

Human Sexuality: A Biblical Perspective

First Presbyterian Church

Jackson, MS

First Pres Forum
Rev. Dr. David Strain
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STATEMENT 6: TEMPTATION

We affirm that Scripture speaks of temptation in different ways. There are some temptations God gives us in the form of morally neutral trials, and other temptations God never gives us because they arise from within as morally illicit desires

(James 1:2, 13-14).

STATEMENT 6: TEMPTATION

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” (James 1:2)

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” (James 1:13-14)

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When temptations come from without, the temptation itself is not sin, unless we enter into the temptation. But when the temptation arises from within, it is our own act and is rightly called sin.

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John Owen explains: “Now, what is it to be tempted? It is to have that proposed to man’s consideration which, if he close, it is evil, it is sin unto him. This is sin’s trade: epithumei—‘it lusts.’ It is raising up in the heart, and proposing unto the mind and affections, that which is evil; trying, as it were, whether the soul will close with its suggestions, or how far it will carry them on, though it does not wholly prevail. Now, when such a temptation comes from without, it is unto the soul an indifferent thing, neither good nor evil, unless it be consented unto; but the very proposal from within, it being the soul’s own act, it is sin.” “Indwelling Sin,” in John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, eds. Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 276.

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Nevertheless, there is an important degree of moral difference between temptation to sin and giving in to sin, even when the temptation is itself an expressing of indwelling sin.

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WSC 83Q: “Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?”

WSC 83A: “Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.”

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While our goal is the weakening and lessening of internal temptations to sin, Christians should feel their greatest responsibility not for the fact that such temptations occur but for thoroughly and immediately fleeing and resisting the temptations when they arise.

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The **Westminster Confession of Faith 13.2** says, “This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.”

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We can avoid “entering into” temptation by refusing to internally ponder and entertain the proposal and desire to actual sin.

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Without some distinction between (1) the illicit temptations that arise in us due to original sin and (2) the willful giving over to actual sin, Christians will be too discouraged to “make every effort” at growth in godliness and will feel like failures in their necessary efforts to be holy as God is holy (2 Peter 1:5-7; 1 Peter 1:14-16).

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“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7)

STATEMENT 6: TEMPTATION

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

(1 Peter 1:14-16)

STATEMENT 6: TEMPTATION

God is pleased with our sincere obedience, even though it may be accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections (WCF 16.6).

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“Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprovable in God’s sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.” (WCF 16.6)

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