

Temptation A Series on the Practice of Sin: Part 2

Human desire, ever changing and supplanted by other desires, is usually for the ultimate goal of experiencing pleasure or avoiding pain. This can be easily seen in the desire for food and sex, personal safety and security, and wealth and dominion. It is worth mentioning that desires do not make one happy nor fulfilled, and in its absence, result in boredom.

According to the author of James, the process of committing sin begins with a person's own desire, and then fulfilling it when tempted to do so.

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust (**epithymia**). Then when lust (**epithymia**) has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (Jam 1:14-15)

The idea that sin originates with one's desires was introduced by Jesus, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt 5:27-28)

The word "temptation" is translated from the Greek noun "peira." It is noteworthy that when using the verb "tempt," the Septuagint and the New Testament often use the Greek verb "peirazō," which is in the intensive word form that is rarely found in extrabiblical and contemporaneous Greek texts. This intensive form places an emphasis on the tempter's effort in tempting / testing and conveys a sense of strong, forceful, and concentrated action.

A person may "peirazō" himself "to test or to try out" or to another with a sense of competition "to measure against or to curry favor." In both cases, the parties involved are endeavoring for knowledge and experience.

James 1:14-15 makes clear that regardless of the intensity one may tempt another, it is the passion of one's desire that makes one susceptible to temptation. From a different perspective, temptation is outside of a person while a desire is created by a person; thus, guilt is determined simply by one's desire regardless of how much temptation is present.

Theologically, **temptation is a test that is designed to reveal what lies in a person's heart.**

A good example of temptation is seen in Satan's testing of Jesus.

Temptation is divinely appointed as it was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus to the wilderness (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1-2).

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (**peirazō**) by the devil. (Matt 4:1)

Satan tempts Jesus with food (Matt 4:3), personal safety (Matt 4:5-6), and wealth / dominion (Matt 4:8-9).

And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter (**peirazō**) came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." (Matt 4:2-3)

And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted (**peirazō**) by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. (Mark 1:13)

With one exception, the gospels use "peirazō" exclusively of Satan or Jewish religious authorities who sought to tempt Him into claiming that He was the Messiah Son of God (Matt 26:59-63). Their temptations failed, because Jesus never had the desire to claim His authority until at the right moment in His Father's plan so that His crucifixion took place at the precise date and time in history (Matt 26:63-66).

Temptation
A Series on the Practice of Sin: Part 2 (page 2)

And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing (**peirazō**) Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." (Matt 22:16-21)

The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test (**peirazō**) Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. (Mark 8:11-13)

Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" They were saying this, testing (**peirazō**) Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:5-7)

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward.... (Matt 26:59-60)

When considering the theological context of temptation, a test that is designed to reveal what lies in a person's heart, it provides clarity into Satan's "peirazō" to test a person's propensity to fulfill a sinful desire. For the most common desire appealing to one's physical senses, the Greek noun "hēdonē" is used to mean "desire for pleasure."

Jesus uses "hēdonē" with the sense of one being consumed with wealth and material comforts at the expense of the Good News.

The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures (**hēdonē**) of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. (Luke 8:14)

The apostles and the author of James are more explicit in describing one's priority of desiring for pleasure as enslavement, because it motivates one to commit deceit, violence and murder.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures (**hēdonē**), spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. (Tit 3:3)

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures (**hēdonē**) that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures (**hēdonē**). (Jam 4:1-3)

But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure (**hēdonē**) to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; (2 Pet 2:12-14)

Temptation

A Series on the Practice of Sin: Part 2 (page 3)

The New Testament is very clear that the desire for wealth and pleasure makes one susceptible to temptation especially when these desires are qualified as extreme (i.e. avarice, “lovers of...”).

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires (**epithymia**) which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Tim 6:9-10)

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses (**epithymia**), always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim 3:1-7)

Satan, taking advantage of one's desires, knows that the passion of one's desire can overwhelm one's self control resulting in disobeying God and causing others to do likewise (1 Cor 7:4-5).

Paul recognizes the natural inclination to desire anything that one sees or hears in himself, even as an apostle!

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. (Rom 7:7-11)

To Believers, Paul encourages the church to test themselves – test to discover what truly lies in your heart. “Peirazō” yourself but not with the sense of competition “to measure against or to curry favor.”

Test (**peirazō**) yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Cor 13:5)

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted (**peirazō**). Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. (Gal 6:1-4)

The only way to manage one's desires is through the study of God's word.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires (**epithymia**), and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Tim 4:3-4)

And though this challenge is not easy, one may be encouraged to trust God's word, because His Son speaks as One who experienced these temptations and shows how temptation can be defeated.

Temptation
A Series on the Practice of Sin: Part 2 (page 4)

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted (**peirazō**) in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (**peirazō**). (Heb 2:17-18)

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has (**peirazō**) been tempted (**peirazō**) in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4:14-15)

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vols. 2-3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).