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Traditions of Men (Part 4)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the importance of controlling one's thoughts and words in accordance with Christian beliefs. He emphasizes that negative speech, even if it seems harmless, can stem from a wicked heart and lead to sinful behavior. Gregg cautions against letting desires, whether natural or not, control one's actions and encourages Christians to stay away from temptation as much as possible in order to avoid sin. Ultimately, he stresses the importance of aligning one's thoughts and words with values of righteousness and self-control.

Transcript

In Matthew chapter 12, in verse 34, Jesus said, Brute of vipers, how can you being evil speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Now, whatever the heart is full of is going to come out of the mouth. That's what he's saying.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. So he's not really saying something new here in Matthew 15 that he hasn't already said. Namely, in verse 18, he says, Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.

Now, they defile a man not because of the sound or the syllables of the words, but because of where they come from. If you say, I don't give a darn, there are some Christians I know who think of darn as a swear word. I know a Mennonite lady who I was talking to, she said that when she was raised, you couldn't say darn any more than you could say damn.

And you couldn't say heck any more than you could say hell. And you couldn't say gosh or gee any more than you could say God or Jesus in the wrong context. Because those were expletives.

Those were euphemisms for what we would ordinarily view as profanity. If you say, what the heck, they'd be like saying, what the hell? And therefore, some people would consider that a moral violation to say, what the heck? And now, frankly, I'm not sure why it would be a moral violation to even say, what the hell? I mean, the word hell is a

biblical word, and I don't know anywhere in the Bible that says, thou shalt not say hell in the wrong context. But of course, when people say, go to hell or damn you or something like that, what we need to understand is it's not that the word damn is a nasty word or hell is a nasty word.

Jesus used both of those words in very similar contexts. How will you escape the damnation of hell? He said to the Pharisees. Now, the problem with saying damn you or go to hell to somebody is it's an unloving thing to say.

You don't say those things when you love somebody. What comes out of your mouth defiles you, not because the words are themselves bad words, but because they come out of the heart. And when those words that have culturally come to be considered to be bad come out of your mouth, they can hardly be coming from anything other than a bad heart.

There are, have you ever wondered about why certain words have taken on the status of profanity, when in fact they're simply synonyms for other words that aren't considered profanity? The F word, the SH word, or as we commonly call them when we don't want to say them, and words like that. We don't say those words, but we will talk in a more clinical sense about the same things, only using synonyms for those words. Somehow, whenever I say, and then I, if I say I stepped in my dog's defecation in my front yard, it's not exactly a pleasant subject to talk about, but no one thinks I've said anything profane.

But if I used the synonym for that, most people would be shocked and say, how could you as a Christian say such a thing? Isn't that, have you ever wondered about that? Maybe you guys haven't been Christians long enough to wonder about that. I don't think anyone who's been a Christian as long as I have could ever have not thought about that many, many times. But even not as a Christian, it seems like people who are sensitive about things like that think, why in the world would one word for a thing be considered a bad word, and another word that means exactly the same thing is simply a clinical or a descriptive word, and it's not offensive.

It may not be the most, it may not be appropriate for mixed company, or it may not be the most enjoyable subject or pleasant subject, but it's not the same thing. It doesn't carry the same stigma as another word for that would be. And I think the reason must be, I don't know the answer, but I think the reason must be that some of those words, which long before our lifetime took on the stigma of being profane words and so forth, became that because they began to be used in situations where they weren't talking about defecation, and they weren't really talking about intercourse and things like that.

They began to be ways of talking nasty. They began to be ways of swearing or of expressing anger or contempt. I mean, I suppose if we began to use the more clinical sounding words in the way that those other words are used, those clinical words would take on the same stigma because it's the heart, it's what's in the heart that makes what

comes out of the mouth objectionable.

If you're speaking in love, then it's not too bad. I know very few Christians, very few, who have used the SH word, as we call it, as a part of their regular vocabulary. Most Christians avoid it like the plague, and I think it's a good idea to.

It's not a really nice word in our society. But I've met on occasions, very rarely, a few people who actually use it. When they're talking about what the dog left on the lawn or when they're talking about what someone forgot to flush, they use that word.

And I don't know if you've ever met a Christian who does that, but it takes you aback for a minute when they say it. They're just using that word the same way I would use a synonym for that. There's no malice in their heart.

They're not trying to be nasty, although I don't know why they use that word. But the fact of the matter is, when that word is used simply descriptively, it's very hard to know why someone would find fault with it. Because the word does have a meaning.

And if it's used in that meaning, and it's used without any malice or any attempt to express anger or whatever, it sort of takes you aback because those words aren't used that way, commonly. I don't recommend the use of them in any form, simply because even if you have the cleanest of hearts, there's always going to be someone offended by it, and it's always good to avoid things that offend the sensitivities of good people. Then that becomes your profanity.

Whatever proceeds from your mouth from evil, that is, if your heart is angry or whatever. Now, by the way, not all anger is evil. But an awful lot of it is.

Most of it is, probably. When the Bible says, be angry and sin not, it's clear that some anger is and some is not sin. And the anger that Jesus had was not sin, for example.

But there are no doubt words which we substitute for other words. Words that are not in themselves, in our culture, considered bad words, but because they come from the same evil emotion. They're just as bad as the swear word would be in that slot.

I grew up not sensitive to words like gosh and gee and stuff. I mean, to tell you the truth, I was so naive, even in my late teens, I never knew that gosh was a word that someone had made up to substitute for the word God. Or that gee was a shorter way of saying Jesus.

I'd never crossed my mind. And in my first Christian comic book I made, I had characters using those expressions. And I remember Chuck Smith, who first proofread and published my first comic book, he didn't say anything about it to me, he sent me to talk to some people at Gospel Light Publishing, who were going, he was working with them to get the thing, to use their printing facilities or something like that.

And I had a meeting, a lunch meeting with some of these guys there. And they were kind of picking the thing apart. It was sort of an underground style comic, and they were very conservative Sunday school type publisher.

And this is in the early 70s. There were all kinds of things they were finding wrong with it, most of which I ignored their comments on. But they said, well, don't you think you'll offend a lot of Christian readers by these uses of things like gosh and gee? And I thought, why? You know, what's the problem with those words? It never crossed my mind.

I later went back and told Chuck Smith that they said that. And he said, well, you know, I kind of felt that way too when I first read it. I just didn't say anything.

Because Chuck was very non-legalistic, but he had those feelings too. And I became aware for the first time that there are people who think those are bad words. And I suppose to such people, the use of the word gee is as bad, I mean really as bad, as using the word Jesus in the wrong context.

If by gee they mean Jesus, and if by gosh, they mean God. You know, I mean, if to avoid saying God in the wrong way, they say gosh in just the same wrong way, it seems to me that gosh becomes actually actual profanity in their mouth. But if a person doesn't even know that that's, it's a strange thing.

It's an interesting study and we don't have time to go into it that much. I bring it up because Jesus said, what comes out of man's mouth defiles a man. But he doesn't mean the actual words are themselves, you know, certain words are in themselves defiling, but whatever comes out of an evil heart is an evil word, even if it's a clean word.

It's a bad word if it comes out of a bad heart. And that's what defiles man, is what's an evil heart. Matt first and then Jamie.

I would have to say, not necessarily. Jesus expressed frustration with his disciples. You know, how long must I bear with you people? You still don't get it? You know, I mean, I don't know to what degree he was emphatic or gentle in his way of saying it.

Of course, I was given the benefit of the doubt since I know he never sinned. But I think frustration, since frustration, well, Jesus seems to experience frustration, you know, but if that is true, then I'd say not all frustration is sin. But I do think, I do think that if you are in a situation in which most people would use expletives and profanity in, and you simply don't use expletives and profanity because that's not part of your vocabulary, but you use something else that expresses the same emotion with the same spirit, then I'd say that was wrong.

I'm not sure that all forms of frustration are sin. But I do think that the expression of sinful attitudes, whether it's a sinful kind of frustration or anger or hatred or contempt for

somebody else or whatever, that those things are all about the same no matter what word you use. Jaylene? Yeah, I've never heard brothers complain about ears.

Ears are dangling or whatever. Yeah, right. Well, I do think, yeah, I think it is possible and probable that some societies become numb to certain things by exposure.

This same Mennonite lady that was talking to me about words like gosh and gee, she said that when she was raised, women could wear stockings, nylons, but they had to have a visible hem. When they came out with stockings that didn't have visible hems, that was immodest to wear those, but they could wear stockings that had a visible hem. The reason is obvious.

I mean, you see about as much of the leg whether there's a visible hem or not. But apparently, in a denomination where there's been a tremendous degree of hiding of the body and so forth, there's a, I guess to people conditioned by that whole cultural phenomenon, the assumption or the belief that they are seeing a bare leg arouses them in ways that seeing the same leg but not perceiving it to be bare doesn't arouse them. I mean, it's a strange, that's a cultural thing.

To me, it would make little difference in terms of stumbling me whether I could see the woman had a hem or didn't have a hem on her stocking. It wouldn't make any difference at all. But to the person who says I'm looking at a naked leg and you see without a hem, there's always a possibility of mistake the stocking the leg for a naked leg.

The person who has come to associate naked legs with something arousing would be stumbled by that. Now, in Muslim countries, the women cover not only their heads and their bodies but their faces. You don't see anything but their eyes.

And anything more than that is very shocking and immodest to them. And it's possible for a man raised in that culture to see a woman's nose or ears might cause him to have fantasies. Just because it seems naughty, it seems racy, it just impacts them differently.

In this culture, like I said, I've never known anyone to be sexually stumbled by seeing a woman's nose or ears. By the way, there are things... I mean, let's face it. You could say, well, in our culture, people are used to X-rated movies and they see naked bodies all the time.

Probably no one would be stumbled if you walk around naked. Well, I disagree with that. There are still people who... There comes a point where a certain degree of exposure will always be a problem.

Will always be a problem. And I think that the determination of modesty... I don't know if I've ever defined modesty for you or not. To my mind, modesty is simply... Well, let me tell you what immodesty is.

To me, immodesty is dressing or conducting yourself in a way that is calculated to bring the wrong kind of attention to yourself. I could say any attention to yourself, but that'd put too many people under condemnation. I mean, everything you do in some way or another might draw attention to yourself and you could get really legalistic about that.

But I'd say anything... When you dress in a way or behave in a way with flirtatious looks, the way you stand or walk, can be calculated to draw the wrong kind of attention to yourself. And the wrong kind of attention usually would mean drawing attention to those sexual distinctives that might bring sexual arousal to someone of the opposite sex. In other words, if you dress in such... For women, obviously, the breasts and for some men, the legs are a great temptation and so forth.

For men, I'm afraid I don't know what tempts a woman in a man's body. I don't think there's anything about my body that would tempt a woman, so I don't have to worry about it. But there are men who have bodies that are somewhat more attractive than mine and who, no doubt, need to be careful how they put them on display.

But I do think that anything that accentuates a person's sexual distinctives, their male or female distinctives, is at least potentially capable of arousing a purulent interest on the part of the opposite sex. I think that one needs to be careful. I don't want to sound too prudish, but one needs to be careful about how much skin they show below the neck, on the torso of their body.

I'm not trying to be specific, because as far as I'm concerned, skin of the shoulder doesn't bother me, but I know some people who does. I remember hearing a Pentecostal preacher say he's never even seen his wife's shoulders after 40 years and they didn't have any children. I wonder why.

I mean, that's going too far. Some older Pentecostal groups, they think that seeing the shoulders of a woman is immodest. Maybe it is.

I don't know. To them, it may be arousing. I just don't know.

I see because there are people with differing degrees of sensitivity and differing degrees of pervertedness. We live in an age where sexual desire has been twisted and perverted so that there's people who are lusting after little children and there's people who have made a mental habit of getting aroused by almost anything that they can get aroused by, by beating themselves or beating someone else with chains or whatever. I mean, there are people whose minds and spirits have been so corrupted and twisted and perverted that they've made a lifestyle of sexual arousal and they've gotten themselves programmed so almost anything can arouse them.

And of course, you can't be held accountable if you're doing your best to be modest and somebody gets aroused. When you've done nothing. But knowing that we live in such a

society and knowing that some of those people with perverted desires have gotten saved and are trying to get renewed in their minds but they still have a lot of those mental habits.

There's still those triggers, you know. Everyone knows that after you're saved, there's still triggers, you know, stimuli in your world which because of your past, your past condition or whatever, they trigger the kind of response you're trying to get rid of as a Christian. You're trying to get rid of that in your life.

But my thought is that every male and female should dress as much as possible in such a way as to bring no attention whatsoever to their sexual distinctives and I don't know, the skin of certain parts of the body. For some people, it's a trial. I don't, that's not a big, seeing legs, for instance, below the knee or above the knee doesn't do an awful lot for me.

I'm not a, I guess I'm not what they call a leg man or something but that's not what arouses me. But I, but the fact of the matter is some people are bothered by that and I think women need to be aware of that. And, you know, some religious groups would say women should only wear dresses.

I don't agree with that. But I guess there may be something to be said for at least, you know, wearing clothes that do not accentuate the shape of your body since there are so many people who are distracted and tempted by such visual stimuli. And like I say, it's going to be more of a consideration for women than for men, I think.

Because although I know there are women who are aroused by visual stimuli it's much, much more of a problem with men than it is for women. And so you women need to be aware of that more than maybe you are. You probably are aware of it.

But anyway, the point I'm making is and we've gotten off on a tangent but it is a relevant tangent. We're talking about, you know, external legalism as opposed to matters of the heart. Legalism in some church groups has taken the form of don't wear this kind of clothing, don't wear your hair this way, don't wear any jewelry, don't wear any makeup, don't smoke, don't chew, don't go to movies, you know, don't hang out in these kinds of places, don't have this kind of friends.

And, you know, one thing like I said in our last session about this, legalism and rules like this, they often are well-intentioned and often are not bad advice. Often they're very good advice. The problem is when they become, you know, the thing that we consider that God considers most rather than the heart.

It's not the external things but the heart. But that doesn't mean that you can do all kinds of violations of these external things and still have a right heart. Because not only out of the mouth, but out of the life in general flow things from the heart.

Now, Jesus said what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart. But he's not stating the full orb of behaviors in that statement that comes from the heart. More than that comes from the heart.

Over in Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23, Proverbs 4.23 says, Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. The issues of life. Not just what comes out of your mouth, not just your speech, but all the issues of your life.

All your behaviors, all of your habits, all of your relating patterns, everything of your life, it all springs from the heart. That's why you need to guard your heart with all diligence. That's why it's so important to be aware of things like hypocrisy and covetousness which attack the heart and win your whole life.

Your whole life becomes affected by such things. Now, Jesus suggests that there's more that comes out of the heart than just what comes out of the mouth, too, even in the passage before us. In Matthew 15.18, he says, But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, they defile a man.

Verse 19 says, For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands doesn't defile a man. Now, what defiles a man is what comes out of his heart.

But that doesn't mean behavior is not relevant. Behavior is. It's just not religious behavior that's to be examined, but moral behavior.

Because immoral behavior comes from the heart. Out of your heart come the issues of life. What you speak is one of the gauges of what's in your heart.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Anybody can listen to you speak for a while and know what your heart's full of. If all you talk about is sports, if all you talk about is cars, if all you talk about is women, if all you talk about is fashion, if all you talk about is Jesus, if all you talk about is something else, it doesn't take long for people to be around you to know what your heart is full of.

Now, there's nothing wrong with your heart being full. Your heart should be full. The question is, what's it full of? Well, one of the ways you can find out is listen to what you're talking about.

Listen to what comes out of your mouth because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. But there's other ways too, not just what you say, but what you do will demonstrate what's in your heart. And the list Jesus gives in verse 19, only two of the things in the list really are verbal.

And that's the last two things, false witness, which is lying, and blasphemies, which is, of

course, speaking disrespectfully concerning God. Now, those are verbal things, but the other things in the list are not verbal at all. Evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts.

These are violations, of course, of some of the Ten Commandments. He says these things come out of a heart that's defiled. When a person steals, when a person commits fornication, when a person murders or has murderous intentions, evil thoughts, that'll tell you what their heart is full of just as much as what they say does.

So, although Jesus gives the mouth as the example, he does so because they're accusing his disciples of defiling themselves by putting something in their mouth. He says it's really you got the direction wrong. It's not what goes in, it's what comes out of the mouth that's relevant to personal defilement.

But it's not just what comes out of the mouth, it's what comes out of the life in general. Out of the heart spring the issues of life. Yeah, Jimmy.

Absolutely. Absolutely. Evil thoughts are what proceed out of the heart.

You see, he doesn't say it in so many words here, but when you take the whole teaching of Jesus, it's quite clear that what he teaches throughout is the loving thing is the right thing. The unloving thing is the wrong thing. If you have unloving motives, you've got an evil heart.

Or at least those particular motives are evil and they come from your heart. If you do the loving thing or have loving motivations, then that means your heart is in a different place. You love people, that's a good heart.

A good heart will do generous things. Remember, I compared this in our last session with the time that's mentioned in Luke where Jesus was eating at the house of a Pharisee. And the Pharisee marveled that Jesus ate without washing his hands.

And Jesus said, you know, you Pharisees, you wash the outside stuff, but you don't wash the inside. And he said, but give alms of what you have and then everything is clean to you. That was another way of Jesus saying this here.

He's basically saying, if you give alms, that's a sign that your heart is good because you're generous. Generosity is a function of love in your heart. If you're a loving person, you'll want to help the poor and be generous and so forth.

So he said, if you give alms, everything's pure to you. That is, all food is pure. Saying that if you eat unclean animals, but your heart is pure, you're still pure.

Because it's the heart, not the food you eat that determines such things. Yes, Jaylene. Okay, well, this takes us off in another direction, but again, it's relevant enough.

We might as well discuss it. How do you make a distinction in your own mind of whether your thoughts are actual sins or simply temptations to sin? Okay, first of all, I'd like to point out to you, as you probably already know, that tempting thoughts are not the same thing as sins. It says in James chapter one, that every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his lusts and enticed.

Chad, what's that verse number? James 1... Okay, thanks. Okay, you saved me some time by telling me that. Good.

Yes, verse 14 and 15. James 1, 14 and 15 says, but each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin and sin, when it's full grown, brings forth death.

Now, here's what I want to point out to you. The word desire there is the same word that's translated lust in other places. In fact, the word lust, which we usually think of only in negative terms, is simply the word in Greek for desire.

Jesus even used it when he said to his disciples in Luke, with great desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. The word desire there is the same word that's used as of lust. When Jesus said, whoever looks at a woman to lust after her, commits adultery in his heart.

It just means desire. If you look at a woman to desire her and she's not yours, then you are taking the first step that leads to adultery and you're already in the realm of adultery in your heart. Here, however, he says, it's when desire has conceived that it brings forth sin.

Now, that means that desire itself is not sin. It is when desire or lust has conceived that sin comes about as a result of that. Sin is the baby that is produced when lust or desire conceives.

Well, what does that mean? Well, as I understand it, we all have desires, whether we ask for them or not. We all have desires, some of which are simply physiological in terms of their origin. We have hunger when we're fasting.

We're tempted to break our fast by the fact that we're hungry. When we're celibate, there may be temptations to violate celibacy because there are sexual hormones and so forth. There are these desires which we cannot say are evil desires in themselves because God made the hormones.

God made the chemistry from which these arise. But when we are tempted and these desires lead us to crave something that is not rightfully ours or what we are not supposed to do, but because the fulfillment of such a desire would be a violation of God's commands, then desire actually becomes a temptation to sin. But that kind of desire, that is, desire for the wrong kinds of things, is not itself sin.

Do you know Jesus had thoughts and desires of those kinds? The Bible says he was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin. So, obviously, temptation and sin are not the same thing because if Jesus could be tempted in all the ways we are and yet avoid sinning, it means that you can have temptation without having sin at the same time. That statement, by the way, is in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 15.

Hebrews 4, verse 15 says, Jesus was tempted in all points like we are. Well, we don't read in the Bible of all the times Jesus was tempted. The narrative is too sketchy.

But we do know of a time when Jesus was out in the wilderness and the devil brought three incredibly strong temptations to him, one of which was based on his physical desires for food. He was hungry, the Bible says. He had been fasting.

And he was hungry. He was tempted to break his fast prematurely. Now, hunger is no sin.

But his hunger, combined with the devil, were inclining him, creating a desire in him, a temptation in him, to do something that would not have been right for him to do at that time, to break his fast prior to being led to do so by his father. And therefore, although hunger is not a bad thing, that desire, if it had conceived, would have resulted in sin. Well, what would conceiving be then for that desire? For Jesus to agree to it.

If Jesus would have said yes instead of no to that desire, then lust would have conceived. That desire would have conceived and brought forth sin. Now, when Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery in his heart, many people have wrongly thought, and I think the NIV even wrongly translates, I think it says whoever looks at a woman lustfully in the NIV.

That's a very vague and unhelpful translation. I mean, looks lustfully? Looks desiringly? Well, the way that Jesus said it, it's you look in order to lust. Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her.

Obviously, if you are going to look at a woman because you know that by looking at her it's going to arouse lusts and desires that you could not lawfully indulge, then there's something that's leading you to make that decision. Something in your heart. Sin, it's rebellion against God.

In your heart you want to indulge an unlawful passion, even if only mentally. And it's that inclination of your heart that shows that you are an adulterer in fact. You may not have the guts to go out and do it, and God forbid that you would have the guts to do it.

But you're still an adulterer because the motivation that leads some people to go out and commit adultery is there causing you to look at a woman and try to get that mental satisfaction or whatever it is that people seek through adultery. And the motivation is what's the sin there. But some people sadly have understood Jesus' statement to mean

whoever looks at a woman and lusts after her has committed adultery in his heart.

And this is a very damaging way of paraphrasing what Jesus said because it's not a good paraphrase. It's not what he said. Unfortunately, many godly men have worked in offices or been exposed to billboards at the side of the road while they're driving or other things where there are women who are dressed immodestly because of these men's background or whatever, or maybe just because of their biology.

A glance at these, though they never intended to glance at them, though they'd wish they weren't there. But when they see them, or they may be walking down the street minding their own business, and a woman walking the other direction who's very immodest catches their glance, and some desire arises. Well, at that point, the man has not committed adultery just because some stimulus has awakened a desire.

He wasn't hoping to awaken that desire. Just like when you're fasting, you're not hoping to awaken a desire to eat. But if you happen to smell good food, that desire may arise.

The question is when does that desire conceive and bring forth sin? And in my opinion, that becomes sin as soon as you are aware of the desire and decide not to resist. As long as you're resisting and saying, wait a minute, I will have nothing to do with that. I do not want that.

I do not agree to that. Then that is a temptation still, and you've not yet succumbed. As soon as you say, I will not fight this.

I will enjoy this. I will agree to this. Even if you never do a thing outwardly, you've already succumbed.

You're already in sin. It's possible that, you know, well, sometimes imagine yourself being at home and there's a knock at the door and there's a delivery person who says, I've got a delivery here. It's COD, you got to pay for it.

And you say, well, what is it? And they say, well, it's a microwave from Sears Roebuck. And you say, well, I didn't order a Sears Roebuck microwave, so I'm not going to pay for this. I'm not going to own this thing.

And they say, well, you know, someone from this address ordered it and it's yours. And I'm going to stay here until you take it. And you say, well, you can stand there all day if you like, but you're going to be looking at my door because it's not mine.

I don't want it. I didn't order it. I don't want it.

And every time you seek to walk out the door, there they are again. Here's your microwave. You say, I'm sorry, that's not my microwave.

You know, I don't want it. I didn't order it. It's not mine.

Now, as long as that guy may stand there all day long, you may be pestered for weeks. But as long as you're saying, I didn't order this, I don't want it, I don't agree to it, you've got no responsibility for it. But the moment you say, I will take that microwave.

I will own it. Then it's yours. And it's that way with temptation.

Most Christians don't go looking for temptation. It appears on their doorstep. And the devil will often say, this is yours.

This thought is your thought. This evil thought, this evil craving. And he'll get you feeling all condemned because you feel like, how could I as a Christian have such terrible thoughts? How could I be such a wicked person? But if in fact, you say, wait a minute.

I didn't order that thought. I don't agree with that thought. I don't want that thought.

Doesn't matter if that's pestering you all day long. If you're saying no the whole day long and you never say yes to it, it's still a temptation. Jesus, the Bible tells us in Mark, was tempted by the devil for 40 days in the wilderness.

That's a long temptation. To be pestered for 40 days by temptation. And yet he didn't sin.

Because although every time he turned around, the devil was there offering him something that he didn't want. The fact that he didn't want it and didn't choose it means that he never defiled himself. He never accepted it.

Now we often feel defiled just by the presence of a temptation. Because so many times the devil seeks to deceive us into thinking that it is a sin already. Because if he can convince us that we've already sinned when in fact we haven't, then he gets what he wants out of us anyway.

He doesn't care if you sin or not. He just wants you to feel condemned. Because condemnation alienates you from God.

He doesn't care if you sin. You think the devil's big project is get you to sin? No. The big project is to alienate you from God.

If he can do it without getting you to sin, that's fine with him. If he can just convince you that you have sinned and that you're guilty even though you haven't, he does the same job. It still makes you feel condemned.

He'd love it if you sinned. But if you don't sin, he's just as happy if you think you have. Because then you have the same condemnation in any case.

And that's what makes you feel alienated from God. So the devil will no doubt attempt to deceive you when you've only in fact been tempted deceive you into thinking that you

have bought into the temptation. And if all day long you're saying no, no, no, then what you're doing is you're just fighting a battle.

And the battle doesn't end until the temptation goes away. But that might be 40 days and 40 nights. It might be longer.

It might be shorter. But I'll tell you, the way to know whether the evil thought in your head is a temptation or a sin is to ask yourself, do I want this here? Have I welcomed it here? Have I stopped fighting it? As long as I'm fighting it, no one can claim that I own it. Although the devil can try to tell you that you do, but he can't convince you because he's a liar.

Now, Jesus, you will recall, was tempted to do some things that you'd be shocked to be tempted by. Suppose the temptation came to you one day to bow down and worship Satan. Maybe you've had that temptation.

I never have. I've never been tempted to do that. In fact, I can't imagine anything that'd be more shocking to have arise in my mind.

It wouldn't shock you because maybe you've had that temptation many times. I mean, the devil doesn't have many new tricks, and I'm sure he's pulled that one on many people. But in fact, some have succumbed to it.

But to me, to have the thought go through my mind, maybe you should just worship the devil. That would shock me. And no doubt, I'd be very tempted to feel defiled by the very entrance of the thought, but the devil's the one who put it there.

The question is, do I agree with it? The very thought entered Jesus' mind. Satan said to him, all these kingdoms you can have if you just bow down and worship me. That thought came to his mind.

That temptation entered. But he wouldn't receive it for a moment. He was appalled by it, and he wouldn't accept it.

But the point is, the thought entered his mind, but he didn't own it. And Hannah Whitehall Smith in her book, *The Christian Secret of Happy Life*, which if you haven't read yet, you'd better. It's the greatest book ever written besides the Bible, I suppose.

I've read it about five times. It's one of the finest books ever written. And it's written by a woman.

How do you like that? I mean, very, very great book. But she says, it's the devil's typical thing to bring a temptation to us, put evil thoughts in our mind, and then condemn us for having had such evil thoughts. She said, it's like if you came home and found a thief rifling through your drawers in your house, and as soon as you caught the thief, he

turned around and started accusing you of being the thief.

If the devil is an intruder and the temptation is unwelcomed, then I ask for, you will no doubt, if the temptation doesn't go away immediately at least, you'll no doubt begin to feel some responsibility for it, some guilt about it. But as long as you have never said yes, and you're still saying no, still holding out and resisting it, it is only a temptation. And you're only in the midst of battle.

You haven't sinned. And so that's something important to know. Now that gets us, you know, several excursions in this session got us off the subject.

But really, I had in my mind kind of devoted this whole session to finish up on what we didn't finish last time. I think we covered those last verses. But there's more things we could have said about some of those verses.

But there's always some limit to what we can get through. And so we'll call that the limit today. Okay.