

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lusts, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin [principle], when it is full grown, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15; R. V.) .

The word "tempt" first meant to test or try a man in order to prove and perfect him. In that sense only, does God tempt or try men. If we endure these testings we receive the crown of life.

Then the word came to be used in a bad sense, meaning "to induce a man to sin, to lure him to his ruin." In that sense God never tempts nor is tempted; but the God-man, Jesus Christ, was thus tempted.

The word "epithymia," translated "lust," originally meant "desire," then very strong desire: then it came to mean strong, impure, unclean, unholy desire or lust. That is the meaning in the text -- a something that draws a man from moral integrity, and entices to sin and ruin.

This opens up before us the sin question. Sin is the cause of all evil in the empire of God. People shrink from the study or discussion of it. It is an unpopular theme in the pulpit. One of the eminent physicians of Manchester, England, told me that the uncleanest section of the city was around the University. I asked "why?" His instant answer was "Prudery." Parents, teachers and preachers are too nice and modest to point out the perils and dangers of "fashionable sins." Jesus and His Apostles were not so modest.

There seem to have been speculating minds through all ages, who, by their theories, blamed God for sin. As:

1. Some asserted that "God eternally and unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass" -- all sin included -- thus foreordaining sin and ruin.

2 God deliberately placed men in circumstances that would be fatal to virtue.

3. He created the race with such ungovernable passions that sin was unavoidable.

4. He made natural laws that work out the phenomena we call sin with the precision of fate. So those who hold this theory tell us that all pangs of conscience for sin or' guilt, all sense of responsibility for wrong doing is a delusion, a foolish notion! If there is any responsibility, it lies with God. Adam started this theory, when he said: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." "Four gift was my ruin!"

Now James resents all these theories, as a libel on a holy God, as our text proves. His theory was that no outward circumstances constitute a temptation to sin apart from some lust in a man's own heart. So he said: A man is tempted only as he is drawn away by something within himself.

I. We find here, then, an explanation of all sin. Our first parents sinned by gratifying what was, at the beginning, innocent desire, instead of obeying Conscience and moral reason. That brought depravity to our race -- "the sin-principle" entered into the world, and the death-principle through "the sin-principle" and so death passed upon all men" (Rom. 5:12). (N. B. Fifteen of the world's most scholarly commentators tell us that the Greek noun for sin, -- "hamartia" in the singular number, with the article "the" before it, means -- "the sin-principle" or "depravity") . This "proclivity" or "inclination to sin" makes sin easy for any of us.

And how do we sin now? "Sin," according to my old teachers, Dr. Samuel Harris of Yale and President Fairchild of Oberlin, "consists in the surrender of the will to depraved desire against the protests of right reason."

The language of the text is very striking. As several commentators have noticed, "Epithymia," lust is personified as an enticing harlot. She persuades the understanding and will to yield to her solicitation and the result of the sinful union is the conception and birth of sin. "The sin principle" of the heart is the fruitful mother of all the sins and crimes that curse the earth.

We need not blame God -- nor even blame the Devil, as Eve did:-- "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Archbishop Tillotson said: "The worst devil is a man's own lust [or depravity] and more strongly inclines him to sin than any devil without can possibly do." Dr. Theodore Cuyler said: "A man's worst foe walks in his own shoes." Every man is his own worst tempter, worst peril and worst foe.

II. We meet here sin's growth, or progress. Lust (very strong desire) when it hath conceived bringeth forth sin; and the sin (principle) when it is finished (full-grown) bringeth forth death. "The sin principle" -- the inclination to sin, or depravity, grows by what it feeds on. Every actual sin a man commits increases the strength of his inclination to sin. The lust grows, like a blacksmith's arm, by its own exercise. Unholy desires lead to unholy deeds: and the deeds feed and inflame the overweening desires. We were born depraved by nature: and we become more and more depraved by practice. A visit to the slums will prove this to any open and discerning mind to a demonstration. The horrible, loathsome creatures living there were once as innocent little boys and girls, and perhaps no more depraved, than your children or mine. The sin principle grows, strengthens, increases in its relish for evil. Just as plants and animals begin to be, then grow, mature and ripen, so in the moral world and the realm of our soul life.

What then is the nature of the conception mentioned in the text? It is the surrender of ourselves to the voluntary slaves of desire, the victims of the uniform tendency to evil, born in us all. The perverted appetites and propensities grow to Herculean strength. The captive will nearly cease to struggle, and the turbid current of base passions rushes us on to inevitable moral death.

Illustrations of this mournful truth are everywhere. In my boyhood, my schoolmates played games of chance for pins, and played marbles for keeps. Then other games, cards and billiards, followed until the gambler's passion was aroused and it ended in the gambler's doom in a gambler's hell. We have watched the sin of lying from the first conscious prevarication or evasion of the truth, to the finished habit of unblushing falsehood and deliberate perjury.

We have seen the first indulgence in the intoxicating cup in a few swift years end in delirium and death. Covetousness becomes finished in the Swindler, the embezzler and the thief. Impurity of thought and dream and purpose has its maturity in the pollutions and obscenities and debaucheries of the brothel. An occasional irreverent word is finished in a stream of horrible blasphemy on the verge of death and hell. Such is the growth of sin, everywhere and always.

III. The sin principle, when she starts action, has no lesser aim than ultimate ruin. The final act of the tragedy which sin initiates is always spiritual and eternal death. She at least mothers "a grizzly terror," "a hideous monster," and final curse of an indignant God. She plans sin, then more sin and worse sin! The pimple becomes a festering ulcer, the soreness becomes a consuming cancer! This is what Satan deliberately planned, when he planted depravity in the human breast.

It became my painful duty as well as privilege to pray over a dying girl in a rescue home. She had a Christian father and mother: but in a careless, frivolous hour, she launched out into a so-called life of pleasure. Oh, if young people would look ahead and see the end! How the devil cheats them. Sin's first and best is soon spent: the worst is always at the end! This girl's career of pleasure was ending in two brief years, away from father and mother, in a home whither she had gone to hide her shame. No one dared touch her save with gloved hands! Hypodermic injections were given every hour to deaden the unendurable pain, while she was constantly praying for death! It was "finished sin"!

Leo Frank of Atlanta, Georgia, graduated from Cornell University. He was a millionaire at the head of a great factory. One day he summoned a girl, who was working in his factory, into his private office, and because she tried to protect her honor, he struck her and killed her! When he was sentenced to be hung his wife and mother swooned, but five thousand people in and around the courtroom cheered. When he was swung into eternity at the end of a rope on the scaffold, it was amidst the execrations and approval of millions of people -- a case of "finished sin."

Intelligence from America, reached me in England, that ran as follows: "There lived a young woman in Boston, unusually gifted and highly educated, cultured to the highest degree. She used the most charming English I ever heard. She had traveled through every civilized country of the world, and was as familiar with many foreign countries as most people are with their own state.

"She read in God's Word, 'The wages of sin is death.' She decided to prove those words untrue ... I was sitting on my porch in the city of Denver, Colorado, when a little boy rushed up and cried: 'Come over quick, there is a crazy woman at our house.' Hastening over, I found this same woman, insane with drugs, emaciated, unkempt, hollow-eyed, sunken low in sin. We got her into the city hospital. She escaped in her night-robe, and wandered to the home of a lady physician. She was then placed in a home and her true character became known ... She was again taken to the city hospital where she lay for days too weak to escape.

"She was now so wasted in form that she weighed only fifty-five pounds, while a year previous she had weighed one hundred and fifty pounds, and her physician told me that when he first knew her she had the most perfect form he ever saw. She lay for days in the hospital between an old lady, seventy years of age who had convulsions every thirty minutes, and an old Indian woman.

"Begging not to be allowed to die there, she appealed to the sympathy of some kind ladies of the Trinity Methodist church, and was removed to a home in North Denver. She died cursing, while from her lips there issued one vile obscene sentence after another, with not a friend to close her eyes. She was hurried to the potter's field, in a box costing \$1.50" -- It was finished sin!

IV. There is no human security against the ravages of the sin-principle. As we have just seen, all the refinements of culture . and noblest education and wealth and foreign travel .and social position afford no protection whatever from its insidious assaults. Its secret lust can be hidden in the noblest soul, and stir and excite, and spread and grow and develop, until the whole being is one mass of corruption and death. If there were no other than human defense from its ravages we might well despair of our race.

But, thank God, the omnipotent Christ can save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). The blood of Christ can cleanse from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7 and 9). The fire of the Holy Spirit can burn out the carnality and corruption of the sin-principle and make us pure and holy (Matt. 3:11; Mal. 3:2, 3; John 1:29; Rom. 6:22).

"Be ye holy [now at once] for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). Will you have deliverance, and have it now?

"Oh, that I was to lie on the fire that never is quenched a thousand thousand years to purchase the favor of God, and be reunited to him again! But it is a fruitless wish. Millions of millions of years will bring me no nearer to the end of my torments than one poor hour. Oh, eternity, eternity! forever and forever! Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell! " -- Sir Francis Newport's "Finished Sin."