

Thought For The Week

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The Neighbor From Hell and What To Do:

Overcoming Temptation Through Godly Thinking and Action

Introduction

In back-to-back sermons delivered on July 19, 2026, at West Side Church of Christ, brothers Tom and John presented complementary messages that together form a powerful exposition on the reality of temptation and the biblical response it demands. Tom's morning sermon, "The Neighbor From Hell," vividly portrayed Satan as a persistent, deceptive tempter who dangles alluring but destructive offers, much like a troublesome neighbor constantly inviting you over with seemingly harmless gifts that lead to ruin. John's evening sermon, "What To Do?," built directly on this foundation by returning to Genesis 4:6-7 and unpacking God's words to Cain as a timeless directive for how believers should respond when sin lies at the door.

Together, these sermons provide a complete picture: the nature of the enemy's tactics and the practical, scripture-grounded steps believers must take to overcome them. They remind us that temptation is real, but victory is possible through correct thinking aligned with God's ethics and faithful action rooted in His word. This article weaves the two messages into a unified teaching, drawing out their shared themes, key scriptures, and urgent applications for daily Christian living.

The Reality of the Evil Neighbor

Tom's sermon opened eyes to the subtle yet aggressive nature of temptation by personifying Satan as "the neighbor from hell." This neighbor doesn't knock once and leave; he returns repeatedly, offering small, enticing portions—perhaps a piece of delicious meat today, cheese and bacon tomorrow—until his invitations become habitual and destructive. The imagery is both humorous and sobering, illustrating how seemingly minor compromises accumulate into bondage.

Central to this picture is Genesis 4, where Cain, angry and dejected after his offering was rejected, receives a direct warning from God: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. Its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Genesis 4:7, NKJV). Tom emphasized that sin is not passive. It crouches like a predator, desiring to master us, yet God calls us to rule over it. The morning message highlighted the tactics of the evil neighbor: deception, persistence, and the illusion of harmless pleasure that masks spiritual death.

This portrayal echoes broader biblical teaching on spiritual warfare. As John later referenced, the message of the cross seems like foolishness to those perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18), precisely because the evil neighbor works to distort our perception. Tom's sermon drove home the point that ignoring the neighbor's invitations is not enough; we must actively recognize and resist his schemes, lest we find ourselves frequenting his door until destruction follows.

Defining the Terms: Ethics and Morality

John's evening message picks up the thread by confronting the listener with Cain's situation and our own. Referencing Romans 3:23, he acknowledges universal sinfulness while making key assumptions: the Bible is God's perfect word, we live under the New Covenant fulfilled in Christ, and we desire to follow God's will. From this foundation, John divides the response into three parts, beginning with a crucial definitional distinction drawn from Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary.

Ethics, according to Webster, comprises the doctrines of morality and the science of moral philosophy—teaching what **should be** according to an external standard, ultimately God's unchanging will. Morality, by contrast, concerns the quality of actions and their conformity to divine law, but over time the term has shifted toward human opinions of right and wrong—what **is** in cultural or personal terms. John succinctly summarizes: ethics is what should be; morality is what we think should be.

This distinction is vital. Professional ethics courses often admit limited expertise, but God's word provides the authoritative standard. Romans 12:2 commands, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." To do well as God asked Cain, we must first think correctly by conforming our morality to God's ethics.

Thinking Correctly: Aligning the Map

Both sermons underscore that temptation succeeds when our thinking is misaligned. Tom illustrated the evil neighbor's strategy of gradual enticement that warps perspective. John reinforces this with Proverbs 23:7: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Our worldview acts as a steering wheel—or a map—for life. If the map is upside down or 180 degrees off, even sincere effort leads in the wrong direction.

Ephesians 5:15 urges us to "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise," considering consequences before acting. John candidly notes that without belief in the gospel, one would likely walk out of a sermon on sin, redemption, and eternity, dismissing it as irrelevant. Correct thinking recognizes the power of the cross and the reality of spiritual battle. It rejects the neighbor's illusions and embraces the truth that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The combined message is clear: the evil neighbor exploits faulty thinking. Victory begins with renewing the mind according to Scripture rather than culture, personal preference, or shifting human morality.

Carrying It Out: The Pattern and the Community

Knowing what is right is insufficient; we must do it. John acknowledges the difficulty, turning to Romans 7 where Paul laments the internal war: "For the good that I want to do, I do not do; but the evil I do not want to do, that I practice" (Romans 7:19). Paul delights in God's law inwardly yet finds sin waging war, leading to the cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" The answer follows immediately: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25).

Practical steps emerge. First, follow the pattern of Scripture. Philippians 3:17 calls believers to

imitate faithful examples and note those who walk according to the apostolic pattern, contrasting them with enemies of the cross who set their minds on earthly things. 1 Peter 2:15-17 instructs doing good to silence foolish ignorance, living as bondservants of God who honor all, love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor authority.

Second, surround yourself with like-minded, Bible-believing Christians. John shares a workplace testimony: consistent conduct and a simple cross spoke volumes even without words. 1 Timothy 4:12 exhorts being an example “in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Tom’s depiction of the persistent neighbor finds its counter in the supportive community of faith that strengthens resistance.

Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection provides the clean slate (as Paul experienced despite his past persecution of the church), but ongoing victory requires daily reliance on the Deliverer.

Unified Application: Ruling Over Sin

The two sermons converge powerfully on Genesis 4:7. God warned Cain that sin desired him, but he must rule over it. Tom exposed the neighbor’s tactics; John supplied the response. Believers today face the same choice. The evil neighbor offers temporary pleasures that lead to spiritual slavery. God offers acceptance through doing well—thinking and acting in line with His perfect will.

Practical implications abound. In a culture where morality shifts with trends, Christians must anchor in biblical ethics. When anger, resentment, or desire knocks (as with Cain), we remember the warning and choose to rule over sin through renewed minds and obedient actions. This involves:

- Daily scripture intake to correct the “map.”
- Prayer for strength, as John closed.
- Accountability within the church family.
- Rejecting isolation that makes one vulnerable to the neighbor’s invitations.
- Living as examples that silence ignorance and point others to Christ.

The sermons also connect to broader themes in recent teaching at West Side, including the Genesis series, grace versus works, and positional freedom in Christ. Overcoming temptation is part of progressive sanctification—living out the freedom purchased at the cross.

Encouragement and Final Charge

Tom and John’s messages are deeply encouraging because they refuse to sugarcoat the battle while proclaiming certain victory in Jesus. We are not alone in the struggle. The same Lord who confronted Cain, redeemed Paul, and empowers us today stands ready to deliver. As John concluded, we must pray for strength to do what is good in God’s eyes, conforming our thoughts to His ethic and living accordingly.

Church family, let us heed both sermons. Recognize the neighbor from hell and his tactics. Then, do what God told Cain and what the apostles model: rule over sin by thinking correctly and carrying it out faithfully. In doing so, we will be accepted by our Father, silence the ignorance of the foolish, and shine as lights in a dark world.

May these twin messages stir us to greater diligence, deeper dependence on Christ, and joyful obedience. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

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Overcoming the Neighbor From Hell

What To Do When Sin Lies at the Door

On July 19, 2026, Tom and John delivered complementary sermons at West Side Church of Christ that together provide a timely, practical guide for facing temptation. Tom's morning message, "The Neighbor From Hell," portrayed Satan as a persistent tempter who repeatedly dangles small, attractive offers—much like a troublesome neighbor offering tasty morsels that lead to ruin. Using Genesis 4, Tom showed how sin crouches at the door, desiring to master us, yet God calls us to rule over it.

John's evening sermon, "What To Do?," built directly on this foundation by examining God's words to Cain in Genesis 4:6-7. He stressed that doing well requires both inward and outward obedience. Drawing from Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary, John distinguished **ethics** (what **should be** according to God's unchanging standard) from **morality** (what we **think** should be). To live rightly, believers must conform their thinking to God's word rather than cultural opinions.

Correct thinking, John explained, acts as a steering wheel for life. Proverbs 23:7 reminds us, "As he thinks in his heart, so is he." Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 1 reinforce the need for wise, gospel-centered minds that reject the evil neighbor's illusions. Yet knowing the right path is only half the battle. Carrying it out demands following the scriptural pattern (Philippians 3:17), surrounding ourselves with faithful believers who exemplify godly character (1 Timothy 4:12), and relying on Christ amid the internal struggle described in Romans 7.

Paul's honest confession of the war within finds its answer in Jesus: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" After baptism into His death and resurrection, believers receive a clean slate and the power to overcome.

Together, these sermons urge us to recognize the neighbor's tactics, renew our minds according to God's ethics, and actively rule over sin in community. Let us pray for strength to think and live according to God's perfect will, not our own, bringing glory to Christ.

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