

TEMPTATIONS AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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Remember this: no one is condemned for being tempted; the only thing that condemns is to give in to the temptation.

Remember this too: everyone who tries to live a good life makes occasional slips; but the slips do not condemn anyone either, so long as he does not give up but honestly tries again.

Everyone who wants to go to heaven is tempted on his way there. He is particularly tempted to do things that are contrary to the ten commandments; in other words, he is tempted to worship himself or worldly things instead of the Lord—to use swear words, to stay away from Church on Sundays, or to neglect his own private prayers, to be disrespectful to his parents, to get hot with anger or revengeful, to abuse his own body or that of another, to be careless with the property of others, to tell lies, or to feel envy. If you will go through the Ten Commandments in your mind, I think you will see that the list I just gave one by one relates to them.

It would be too long, and probably also boring, to go through all of the Ten Commandments. We shall therefore select only five of them, and we choose those that have a direct bearing on what we should do and not do to our neighbors.

Hot Anger

Some people get angry more easily than others do. Few, however, get so angry that they would be ready to kill somebody. Still, hot anger is related to the urge to hurt or even kill another. That is why the Lord In His Sermon on the Mount said: “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill, but I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matthew 21, 22). Anyone can see that hot anger involves a desire for revenge. This is a feeling or tendency that we must resist. We must not lose control of ourselves. When we do lose control, it is because we have given over our minds at that time to influences from hell. A strong person keeps himself in check. But even a strong person is tempted to give way to anger and revenge; and I repeat, such temptation does not condemn him, nor let the powers of hell flow into his heart itself; only if he gives his heart at that time taken over by the power of evil.

Degrading Sex

We are now speaking of the commandment; “You shall not commit adultery.” But anyone can see that the big sin, the actual adultery, is related to a lot of smaller sins which, if unchecked, will tend to lead to worse and worse things.

Our body is created in the image of God Himself. It is a marvelous creation! The male body and the female body are created so as to complement each other, and so that new human beings may be born by their being joined together—all such human beings being intended by the Lord for eternal life and happiness in heaven. One's body should therefore not be abused, and it is especially important not to abuse that of another. In marriage, where there is a real love between husband and wife, there is no abuse. In such a case sex serves love. But sex can also serve self-love! And that is when it does not serve well.

There are many difficulties and pressures that surround the modern young person. But many of these can be shut out. Why, for instance, read books or articles that deal with these matters in an ugly way? Why watch television shows or movies that deal with sex almost as it is with animals instead of humans? It is one thing to be tempted without wanting to be, and another to open oneself to temptation. When we pray to the Lord: "Lead us not into temptation," then what is meant is that we wish the Lord to protect us from the things that would so lead us. We should not make things more difficult for ourselves than they are already. No one can keep the things of his body in control without a measure of self-discipline.

At this point I should like to note that the Ten Commandments, and all the details that are involved in them, are not given to make things difficult for us. They are given to protect us; and most of the protection we need is against ourselves! They are like traffic laws. Obviously we could not use our roads without them.

Being Careless With the Property of Others

Here the big sin is stealing, and the commandment is, "You shall not steal." But we steal not only by robbing a bank or by taking dollars out of somebody's wallet. For the most part our weaknesses in this area come out in small ways. We might borrow money or a book or some sports equipment, and forget all about returning what we have borrowed. That means we are keeping for ourselves something that belongs to another. If we care, then we will return the other person's property as soon as we remember, and if late we will apologize. But if we don't care, or do not care enough to return the thing, then we are committing a form of theft.

The general idea is to respect other people's property. Any form of disrespect is a form of theft. What, for instance, would you say about crossing somebody's garden and trampling down his flowers? And what about borrowing somebody's bike and returning it scratched or with a punctured tire, in other words in a poorer condition than when you received it? Make examples for yourselves. We are tempted to be careless about the property of others in many ways, but we need not give in to the temptation.

Lies

"You shall not bear false witness. That is the commandment. Perhaps what would first come to a young person's mind (and to many an adult's mind too, for that matter) is lying for the purpose of getting away with things. That will at once tell us that when we lie we have usually already done something that is wrong. In that case, a lie will double it, and make two wrongs instead of

one. It takes courage to own up to something that we know we ought not to have done, especially if punishment is expected. But a strong character would rather “face the music” than complicate the situation still further.

Some lies are obviously worse than others. Anyone can see, for instance, that if a soldier tells a lie to the enemy in order to protect his own country, then that is a different thing from the same soldier telling a lie to his commanding officer in order to protect himself. It is the selfish motive we need to guard against. A selfish motive loves the lie, it desires to cover itself with it as with a garment. But why let it? Selfishness is not the only force that operates within us; every person, including every young person, also has a conscience. Our conscience has no desire to cover itself with a lie. It has nothing to hide, and it takes pride in being honest and straightforward, and finds joy in this.

Envy

We will say also a few words about the last two of the Ten Commandments. These commandments begin with the words; “You shall not covet.” To “covet” is to lust after. These two commandments refer to lusting after somebody else’s wife or property. “Lust” is a word associated with an evil attitude, and therefore in the case of a good attitude we would need another word, such as “long for” or “desire.” To long for a happy marriage is of course very different from lusting after something we should not have; and to desire worldly possessions through perfectly legitimate means is different from wishing to have them without such means. “Envy” is what we are talking about. As you can see, envy is an attitude of the mind rather than an external way of speaking. But here too every strong young person can try to live in a responsible way. Thoughts of envy can be stopped; and if not, they too will lead us into temptation.

As we can see in the prayer, “Lead us not into temptation” cannot be heard by the Lord unless we, ourselves, strive honestly to turn away from things in our own thoughts or acts that might turn in the direction of evil. On the other hand, if we do try, then the Lord will flow In with strength to help us through. The Lord helps the person who shows in his own life that he truly wants that help.

Texts: Matthew 21, 22