

# Things Which Limit Our Ministry

by J. Oswald Sanders

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the right priorities, avoiding limiting God through minimum expectations, and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance in ministry.*

**Duration:** 59:56

**Scripture:** Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:18, Colossians 3:16

**Topics:** "Ministry"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the corrupt nature of the world we live in and the difficulty of maintaining purity. He highlights a verse that speaks of God's power to deliver us from temptation and provide a way to escape. The preacher shares a personal story of a young man who faced a powerful temptation but was able to resist by abiding in Christ and listening to his master's voice. The sermon also touches on the importance of knowing God's voice and the need to protect oneself against sin. The passage in Galatians 5:13 is referenced, reminding believers to use their freedom to serve one another in love.

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## Transcript

I've been asked this morning to speak about how to protect oneself against sin, and also to speak about some things that disqualify. I'd like you to turn with me to Galatians chapter 5, verse 13. For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk in the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh, for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain, immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another. I'll refer to this passage a little later, but may I first say just a few things that tend to disqualify or to limit the effectiveness of our ministry for God.

Now there's none of us who hasn't a genuine desire to be the very best we can be for God. And if there are certain limiting factors, then we will set ourselves to eliminate those. The first is to have the wrong priorities.

And in 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 16, when Paul was counseling young Timothy as he was about to undertake a new assignment, the church at Ephesus, a church that had experienced a galaxy of talent in its previous pastors. And this young man has got the awesome responsibility of going and taking up that work. And Paul is counseling him.

And notice what he says in verse 16. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching or to your ministry. The most important factor in the ministry is the minister.

I think if I said no more than that, I've made my point. Paul said to Timothy, take heed to yourself and then to your ministry. It's the yourself that's the important factor.

Watch your priorities, your first duty is to God. Your second duty is not to your ministry. The second duty is to yourself and the third to those to whom you minister.

And if you reverse that order, you are limiting your ministry. Paul is here drawing a very sharp line between public and private life. I am no more than I am before God.

And therefore it's tremendously important that I attend to the needs of my own soul. And then after that, the ministry. Timothy, he says, keep this order correct.

Take heed to yourself and to your ministry. And you've been brought up in the Navigator's Circle. If you don't know how to look after yourself and look after your soul, well, I wonder what other people who've not been so privileged have to do.

You know what to do. Well, the thing is to do it. A second limiting factor is that we can limit God through minimum expectations.

They limited the Holy One of Israel, the scripture says. And we can limit God by our minimum expectations. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

You can have anything else you like. You can have your head stuffed with texts. You can know the Bible from beginning to end.

But without faith, it is impossible to please God. So the Lord places faith very high in its scale of importance. Without faith, impossible.

Are my expectations worthy of God? Or am I expecting only the minimum from God? There is no such thing as faith which doesn't involve a risk. And every time you exercise true faith, you're taking a risk. If

there's no risk, you don't need faith.

You can just walk by sight. And it's good to ask ourselves every now and again, when did I last take a real risk on God? I think sometimes you'll find that it's a while since you took some step like that. Well, maybe God will give you a chance to do it very soon.

Respond to it. I'm always moved by William Carey and his great motto, expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. Are we expecting great things or merely getting by with the minimum? On one occasion, God was speaking to William Carey again.

And he said something like this, my earliest vision was to produce the Bible in Bengali. But now God seemed to be saying, translate the Bible into all the tongues of India. And you will know probably that when William Carey died, he had translated the Bible or portions of scripture into 34 different languages.

His Nottingham Sermon, that was the sermon that he gave when he launched out into missionary work, his Nottingham Sermon came to him. Thou shalt see greater things than these. Enlarge thy tent.

Stretch forth thy curtains. Lengthen thy cords. Strengthen thy states.

Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God. Dare a bolder program.

Dwell in an ampler world. Launch out into the deep. God is able to do above all our thinking.

The voice rang through him like a trumpet. The vision was blinding. My, there's some challenge, isn't there? Am I expecting great things from God? Am I, 1982, going to attempt great things for God? I'm not saying are you going to attempt great things.

That could be purely carnal ambition. But are you going to attempt great things for God? Are you going to dwell in an ampler world, or are you just going to remain in the one little world? Are you going to dare something, dare a bolder program? Are you going to launch out into the deep or paddle round in the shallows? These are the options. And one of the limiting factors in our work is a lack of vision.

Limiting God through minimum expectations. Let your expectations be large. A third limitation is when we are lukewarm in enthusiasm.

I would that thou were cold or hot, one or the other. When you really think that through, it's a tremendously challenging. God said, I'd sooner you were stone cold than lukewarm.

Lukewarmness nauseated him. Well, these things are speaking to my heart, not only to yours. It's the enthusiastic leader who produces enthusiastic disciples.

The lukewarm leader will produce lukewarm disciples. There's no question about it. Another limitation factor is when we have immature reactions to the divine disciplines.

When God is dealing with us and we react in an immature and not in a mature way. And one of the things that's very testing is our reactions when these divine disciplines come to us through human leaders. In the course of my missionary work, I had to do a good deal of in administrative work and in personnel work.

You know, one of the most difficult things is to be the instrument of God in some discipline, in some decision that affects other people. And it's the way in which we react to those disciplines, even when they

come through a human channel, through the human leadership of navigators. That's sometimes more difficult to accept than if it came direct from God.

But the way in which we react is the important thing. Not in the decision, not whether the decision is right or wrong. That's out of our hands.

How do I react? Do I react in a mature way or do I react in an immature way? The way in which I react is going to affect my ministry. If I receive it in a mature way, it means that my own life will be enriched. And if the decision is wrong, and leaders do make wrong decisions, believe it or not, but if they do, God will overrule.

We can leave it in his hands. We needn't worry about it. Leave it in the Lord's hands and let him work out the implications.

And you'll find as a result, when you receive these disciplines, of the Lord, that instead of impoverishing you, it enriches your ministry. You've made some progress and God can use you in a new area. Another limiting factor is when we are too greatly dependent on methods and techniques.

When there is a rigidity, a rigid being tied to a technique or a method that limits the movement of the Holy Spirit. I think this is something that is relevant to your work. We've got our own techniques, there's an experience, there's a training of others, but you know, it takes the liberty of the Holy Spirit to deal with certain situations.

There are certain things that you can't anticipate. And if you think it must go according to a certain rule, then the Holy Spirit is likely to break right across that. So don't be too tied, too rigidly tied to methods and techniques.

Be prepared for the Holy Spirit to break through in some other direction. And then one last thing, there are so many things, I'm just dealing with a few. One last thing is this.

It is a limiting factor when we are reluctant to grasp the nettle and deal courageously with problems and decisions. It's very easy to postpone and procrastinate instead of dealing with the problem promptly and firmly, and yet kindly. Don't be reluctant to grasp the nettle.

The sooner the problem is dealt with, the easier it is to do and the more likely the result will be satisfactory. Now let us come to my main subject, how to protect oneself from sin. Sin is a continuing problem.

We never get beyond the possibility of sinning. We have experienced the joy of forgiveness. We know the wonder of having our guilt removed so that there is nothing that is between us and God.

There is naught that stands between my Lord and me, for my sins are buried deep in love's great sea. That's dealt with firmly, finally, forever. When our Lord died on the cross, all my sins were still in the future, and all my sins were laid upon him.

He bore them on the tree. So that as far as my relationship with God is concerned, the question of sin is finally dealt with. But yet sin remains a problem.

It's not God's intention that we sin. In 1 John 2.1, he said, My little children, I write unto you that ye sin not. There's God's plan, God's desire.

But John's realistic. He doesn't stop there. He said, And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.

He recognizes the possibility of sin. And sometimes we are overtaken by sin. Who of us can say that we have not sinned since our conversion? And when you come to think of what sin is, is it not true that as the years go by, our conception of sin widens, deepens, and we become more conscious of sin of which we were quite unconscious earlier? One of the things that used to stagger me as a young Christian was to read some of the books of the great men of God and read their confessions of sin.

And I used to think, well, two possibilities. Either these were very wicked men, or I'm a very shallow Christian. Well, it was the latter, of course.

Here was these men, as they walked with God, they saw sin to be a much greater thing. And I think we'll find that too as we go along, that God will give us a deepening consciousness of sin. There's a poem that I often quote in this connection.

It's by John Newton. I ask the Lord that I might grow in faith and love and every grace, might more of his salvation know and seek more earnestly his face. T'was he who taught me thus to pray, and he I trust has answered prayer, but it has been in such a way as almost drove me to despair.

I thought that in some favored hour at once he'd answer my request and by his love's constraining power subdue my sins and give me rest. Instead of that, he made me feel the hidden evils of my heart and bad the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part. Nay more, with his own hand he seemed intent to aggravate my world, crossed all the fair designs I schemed, blasted my gourds and laid me low.

Lord, why is this? I trembling cried. Will thou pursue thy worm to death? This is the way the Lord replied. I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ from self and sin to set thee free and cross thy schemes of earthly joy that thou mightst find all in me. You know, when you have a growing sense of sin, it doesn't mean you're going backwards. It probably means you're making progress because you're beginning to see things increasingly from God's viewpoint.

And so even though our sin has been dealt with, yet God is still revealing to us the sinfulness of sin. Have you never sometimes been shocked at the revival of some old sin that you thought was settled forever? Who hasn't had that experience? Have you never experienced sinful thoughts coming into your mind in your holiest moments? Yes, it's there, it's reality. And yet, what we know is only the surface.

I wonder what lies, what hidden lies hidden in the subconscious mind. Remember what Jesus said, fall from within, from the subconscious. There comes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and you go on with that list.

My, sin's no easy problem, is it? We sing the hymn prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. Well, there's a tendency. What do you do about it? Well, one of the things is what is suggested in that passage in Galatians that we read together.

By walking in the Spirit. Walk in the Spirit. Verse 16, but I say walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

And then verse 25, if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Now this is Paul's prescription. If you want not to gratify the desires of the flesh, Paul says the answer is you walk by the Spirit.

And there are two different words in 16 and 25. The word in verse 16 means to walk around, to walk about in the ordinary round of daily actions. Paul says you're to walk in love, you're to walk in the truth, and so on.

Your daily life is to be lived out in an atmosphere of love. It's to be characterized by truth. Well, that's the ordinary word that is used here.

And what he's saying is that our ordinary life is to be lived in awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. You could render it this way, through the Spirit, habitually order your lifestyle and you will in no way execute the passionate desires of the flesh. That means that we are to regulate our lives by the Holy Spirit.

He is the one who is to control the whole of our personal lives in every aspect. Walk by the Spirit. The second word in verse 25 has got a different significance.

It doesn't mean mere locomotion. It means a measured walk. It means to march in file, to march in step.

And so that's the significance of the second word. It's referring to concerted action. It's referring to teamwork.

Now you'll do certain things in your ministry as an individual, but you also have your relationship as a team. The first word is dealing with that, the first part. The second word is dealing with your joint action.

And the word there is let us step out by the Spirit when we're engaged in our teamwork, in our concerted action. Let us step out by the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit, when we're engaged in concerted action, let him be the one who controls, the one whose word of command is final as you march.

Now you get a very interesting example of this in Acts chapter 16, when Paul and his companions were set out on a concerted action, and they wanted to go into Bithynia. But they were walking by the Spirit. They were sensitive, their hearts were open, and the Spirit said no.

And so immediately they stopped. They thought, well, if it's not Bithynia, well, let us go to Micea. Once again, the Spirit forbade them, and they stopped.

So now what do they do next? They, well, they take the other option, and they go to Troas. And they conferred together and sought the mind of the Spirit. Well, you've deflected us here, you've deflected us from there.

Here we are at Troas now, and there's a sea in front of us. What do we do now? And as they conferred and waited on God, the Holy Spirit brought them to joint conviction. And we assuredly gathered that the Lord wanted us to go forward.

Well, there's an example of the way in which they walked by the Spirit in team action. It's the present subjunctive, and it carries the idea of let us go on walking by the Spirit. This is the, to be the habit of life.

I'm, my life, my personal life, under control of the Spirit, I walk by the Spirit in my ordinary daily life. And here in our joint action, as we move together to achieve the desired purpose, the divine purpose, we

deliberately walk along the line that the Holy Spirit directs, heeding his checks. The Lord sometimes surprises us by the way he checks us.

When I was a young fellow, I volunteered to go to the mission field. And I wanted to go to Bolivia. The founder of the Andes Evangelical Mission lived near my home, and my father was the representative, honorary representative of that mission in the area.

And I wanted to go to Bolivia. And I went into training, but I'd only been in training for a very short time when family affairs intervened, and I had to pull out, go back to my legal work again. And I was offended with the Lord.

You know, I doing, he commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel, and I'd made sacrifices to do it, and then he goes and shuts the door. I didn't discern in that for quite a while that it was the Holy Spirit doing something else, deflecting my life in another direction. And as I look back now and see all that God had in coming years, I say, how stupid when the Holy Spirit is deflecting me in another direction, how stupid to rebel against it and to resent it.

And yet that's what we sometimes do to our own loss. So now, when you put these two words together, you get a double picture. The Holy Spirit is the director of our personal lives in their actions and decisions, and he's also the one who disciplines and orders us as we engage in concerted action, in company with others.

And when we fail, when we make mistakes, when our relationships break down, when we find ourselves sinning, there are two possibilities. One is that we haven't asked the guidance of the Spirit, or we haven't followed one or the other. And sometimes we just plunge ahead without consciously seeking the guidance of the Spirit.

You notice that the promise here is not that if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not feel the desires of the flesh. It doesn't say that. It says you're not fulfilled.

The desires can be very strong. But here is the, Paul's recipe, walk in the Spirit. And you'll find that his gracious ministry has a counteracting effect, and you will not fulfill.

The Holy Spirit is the powerful unseen ally who is there and available all the time. I remember reading the book by Jack London called *White Fang*. And *White Fang* was the story of a half-wolf, half-dog.

And one day he took him with him to a farm, and *White Fang* got into the hen coop. And there were feathers and dead hens all around. And the farmer was very angry, of course, and he spoke to the trainer about it.

And the trainer says, you let me take *White Fang*, and I'll go into the coop with him, and I'll guarantee there will not be one of those hens affected. So he put *White Fang* in the coop, and he just stayed outside. And the dog lay down at first, and then he saw the dog looking around.

And he could see him getting up and getting ready just to spring on a hen. And he just quietly called to him. And when he heard his master's voice, he just sat down again and waited a while.

And then he could see the rising desire for blood. And once again, he just called to him. And when he heard his master's voice, then he lay down.

This happened a number of times, until at last the dog just slumped and put his head in his paws and lay there for a while. And after a while, he just got up and jumped out of the coop, no more trouble. What happened? His master's voice.

He was controlled by the one who was training him. And I believe that that is a good illustration of, as we walk by the Spirit, how he can subdue these passionate desires of the flesh. How do we know his voice? How does a baby know its mother's voice? Because it is in constant communion with its mother.

It's there on its mother's breast. It knows its mother's voice. My sheep know my voice, Jesus said.

They follow me. They respond. Another way in which we can protect ourselves from sin, by abiding in Christ.

In 1st John 3 and 6, it says, no one who abides in him sins. Or the New International Version says, no one who lives in him keeps on sinning. Well, there's one of the prescriptions for keeping ourselves from sin.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? It means simply keeping in unbroken contact with Christ, in a union of love. That's all it is. Just maintaining unbroken contact with Christ, in a union of intimate love.

Abide in me and I in you. It's a reciprocal thing. As I abide in Christ, he abides in me.

And while I am abiding in Christ, I am not sinning. Potential for sin there? Yes, but while I'm abiding in Christ, I am not sinning. If I have to sin, I cease abiding.

The contact is broken. It doesn't mean that my life in Christ is broken, but my fellowship with Christ is broken, and then sin has its opportunity. When you believed in the Lord, we were united to him by a living, vital union, just as real as that of the branch with the vine.

My life and his flow together. His life flows into me. And Jesus said, now, stay there.

You are in this privileged position. You are united with me. My life is your life.

You have been made a partaker of the divine nature. Don't allow anything to come in to disturb that union. Abide in me and I in you.

Don't allow anything to break it. Keep constantly depending upon me. Cling to me.

Those are the thoughts involved in it. No one who keeps on abiding in him keeps on sinning. So long as I am maintaining that union with Christ, then I am kept from sin.

The possibility is there, but sin no longer becomes a cherished thing. I hate sin with all my heart and with all my mind. The fact that Christ is living in me and I am abiding in him means that to me, sin becomes hateful and abhorrent.

What was the secret of our Lord's life? He constantly abode in fellowship with his Father. He took pains to maintain communion. He arose a great while before day.

When he came to a new town, he didn't ask for the plushiest hotel. He asked, what is the shortest way to the mountain? Where is a place where I can get alone with my Father? And there every day he received his orders for the day. He got his time schedule from the Father.

That was why he knew when his hour was come and when it wasn't come. His life was without strain because he maintained constant communion. He abode in the Father.

And he says, this can be the of your life. If he had to withdraw to the secret place to find out his Father's will and to maintain communion, then we do the same thing. And we have to take steps to do it.

It doesn't just happen. Constant abiding is not something that just happens. It's something that is a matter of our conscious choice and we see that we maintain it.

And if we become conscious that there is something between and immediately we'll confess it. That's why quick confession is so important. Now we can't abide in Christ.

You notice the two things he links. If you abide in me and my word abide in you, there's the condition of answered prayer. His word has to abide in us.

You've noticed no doubt that in Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16, you have two different statements, but the things which flow from those two things are the same. In Ephesians 5:18, it says, be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. Then it goes on, speaking to yourselves psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things that will be submitted one to another.

You go to Colossians 3:16, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. And you sing and so on with grace in your heart. And exactly the same results follow, letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

So you have these two things. How am I to remain filled with the Spirit? By letting the word of Christ dwell in me richly, that's why. When the word of Christ is dwelling in me richly, the Holy Spirit is able to take that word.

He's able to control my life through that word. Jesus says the same thing. He says, abide in me and I in you.

Here is the mutual abiding. Let if you abide in me and my word abide in you rather. There you have the two things going together.

And so it's so tremendously important, as you stress rightly in your Navigator teaching, that these two things go together. But the last thing I want to speak about this morning is we keep ourselves from sin by a correct attitude toward temptation. Temptation is a universal ingredient of life.

There are no exemptions. There's nobody who escaped it. Our Lord didn't escape temptation.

It reaches us along three main avenues. The avenue of appetite, the desire to enjoy things. It comes to us through avarice, the desire to get things.

It comes to us through ambition, the desire to be somebody. And if you analyze sin, you'll find that practically every sin will come into one of these three, appetite, avarice, or ambition. You go back to Genesis and you find those three things are there.

You go to the temptation in the desert, and you find that those were the three ingredients in the temptation of our Lord. And they are the three avenues along which temptation comes to us. Both God and Satan are involved in temptation.

There are two parallel Greek and Hebrew words for temptation, and they convey the idea either to test. For example, as you would test gold, you would subject it to heat and so on, to test its genuineness. And so temptation can be a test of character.

Or it can mean to tempt, to solicit to evil. God tests us. What for? In order to purify our character, in order to show the real gold.

The devil tempts. He solicits to evil. He probes for the weak spot.

That's all temptation is. He goes for the weak spot. And Satan is so expert that he knows the weak spot.

Now you know the weak spot too, don't you? You know where he probes. You know where he so often gets you. That's what temptation is about.

Satan seduces us into sin. God tests us to mature character and to establish us in holiness. Now the classic text on temptation is, of course, 1 Corinthians 10, 13.

No temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful. Will not suffer you to be tested above that you are able, but will with the test also provide the way to escape that you may be able to bear it. Now there are four things in that text.

The first one is he says God is faithful. That's the first one. God is faithful.

He'll keep his word. He won't abandon you in the time of temptation. If you're trusting him, he's faithful.

So there's the character of God is brought before us in his faithfulness. And then God is considerate. He won't suffer you to be tested beyond your ability to bear it.

Now that's comforting, isn't it? So it means that no matter what test or temptation comes into your life, here is the assurance that you can rise above it. He will not suffer you to be tested above that you are able. That means that no matter how devastating, no matter how difficult the test comes in your life, here is the divine assurance that you can surmount it.

The third thing, God is impartial. He's got no favorites. It's common to man.

There's nobody that's exempt. I know different temptations come to different people, but there's no temptations that's not common to man. I remember as a young fellow, where tremendous discovery it was, I thought that certain temptations were peculiar to me, and I just got to discover others had them too.

Well, it shouldn't have comforted me, but it did. Here are these weaknesses that are common to human nature. And you know, one of the things in our counseling and so on should be that we should be unshockable.

Shocked when it's ourselves, but unshockable when it's other people. Because these temptations are all possible. There's no temptation that's taken you, but such is common to man.

And you see, why is this? Because of the weakness of our human nature and because of the outward corruption of society. We are living in a horribly corrupt world. It's desperately hard for people to be pure today.

There it is, and the scripture makes it clear. The fourth thing about this verse is, it says that God is powerful. He's able to deliver us.

With every temptation, he provides a way to escape that you may be able to bear. There is the locked door of temptation. Alongside it's a key.

If you only take it down, it's there. With every temptation, there is an appropriate way to escape that you may be able to bear. When I was a young fellow, my father said to me one day, he said, boy, don't be surprised if when you get older God submits you to great trials.

And he said, well, if he does, remember that this is his vote of confidence in you. He is saying, there is no test taken you, but such is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability to bear it.

And so if he sends a great test, he is expressing his confidence that you will be able to bear it and rise above it. I found that a helpful thought. There is help promised.

It's tailored to every need. Every defeat is avoidable if I search for the key and take it. For some temptations, the key is walk in the spirit and you will not fulfill the passionate desires of the flesh.

I think the story of Joseph is a very vivid illustration of the way in which we can protect ourselves from sin. You see, it isn't always God that has got to do the protecting. There are certain things that Joseph did.

One of the things that he did that protect himself from temptation was he took to his heels. God didn't run away for him. He did the running away.

And there are certain things that we need to do. When you think of this picture, here was Joseph at 27 years old in the full vitality of his youth. And for 13 years, he'd been going through the mill.

He'd been, every step had been down step. It wasn't 13 years getting on for him. But he'd been having a terrible time.

He was a manly young man, a handsome, handsome appearance. And suddenly he was faced with the most volcanic temptation of life and came on him suddenly, unexpectedly. And everything around it seems to have been so arranged that it was desperately easy to yield and desperately difficult to resist.

It seemed as though the whole stage had been set. It was totally unexpected. Here he was engaged in his ordinary daily task.

He was responsible for the house. He goes into the house to do his ordinary job. Who would ever have dreamed that a slave would be tempted by his master's wife? Totally unexpected quarter.

What a man he was. How did he maintain his spiritual integrity? If there had been New Testament language, I'd have said he did it by abiding in Christ and by walking in the Spirit. That's how he did it.

The Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament too, you know, as well as in the New. He was there to help Joseph. But Joseph had a heavy price to pay for his purity.

Why didn't he suffer for it? And in the end, as I said, the only way he could escape from the flames of passion which I have no doubt rose up in his own heart, the only way in which he could do it was by taking

to his heels. And sometimes that's the only way of victory. You get out of the zone of temptation and go for your life.

What were the factors in victory in Joseph's case? What were the things on his part that were involved? First of all, a primary loyalty to God. He was loyal to his master. He said, my master has entrusted me with everything in his hand except you.

How could I sin against my master? Well, that was good for him to be loyal to his master, but his primary loyalty was to God. How can I sin against God? God was the great reality to him. His loyalty to God exceeded even his loyalty to his master.

Another thing was Joseph was shocked by sin. The women of Egypt were very loose women. He lived in an impure atmosphere and yet he maintained his integrity and his purity in such a way that the sin shocked him.

How could I do it? This is sinning against God. And then I think there was on his part a habitual preparedness. He didn't open his mind to it.

He didn't entertain the sin, obviously. The moment it came, he rejected it because it had found no previous hospitality in his mind. His mind wasn't conditioned to failure.

He was motivated by principle, not by expediency. If he had obeyed expediency, wouldn't it have been to his own advantage to stand well in the eyes of his mistress? When you come to think of David in comparison with Joseph, the way in which David failed to protect himself against sin, what were the elements in his case? David was weak through previous indulgence. God had said to him, don't multiply wives.

David multiplied wives. He was not walking in the path of obedience and he was weak through previous indulgence. It was a time of unbounded prosperity and success.

And you know, it's true with us too that at the time when we are really succeeding, temptations become more subtle. It's more difficult to maintain a close walk with God when things are going swimmingly than it is when you're really pressed down to the boards. Aye, when things are difficult, we're very conscious of the Lord's need of him and we're dependent on him.

But when things are going swimmingly, we don't seem to be so needy. And this was true with David. It was a time of his height of prosperity.

It was a time of indolence and sloth. It's all right to have a nap after lunch, but his siesta was gone on to late afternoon. Well, we are always more open to sin when we are indolent or lazy.

David's fall was that he was not moving in the direction of duty. Joseph's temptation came to him in the course of duty. He had to do these things.

He had to go into the house. He was a minister. But the scripture says that the time when David sinned was at the time when kings lead their armies out.

And instead of leading his army, David was slothfully enjoying an unduly prolonged siesta. And that conditioned him for what happened. And it wasn't the first look.

It was the repeated lustful look that caused David to fall. So you see, between these two men, there was a world of difference. The one man had protected himself against that sin.

The other man was conditioned to failure. And what a terrible lesson that teaches us. It's a psychological fact that in the battle between the imagination and the will, the imagination always wins.

The imagination has to be kept pure. There are two or three lessons that emerge from this. The first is that desire in itself is not sinful.

You know, in the world of today, when we are constantly surrounded by the suggestions of sex and so on, it's very easy unconsciously to be affected by it. I was talking with one young man. One country came to me, and he acknowledges that he and the wife of another fellow, a missionary, they'd been attracted to each other.

They were working together at the same place, and nothing immoral had happened, but they were very much drawn to each other, and he was in great distress about it, and what was he to do, and so on. You know, it's quite possible, even in Christian circles, for someone who's perhaps they're not completely satisfied in their marriage to be attracted by somebody else. Well, I spoke to the girl concerned too, and they put it right.

But she said to me, you know, my mother said to me, don't think that because you're married that that necessarily means that you won't be attracted by another man. You know, that's something that's very possible, something that we need to be alert about. And it's, if we find our mind going in that direction, it's something that needs, this is something we need to do to keep ourselves from saying, immediately nip that thing in the bud, and see that it doesn't go any further.

Don't allow it any hospitality in the mind, otherwise it might lead to something that's not desirable. When our Lord was in the desert, and he was tempted along those three lines in which temptation comes to us, his only weapon was the Word of God. A mind stored with the Word of God, walking in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit was able, out of the stored scripture in the mind, to select three verses which no one normally would have selected. Three verses from Deuteronomy, the book which is more attacked by destructive critics than any other book in the Bible. And the Holy Spirit takes those three verses, and as each temptation comes, he put into the mind of the Lord the appropriate answer that silenced the adversary.

Here's a good plug for your storing your mind with scripture. It is your one weapon that is infallible. And as you face temptation, there should be the immediate turning to the Spirit of God, trusting him to bring to your mind that appropriate word that carries with it the power and the authority of God.

And it's that that defused the devil's temptation in the case of our Lord. And you know the verses, you know the one in Psalm 119, how can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. Colossians 3, 16, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Philippians 4, 8, whatever is true, noble, pure, right, lovely, admirable, if anything is excellent and praiseworthy, think on these things. And thinking is an act of the will. It's something that you do.

Your mind can't think of two things at the same time. You can't think of the impure and the pure at the same time. You can't think of the lovely and the unlovely at the same time.

And so here is one of the things which Paul says will help us keep ourselves from sin. Whatsoever is pure, lovely, good report, think on these things. And when you're thinking on that, automatically you're turning away from the other.

There is a choice involved. You will think of one or the other. Now which do I choose? My choice is my will is on the side of that which is pure, lovely, excellent, praiseworthy, and so on.

Well now there are some of the scriptural ways in which we can keep ourselves from sin. And I'm sure that one of the factors that is of greatest importance is that the Holy Spirit has been given for the express purpose of enabling us to live a holy life. That means not sinning.

Let us trust him to the very limit. Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. Abide, he that abides, keeps on abiding in him, will not keep on sinning.

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