

Matthew 18:5-14 (read vv.5-10) “A World of Temptation”

Intro. In our last message I shared with you about turning from sin, and humbly acknowledging your need to trust Christ as Savior. Now once you have done that, you need to live a sanctified life. In other words, you need to be holy and live as free from sin as possible. Now Jesus talks in these verses about how a holy life is threatened by temptation, and how to maintain a godly life.

Unlike many preachers today, conservative Bible-believing preachers still preach and teach against committing sin. And we usually think of sin as personally disobeying God by killing, stealing, lying, or some other such deed. But in this passage of Scripture we read of another type of sin which is very serious, and that is the sin of enticing or leading *others* to sin. It is wrong to steal, but it is a greater wrong to entice someone else to steal, especially a child or a new Christian. There are some drug pushers that do not use drugs themselves, but they entice others to use drugs. Well, they are greater sinners than the drug *users*. When you lead others to sin, you move from just being human, to being like the devil.

This morning I want you to be fully convinced of the seriousness of doing *anything* that would lead someone else to sin. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus Christ pronounces great judgment upon those who in any way, by act or by example, lead others to sin, especially children. So I want to share these verses of Scripture with you to help keep you from this great wrong. And if you have been guilty of this sin, I hope to lead you to repent of it and turn to Christ for forgiveness.

Now let’s look into our text together and find out how to avoid this serious problem. First of all:

I. RECOGNIZE THE CERTAINTY OF TEMPTATION

As long as you are living in this world, you are sure to face temptation. In v.7 Jesus said, “Woe *to the world* because of offenses! For offenses must come....” Jesus indicates that in this world you will face all kinds of temptations. I use that word, and yet why did Jesus warn of “offences” in this verse? Jesus is not referring to offending someone and hurting their feelings. The Greek word is *skandalon*. It literally refers to an enticing trap that is set for an animal. Not many of us are very familiar with trapping animals. We are more familiar with fishing. You entice fish with your bait, but when they are lured by the bait, and bite it, they find out there is a hook, and you hope thereby to catch them. So Jesus is referring to enticements and temptations, that cause people to stumble and fall into sin. The verb form of the same word is found in v.6, where it is translated “causes one ... to sin.”¹

So Jesus acknowledges that in this current evil age, there will always be many temptations and snares. He said, “...offenses must come.” Given the depravity of man and the environment of the world, sin is inevitable. Jesus teaches here that we cannot expect to avoid temptation altogether. In fact, someone said, “Opportunity may knock once, but temptation bangs on your front door your whole life.”² I’m afraid that our young generation faces more temptations and enticements to sin than any other generation of young people! Today, temptation comes right into your home through

¹ He had previously addressed this problem in the Sermon on the Mount (5:29-30; cf. 2 Cor. 11:29).

² Pulpit Helps, 4/04, p.18.

television, movies, video games and the Internet. Also, when people sin, they want others to join them and so they often tempt others to sin. And when we fall prey to these dangers, there will be many sorrows.

This means that we must always be watchful and on guard regarding temptation, for as we travel the pathway of life, we travel a dangerous path, full of stumbling-blocks, traps, and false guides. We can easily fall into sin.

Not only should we be careful of worldly sources of temptation, but Jesus also warns of something else we should avoid:

II. DON'T BECOME A SOURCE OF TEMPTATION

In v.7 He says, “Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” Jesus clearly warns that the world is certainly a source of temptation. This world will never try to lead you closer to God, but it will seek to lead you away from God. That’s because humanity has an undeniable inclination toward sin. Furthermore, Eph. 2:2 says that the world is under the influence of the devil. And 1 John 5:19 says that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” That is why the Bible warns against worldliness. The world is not godly. The world is full of evil, and full of temptation. That is why 1 John 2:15-16 says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world... For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”

Now here’s the point. Even though it is impossible to eradicate and to avoid all temptation, we should make sure we do not belong to the company of the tempters. Even though diseases will always be present, that doesn’t mean that we go ahead and help spread disease. In fact, we should do what we can to prevent the spread of disease. So you should be diligent not to become a source of temptation. It is one thing to yield to temptation in a moment of weakness, but it is far worse to tempt someone else to sin. There is always somebody who gives that first nudge to sin. Do you remember the first person who tried to get you to smoke a cigarette? Do you remember the first person who offered you an alcoholic drink or illegal drug?

There are all kinds of ways we can be a source of temptation. A minister parked his car in a no-parking zone in a large city because he was short of time and couldn’t find a space with a meter. Then he put a note under the windshield wiper that read: “I have circled the block 10 times. If I don’t park here, I’ll miss my appointment.” Then he quoted from the model prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses.” When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with this note, “I’ve circled this block for 10 years. If I don’t give you a ticket, I will lose my job.” Then he also quoted from the model prayer saying, “Lead us not into temptation.” [From the Internet].

I want to give a few examples of the ways people become sources of temptation:

A. Setting a Bad Example - I don’t know who started it, but the disciples had been arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom (v.1; Luke 9:46). They were manifesting worldly concepts of greatness. This atmosphere of carnality, selfishness, and ambition would tend to lead others down the same path. They were not only injuring themselves but becoming stumbling-blocks to others by their prideful ambition.

Even so, we can lead others into sin by our example. Parents have a special responsibility to avoid setting a bad example before our children. When a parent doesn’t attend church, what kind of example is that giving their children? By their example they are saying, “Church isn’t important.” Only about 10% of children who attend church without their parents continue attending by the time they are teenagers. If you use bad or hurtful language, your example will lead your children to do the same. I was at the driving range one time and heard a 9-10 year-old child blurting out profanity.

Where did he learn to talk like that? I suspect their parents, as well as others.

Likewise, Christians need to be careful about the example they are setting for other believers. Paul talks about this in Romans 14. The phrase in v.6, “one of these little ones who believe in Me” indicates that Jesus is especially thinking of young Christians as well as children. They are less discerning and more vulnerable. What kind of example do we set for these new believers in Christ? You may think it is OK to go to a questionable activity. But by your example you may be leading a weaker Christian to go too, and he may fall into sin. Our example gives a message that is loud and clear, much clearer than words. And a bad example can be a stumbling block for a new or young Christian.

B. Alcohol and Drug Pushers – The alcohol industry is concerned about one thing, and that is making money, and enticing people to drink. Too often our government looks the other way concerning all the harm that it does. Do you realize that if a new drug comes out, and only a very small percentage of people are adversely affected, they will yank that drug off the market? And yet, there is about 10% of the American population who just can’t handle alcohol. They will become alcoholics from the first time they get drunk. Then their lives will be destroyed, their families will be hurt. Yet, alcohol is legal. One of the leading causes of death and disability among teenagers is alcohol related accidents. And yet the alcohol industry seems to care less about these millions of people. They actively promote the consumption of their brew. Local businesses, filled with greed for more profit, will become pushers of beer, wine, and strong drink. Hab. 2:15 says, “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk...” It doesn’t matter how much the businessman makes by selling booze, it is better to give up some income than to lose your soul! (cf. Mt. 16:26). And a young man who gets his girlfriend drunk to take advantage of her is a devil. And that leads to another common class of tempters:

C. Sexual Seducers – For thousands of years many men have seduced women and even girls into committing sexual immorality. It’s amazing all the lies they will say to accomplish their goal. But today, it is no longer just the guys that are doing the seducing! I hear the young ladies have become very forward in this area.

And then there are many enticements in the form of pornography. The devil is having a heyday with the Internet, and the government does little or nothing about it. There is so much pornographic seduction these days. Many businesses are filled with greed and they will seek additional profit by selling soft and hard-core pornography. Ted Bundy, who sexually assaulted and brutally murdered at least 28 women, told Dr. Dobson before he was executed that pornography was a major factor in leading him to commit many sexual crimes and murder. By the way, he said he got his start in pornography because of the influence of a wicked grandfather who had his pornographic literature available for his grandson to see. Oh, there must be a special place in hell for those who publish and share pornography!³ Much of the music today will entice people into committing sexual sin. And I’m not just talking about rock and roll, hip hop, or rap music. Today’s country music has themes of immorality today. Hollywood is constantly producing more and more material that entices people into sexual sin. Television has created a whole generation of young people who believe that it is normal and acceptable to have sexual relations apart from marriage. In fact, a 2015 Gallup poll found that approval for sex between unmarried couples increased from 53% to 68% in the previous 14 years.

I must address here the problem of seduction through how we dress. Every year the problem seems to be getting worse, even in the Church. You see, one of the big battlegrounds for the

³ Focus on the Family *Citizen*, March 1989.

Christian man is in the area of sexual lust. Jesus said in Mt. 5:28, "...whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Based on the original language I can say that Christ is not talking about that first glance, but when a man continues to look with lustful, adulterous thoughts. Thousands of years ago Job shared about his own battle with lust when he said in 31:1, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" Now ladies, you do not understand how it is to be a man unless someone tells you. So I want you to understand that men are very visual in orientation. While women are attracted to the opposite sex largely through what they hear, men are attracted to the opposite sex primarily through what they see. While Christian men are responsible for avoiding such things as pornography and a continual, lustful look, Christian women are responsible for not becoming a source of temptation in the way you dress, and in other ways. I will be blunt. When you expose too much of your skin, especially around what are *supposed* to be your private parts, then you are becoming a source of temptation. And the tighter your clothes are, the more you are becoming a source of temptation to men. And when Christian men come to church their minds should be on God, and not be exposed to temptation. This is why 1 Tim. 2:9 says, "in like manner also, [I desire] that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation." That was spoken in a context of men praying and worshipping God (v.8). So ladies, it is one thing to dress nicely and make yourself look pretty. 1 Cor. 11:7 says, "woman is the glory of man." However, it's another thing to dress in such a way that you become a source of temptation even to men who want to be godly, especially in the church. The fashion designers of this world for the most part are not Christian, and they have no regard for biblical teaching. So you may have to work at finding modest clothing, but you can do it.⁴

So we have seen so far that until God intervenes, the world will always be full of temptation. As long as you live in the world, you will face temptation. We have also seen that we should do all we can to keep from becoming a source of temptation.

But let's suppose that you do not want to accept responsibility when others sin because of your actions or example. Or suppose you think it's no big deal to lead others into sin. Well I want you to listen to Jesus and:

III. CONSIDER THE SERIOUSNESS OF TEMPTATION

Many regard sin as insignificant. Many would even regard tempting others to sin as no big deal. But I'm going to show you from the words of Jesus why yielding to temptation and tempting others to sin are such serious matters. First of all:

A. Yielding to Temptation Will Bring God's Judgment - In vv. 8-9 Jesus warns of yielding to temptation and sin to the point that you never turn from sin, and you miss heaven. Twice He warns that if you do not give up your sin, you will be "be cast into the everlasting fire." Friend, there is no sin that is worth hell! And if you think you can miss hell and go to heaven apart from repentance of sin, you are sadly mistaken.

One time scientists came across an unusual sight in the Florida Everglades. A 13-foot python attempted to swallow a 6-foot alligator. However, it was evidently killed as the alligator struggled to escape the python's stomach. No doubt when the python ate the alligator, he thought he was gaining a very tempting meal. But it ended in his own destruction.⁵

⁴ Now if you are not sure if what you are wearing is modest enough, ask your father or husband, especially if they are Christians. There are better judges of what kind of dress is immodest.

⁵ Michael Shannon, *Preaching*, Jan.-Feb.'06, p.74. See www.deveoh.com/python-alligator-everglades.

We need to be wiser than the python, and recognize the destructive nature of temptation and sin.

Furthermore, in this text we see that:

B. Tempting Others Will Bring Greater Judgment – It's one thing to yield to temptation. But greater judgment awaits those who lead others to sin. In fact, in v.7 Jesus pronounces “woe” to those who entice others to sin. That term is a warning of coming judgment. It's the same kind of language spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament. In v.6 He indicates that this judgment is worse than a terrible, physical death known to the ancient world. The millstone of which Jesus speaks is the top-stone of an ancient method of grinding grain. As the stone is turned by a donkey,⁶ the grain is crushed. That stone was about a hundred pounds in weight. It is supposed that in Syria, as well as in Greece, what Jesus describes here was a mode of punishing criminals. The misery of having ruined someone's character by seducing it into evil is so intense, that a man would be better off being thrown into the sea with such a stone around his neck before he does so. Those who entice others to get drunk or get high on drugs are in danger of serious judgment from God. This is especially true in reference to leading children into sin, as Jesus says in v.6. No greater crime can be committed than to harm a child, especially one who believes in Christ.

So let those who exploit little children for the sake of lust and personal gain beware. Let all those who abuse children beware. Woe unto you, movie makers. Woe unto you, alcohol manufacturers. Woe to those who teach children to hate people of another race, religion or ethnic group. Woe unto you singers of sexually explicit or seductive songs. Woe to the Netflix executives who approved the recent movie that sexualizes 11-year-old girls. As someone has said, “We're going to need more millstones!” The judgment of God hangs heavy over the heads of many people. It's a serious thing to cause somebody else to sin.

Now something else to consider is this:

C. It Is *Very* Serious to Lead a Child or Youth into Sin – We must not for a moment suppose that the misleading of a child or youth is as insignificant as their apparent lack of worldly significance. In v.10 Jesus says, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones....” That word “despise” literally means, “to think down”, thus it means to think little of, to treat as unimportant. Friend, every child, and every precious young person is important to God! And no greater crime can be committed than to harm a child, especially one who believes in Christ. In these days of child neglect and child abuse, we need to take Christ's warning seriously. Yet the alcohol and pornography industries, the drug pusher, the hip/hop singer, and many other tempters could care less about the harm they are doing to our young people. All they care about is money and popularity. They say, “Ah, they're just kids. It won't hurt them. And if it does, they'll get over it.” Jesus warns against regarding children as insignificant.

Here's a married man with children and another woman is showing an interest in him. She flirts with him. He likes it. They look for opportunities to spend time together. Then he starts thinking about having an affair. Then he leaves his wife and children. Oh, never mind about the children. They'll get over it, he says. Listen, we should not regard children as insignificant, for they are not insignificant to God. Children are important to God and they should be important to us. In v.5 Jesus said, “Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.” You should receive a child like you would Jesus! Furthermore, God has assigned angels to look out for them. Jesus says in the last of v.10, “for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” Here our Lord casts a fascinating flash of light on the mysteries of the

⁶ In the Greek it is literally “millstone of a donkey.”

world beyond our natural sight. Someone important like the President has his secret service agents, but the children have angels watching over them! And the angels are more knowledgeable and powerful than any human agent. These children may be dressed in rags, but they are attended like princes; therefore, treat them as such. But too often adults put themselves and their profits and their careers and their own pleasures over the children. Children in this country are treated like disposable objects! That's especially true of aborted babies. God help us! And woe to those who get the young hooked on drugs or ruin their impressionable minds with Satanic philosophies. Their angels make personal reports to God the Father in Heaven about all such crimes. You will answer for it some day.

And then in vv.12-14 Jesus illustrates the fact that every child is important to God, and needs to be delivered from sin. There He gives the parable of the lost sheep. He says, "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." The least of them is too precious to God to be allowed to wander away and be lost. God Himself will seek the lost sheep because of His love and concern. God cares when a child is hurting. God cares when a youth has lost his way. In fact, it is not God's will that *any* should perish (cf. I Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Brethren, since God is so concerned about the spiritual welfare of people, shouldn't we be more concerned than we are? Shouldn't we do all we can to avoid doing anything that will bring physical or spiritual harm to a child? Shouldn't we do more to bring children and young people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? The church has a responsibility to seek those who are lost in trespasses and sins; it also has a responsibility to seek out and restore those who are lost to its *fellowship*. There should be as much rejoicing in the local church over the restoration of a backslider as there is over the reception of a new believer.

Now since yielding to temptation, or becoming a source of temptation is so serious, let us:

IV. DEAL DECISIVELY WITH THE SOURCES OF TEMPTATION

Jesus does not suggest leaving the world, going off to some isolated monastery. Rather, He says that we are to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world (5:13-14). We can't fulfill that role if we isolate ourselves. So what are we to do? Well, when possible, eliminate the sources of temptation. In vv.8-9 he gives a dramatic illustration of what He is talking about. He says, "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." Jesus had already said something similar in the Sermon on the Mount (5:29-30). Jesus may be using hyperbole here. That is a figure of speech that is an obvious exaggeration for the purpose of attracting attention. But these words of Jesus are not necessarily a hyperbole. Rather, His words may be more of an illustration. If a doctor reports to you that you have cancer, and part of your body must be cut out into order to save your life, what will you do? Most likely you will agree to have the operation. Now if you are willing to go through radical surgery to save your physical life, then you should be willing to make sacrifices to save your spiritual wellbeing. After all, your body is temporal, but your spirit is eternal. So I believe our Lord is teaching us to remove or sacrifice any known temptations to sin that we have control over. You can't pamper sin. You can't play with sin.

What does this mean? If TV is too great of a temptation to you and your children, unplug it and get rid of it! If your computer is a source of temptation, then either get an Internet filter, or get

rid of it! If you have a problem with greed and covetousness, then get rid of that credit card. If you have a problem with alcohol, then you need to stay away from it completely. You need to go through your music collection and get rid of anything that is contrary to godliness. When I was about 17 years old, I came back from youth camp and destroyed some of the music I was listening to. It is better to sacrifice material things than to bring upon yourself spiritual damage. If there is a friendship that is leading you in the paths of sin, Jesus would say, “Cut off that friendship.” In fact, I’ve known of Christian young people who have given up a relationship with a girlfriend or boyfriend because they knew they were a constant source of temptation.

Another way to carry out the spirit of what Jesus is teaching is to do what is stated elsewhere: Die to sin. We must put to death our sinful passions. Rom. 8:13 says, “If we live according to the flesh, we shall die. If we through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body, we shall live.” You should keep in mind the fact that the appeal to deal decisively with temptation and sin is spoken in a context of repentance (v.3). So you should not play around with temptation! This requires self-discipline but if you will listen to these words of Jesus and act on them, you will save yourself from a mess of trouble.

Conclusion: I want you to examine your life to see if there is anything that is causing someone else to stumble or be led astray. What about your actions, your language, your activities? Mom, dad, grandparent, are you leading your children or grandchildren to Jesus or away from Jesus? Are we going to deal with the problem of temptation or even continue to be part of the problem? I believe we need to do business with God and deal decisively with temptation, and especially avoid being a source of temptation to others.

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 3, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971; vv.1-9 only); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973; vv.1-9 only); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961 reprint); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; also has sermon on v.8 v. 12); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 244-245; Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on Mt. 18:1-14); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); vv.5-10 only. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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