



BARK OR BITE?

I admit it, I write in my Bible. I make marks and notes along the margins and underline words and phrases. Sometimes I'm no longer sure what it was that made such an impression on me at the time. I recently wrote "Your flesh can only bark at you; it has no bite." In other words, it's not the temptation that hurts us; it's our choice regarding what to do with that temptation that can hurt us. In a sermon I just heard, we were challenged to think about the consequences of our actions before we take the next step. Wow! What a concept! Actually THINK before ACTING? Sounds easy doesn't it but how many times do we just do something without thinking about the results?

It occurred to me that we sometimes feel helpless in the face of temptations we face; like we have no control over our actions or reactions. Some of the terms that are common in describing sin in our lives can lead us to that conclusion. We have "slipped", "fallen", "wandered", "been lead astray", etc. To me, these words imply that we were just walking along, minding our own business, and suddenly, out of nowhere, sin attacked and carried us off. We were defenseless against it; it snuck up on us, without warning. A verse that has been on my mind lately is **I Cor. 10:12-13** "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." For years and years I wondered what that "way out" was: Would it be obvious at the time? Was it different in every situation? Would I recognize it when it came? The answer to my questions was so simple that I had missed it altogether. The "way out" is simply that we have a choice to a) give in to temptation or b) to run away. A choice: We're *not* helpless; we don't have to "fall" into sin. Now, of course, this puts the responsibility for our sinful acts squarely where it belongs: on us! We can't hide behind being powerless to control ourselves.

In this day and age, it's much more comfortable to be able to place the blame for our behavior on someone or something else. Avoiding responsibility has become an art form. "She made me so mad...." "It wasn't really a lie..." If we can put the responsibility on something else then it isn't our fault and we don't have to feel guilty about the choices we make. When we look at situations/temptations through God's eyes it is clear that He has given us a choice and it's our responsibility to

make the right one. Take out all the complications that our flesh tries to throw at us and we have the "choice", the "way out" God has provided. Our choices are either a) let the flesh bark and ignore it or b) let it bite and have to recover from the wounds. What is our choice today?

Blessings on your week!

Georgia