get angry.

If temptation were a sin, in and of itself, then not just every man, woman and child that have ever lived have sinned (as we all have) but so has Jesus Himself.

Let’s look and see how Jesus handled temptation….

**Matthew 4:2 -11 (NIV)**

**1Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”**

**4Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**

**5Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:**

**“‘He will command his angels concerning you,**

**and they will lift you up in their hands,**

**so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”**

**7Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”**

**8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.****9“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”**

**10Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”**

**11Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**

What can we learn here from this account of Jesus life?

What can we learn from the temptations of Christ?

#1. Temptation is not sin! Jesus was tempted but He never sinned…

**Hebrews 4:14 - 15 (NIV) 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.**

#2. Temptation holds just as much opportunity for us to do good as it does for us to do bad.

Temptation is a way whereby we can exercise our free will and test and prove our faith.

With every temptation we have an opportunity to obey God…

**Temptation…**Who will ever know if I cheat on my income tax?

**Choice….**Cheat on your taxes or remain true to the character of Christ and pay the full amount that you owe.

Give unto Creaser the things that are Creasers and give to the Lord the things that are the Lords.

The temptation gives us an opportunity to obey God!

**Temptation….** Who will ever know if I am unfaithful to my spouse this one time?

**Choice….**To break your marriage covenant to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season or remain true to the covenant that you made between God and man.

The temptation gives us an opportunity to obey God.

**Temptation….** Hearing from one friend some nasty news about another friend….

**Choice…** become a conduit for the gossip or choose to let the gossip stop with you…..Or better yet choose to tell the person telling it to you that you will not talk about someone when that person is not there to defend themselves.

With every temptation that we face we have another opportunity to obey God…

The more that we obey God the more of Christ character we will take on.

The more that we obey God the more like Jesus we will become.

The fact of the matter is, we need to start to worry if all temptations disappear from our life..

Satan doesn’t need to tempt people that he already has under his control or who are of no threat to him.

Satan uses temptation only on those who are a threat to him.

Satan tempted Jesus because Jesus was a threat!

Satan tempted Jesus and he tempted him at his weakest moment-- When Jesus was hungry and tired and alone in the desert.

How did Jesus respond to the temptation?

Each time by drawing upon the Word of God!

**“If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”**

**4Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**

**6“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:**

**“‘He will command his angels concerning you,**

**and they will lift you up in their hands,**

**so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”**

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**10Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”**

With each temptation Jesus yielded the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, to strike down the enemy.

With each temptation Jesus made the choice of obedience to the Father..

The result…..

**11Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**

Scripture has promised us that God **will never leave us or forsake us!**

**That greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world!**

**That He who began a good work within you is faithful to bring it to completion!**

**And we can do all things through Him who gives us strength!**

As we use temptations as an opportunity for obedience to God we too will find that the devil will eventually give up, in that particular area, and move on…..And that through each act of our obedience to God in the temptations that we face we will find that we are developing the character of Christ in our lives. **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control.**

God has given us this promise in:

**1 Corinthians 10:12 - -13 (NIV)** **13No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**

Again, it is not a sin to be tempted. Even Jesus was tempted yet He never sinned!

Temptation only becomes a sin when we give in to it!

Martin Luther once said: “*You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”*

We can’t keep the Devil from suggesting thoughts, but we can choose not to dwell or act upon them.

**James 1:2-5(NIV) 2Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,    
3because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.    
4Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.    
5If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.**

**James 1:2-4(YLT)   
2All joy count *it*, my brethren, when ye may fall into temptations manifold;    
3knowing that the proof of your faith doth work endurance,    
4and let the endurance have a perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire—in nothing lacking;**

How do you view temptations in your life this morning?

Do you see every temptation as just another opportunity to obey God and help develop a Christ like character within you?

Temptations only become sin when they are yielded to…

But every temptation stood up to through obedience helps make us more Christ like.

It helps build a stronger faith and reliance upon God.

With the next temptation that you face look at it as an opportunity to obey God and grow in your faith becoming more and more like Jesus.