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TEMPTATION

#160

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BENEFITS OF TEMPTATION

G.A.W. (not further identified)

Grace has to work a great many miracles in us before we get far enough along to heartily sanction the words of St. James, to "count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations." But there is a place of such victory and union with Christ that the soul can really find a source of joy from every trial and temptation through which it has gone. It is almost impossible for us to see any benefits of being tempted while we are passing through them; the sensibilities are so pierced by fiery darts, the mind is so distracted by evil suggestions, the will is so beset with opposite motives, the rattle of spiritual musketry and smoke of battles obscures the vision from seeing any blessing likely to come out of it. Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are properly exercised thereby. Among the benefits of being tried by temptation, we may mention.

1. **Resisting any given evil to which the soul is tempted will induce an increased hatred for that sin.** The very habit of fighting any particular sin will form a habit of loathing for that sin. It is watched as an old and bitter foe. In long and bitter feuds between families there is not only hatred for the principal agents, but hatred for the children, their relatives, their property. So the persistent fight against some old ruling passion, some old besetting sin, arouses in the soul a universal revenge, not only against the old sin itself, but against all its family relatives, and a jealous hatred to all the insidious steps that lead to that sin. The holiest saints in all ages have been those who were the most sorely tempted. Surely it is a great blessing to

loathe sin, and a still greater blessing to loathe that particular sin that has done us the most damage. It is God's design that we shall have the most perfect victory on the very points where we have been the weakest. This requires a limitless crucifixion of self and a complete possession by the Holy Ghost. But it can be done, and has been done, in thousands of cases. And such victory has been brought about by awful temptations to some sin which developed a boundless, unrelenting hatred for that sin.

2. Temptation drives us to a deep, serious study of ourselves; it makes us take ourselves all to pieces, to analyze our affections, our wills, our motives, our propensities; it makes us search the quality of our actions, thoughts, words; it makes us scrutinize our real chances for heaven or hell; it makes us dig in solitude to the very secret foundation of our character. Temptation compels us to study the awful nature of sin; it makes us trace the danger of wrong affections, of evil thoughts, of improper words; it opens our eyes to see the hell-fire that stealthily sleeps in so-called little sins. To be thoroughly tempted is the pathway to a thorough knowledge of ourselves and of the malignity of sin.

3. Temptation makes us see our true nothingness and weakness. It withers our cleverness, cauterizes our smartness, teaches us true humiliation and self-abasement. It clips the rattling talkativeness from our tongues, gives us a real, healthy hatred of ourselves, and shows us our demerit in a strong light. It leads us to patient endurance. When we are first tempted, we chafe and fret; when it comes back still stronger, we whimper and whine; the next time, we try to fight the devil with our fist, we bluster with our will-power against being so assaulted; at the next time, we break down and cry like a child whose Sunday clothes have been bespattered by a bad boy; then we wonder what we shall do; then we half despair of getting complete victory; at last we quiver long-sufferingly in the hand of God, and patiently look to Jesus as an afflicted child looks to its mother's face while its wound is being dressed. But for the severe temptations, the soul would go skipping along, gloating over its own pretty piety, full of self-admiration. As a severe case of smallpox will prevent a pretty face from standing before a mirror, so terrible temptations prevent holy souls from admiring their own graces.

4. Temptation leads us into real heart-felt sympathy and compassion for others. It takes deep trials to soften and widen the sympathies. Every tree has its special parasites to attack it, and it does seem that *severity* is the special parasite that fastens itself onto religion in a human soul. If a cold, condemnatory saint is put through an unexplainable conflict of soul that makes him roll on the floor in agony for hours at a time, while his body is wet with perspiration, when he comes out of that sulphur bath, if he comes out on the Christ-side, there will be a tenderness in his judgment and a broadness in his compassion which no camp-meeting hallelujahs could ever impart.[Amen! Editor]
Blessed are they that endure temptation till not only sinful self is purged out, but till the last form of righteous self is gone, and the soul is taken out of its furnaces into a supernatural embrace of the Holy Spirit.

—G.A.W.

THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE

Robert Murray McCheyne
1813-1843

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

—Romans 7:22-25

A believer is to be known not only by his peace and joy, but by his warfare in distress. His peace is peculiar; it flows

from Christ, it is heavenly, it is holy peace. His warfare is as peculiar: it is deep-seated, agonizing, and ceases not till death. I have chosen the subject of the Christian's warfare, that you may know thereby whether you are a soldier of Christ—whether you are really fighting the good fight of faith.

The Believer Delights in the Law of God:

"I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

1. Before a man comes to Christ, *he hates the law of God*; his whole soul rises up against it—"The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God" (Rom. 8:7).

First, Unconverted men hate the law of God on account of its *purity*—"Thy Word is very pure, therefore Thy servant loveth it." For the same reason worldly men hate it. The law is the breathing of God's pure and holy mind. It is infinitely opposed to all impurity and sin. Every line of the law is against sin. But natural men love sin, and therefore they hate the law, because it opposes them in all they love. As bats hate the light, and fly against it, so unconverted men hate the pure light of God's law, and fly against it.

Second, *They hate it for its breadth*—"Thy commandment is exceeding broad" (Psa. 119:96). It extends to all their outward actions, seen and unseen; it extends to every idle word that men shall speak; it extends to the looks of their eye; it dives into the deepest caves of their hearts; it condemns the most secret springs of sin and lust that nestle there. Unconverted men quarrel with the law of God because of its strictness. If it extended only to my *outward* actions, then I could bear with it; but it condemns my most *secret* thoughts and desires, which I cannot prevent. Therefore ungodly men rise against the law.

Third, they hate it for its *unchangeableness*. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or one tittle of the law shall in no wise pass away. If the law would change, or let down its requirements, or die, then ungodly men would be well pleased. But it is as unchangeable as God: it is written on the heart of God, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. It cannot change unless God change; it cannot die unless God die. Even in an eternal hell its demands and curses will be the same. It is an unchangeable law, for He is an unchangeable God. Therefore ungodly men have an unchangeable hatred to that holy law.

2. When a man comes to Christ, *this is all changed*. He can say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." He can say with David, "O how love I Thy law: it is my meditation all the day." He can say with the Lord Jesus in the 40th Psalm, "I delight to do Thy will, O God, yea, Thy law is within My heart." There are two reasons for this:

First, *the law is no longer an enemy*. If any of you who are trembling under a sense of your infinite sins, and the curses of the law which you have broken, flee to Christ, you will find rest. You will find that He has fully cancelled the demands of the law as a Surety for sinners, that He has fully borne all its curses. You will be able to say, "Christ hath redeemed me from the curse of the law, being made a curse for me, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). You have no more to fear, then, from that awfully holy law; you are not under the law, but under grace. You have no more to fear from the law, than you will have after the Judgment Day. When that awful scene is past—when the dead, small and great, have stood before the Great White Throne—when the sentence of eternal woe has fallen upon all the unconverted, and they have sunk into the lake whose fires can never be quenched; would not that redeemed soul say, I have nothing to fear from that holy law; I have seen its vials poured out, but not a drop has fallen on me? So may you say now, O believer in Jesus! When you look upon the soul of Christ, scarred with God's thunderbolts, when you look upon His body, pierced for sin, you can say—He was made a curse for me; why should I fear that holy law?

Second, *the Spirit of God writes the law on the heart*. This is the promise: "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:33). Coming to Christ takes away your fear of the law, but it is the Holy Spirit coming

into your heart that makes you love the law. The Holy Spirit is no more frightened away from that heart; He comes and softens it; He takes out the stony heart and puts in a heart of flesh; and there He writes the holy law of God. Then the law of God is sweet to that soul: he has an inward delight in it. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Now he unfeignedly desires every thought, word, and action, to be according to that law. "Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes: great peace have they that love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them." The 119th Psalm becomes the breathing of that new heart. Now also he would fain see all the world submitting to that pure and holy law. "Rivers of water run down mine eyes because they keep not Thy law." Oh that all the world but knew that *holiness* and *happiness* are one. Try yourselves by this. Can you say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man"? Do you love it now? Do you long for the time when you shall live fully under it—holy as God is holy, pure as Christ is pure?

Oh come, sinners, give up your hearts to Christ, that He may write on it His holy law! You have long enough had the devil's law graven on your hearts; come you to the Lord Jesus, and He will both shelter you from the curses of the law, and He will give you the Spirit to write all that law in your heart; He will make you love it with your inmost soul. Plead the promise with Him. Surely you have tried the pleasures of sin long enough. Come now, and try the pleasures of holiness out of a new heart. If you die with your heart as it is, it will be stamped a wicked heart to all eternity: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev. 22:11). Oh come and get the new heart before you die; for except you be born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.

A True Believer Feels an Opposing Law in His Members:

"I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." When a sinner comes first to Christ, he often thinks he will now bid an eternal farewell to sin: now I shall never sin any more. He feels already at the gate of heaven. But a little breath of temptation soon discovers his heart, and he cries out, "I see another law."

1. Observe what he calls it—"another law," quite a different law from the law of God—a law clean contrary to it. In v. 25 he calls it a "law of sin"—a law that commands him to commit sin, that urges him on by rewards and threatenings. In Rom. 8:2 it is called "the law of sin and death"—a law which not only leads to sin, but leads to death, eternal death: "the wages of sin is death." It is the same law which in Galatians is called the flesh: "the flesh lusteth against the spirit" (5:17). It is the same which in Eph. 4:22 is called "the old man," which is wrought according to the deceitful lusts. The same law which in Col. 3 is called "your members" which is wrought according to the deceitful lusts: "mortify therefore, your members which are upon the earth" (v. 5). The same is called in Rom. 7:24 "this body of death." The truth then is, that in the heart of the believer there remains the whole members and body of an *old man*, or old nature—there remains the fountain of every sin that has ever polluted the world.

2. Observe again what this law is doing—*warring*. This law in the members is not resting quiet, but is *always fighting*. There can never be peace in the bosom of a believer. There is peace with God, but constant war with sin. This law in the members has got an army of lusts under him, and he wages constant war against the law of God. Sometimes, indeed, an army is lying in ambush, and they lie quiet till a favorable moment comes. So in the heart the lusts often lie quiet till the hour of temptation, and then they war against the soul. The heart is like a volcano, sometimes it slumbers and sends up nothing but a little smoke, but the fire is slumbering all the while below, and will soon break out again. There are two great combatants in the believer's soul. There is Satan on the one side, with the flesh and all its lusts at his command; then on the other side there is the Holy Spirit, with all the new creature at His command. And so "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these two are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things which ye would."

Is Satan ever successful? In the deep wisdom of God the law in the members does sometimes bring the soul into captivity. "Noah was a perfect man," and Noah walked with God, and yet he was led captive: "Noah

drank of the wine, and was drunken." Abraham was "the friend of God," and yet he told a lie, saying of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." Job was a perfect man, one that feared God and hated evil, and yet he was provoked to curse the day wherein he was born. And so with Moses, and David, and Solomon, and Hezekiah, and Peter, and the apostles.

Have you experienced this warfare? It is a clear mark of God's children. Most of you, I fear, have never felt it. Do not mistake me. All of you have felt a warfare at times between your natural conscience and the law of God. But that is not the contest in the believer's bosom. It is a warfare between the Spirit of God in the heart, and the old man with his deeds.

If any of you are groaning under this warfare, learn to be humbled by it, but not discouraged. *First*, be humbled under it. It is intended to make you lie in the dust, and feel that you are but a worm. Oh! what a vile wretch you must be, that even after you are forgiven, and have received the Holy Spirit, your heart should still be a fountain of every wickedness! How vile, that in your most solemn approaches to God, in awfully affecting situations, you should still have in your bosom all the members of your old nature. Let this make you lie low. *Second*, let this teach you your need of Christ. You need His precious blood as much now as you did at the first. You can never stand before God in yourself. You must go again and again to Him to be washed. Even on your dying bed you must hide under Jehovah, our righteousness. You must also lean upon Christ. He alone can overcome in you. Cleave closer and closer to Him every day.

The feelings of a believer during this warfare:

1. He feels *wretched*. "O wretched man that I am." (v. 24) There is nobody in this world so happy as a believer. He has come to Christ, and found rest. He has the pardon of all his sins in Christ. He has as near approach to God as a child. He has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. He has the hope of glory. In the most awful times he can be calm, for he feels that God is with him. Still there are times when he cries, *O wretched man!* When he feels the plague of his own heart—when he feels the thorn in the flesh—when his wicked heart is discovered in all its fearful malignity—ah, then he lies down, crying, "O wretched man that I am!" One reason of this wretchedness is that sin discovered in the heart takes away the sense of forgiveness. Guilt comes upon the conscience, and a dark cloud covers the soul. How can I ever go back to Christ? he cries. Alas! I have sinned away my Savior. Another reason is, the loathsomeness of sin. It is felt like a viper in the heart. A natural man is often miserable from his sin, but he never feels its loathsomeness; but to the new creature it is vile indeed. Ah! brethren, do you know anything of a believer's wretchedness? If you do not, you will never know his joy. If you know not a believer's tears and groans, you will never know his song of victory.

2. He *seeks deliverance*. "Who shall deliver me?" In ancient times, some of the tyrants used to chain their prisoners to a dead body; so that, wherever the prisoner wandered, he had to drag a putrid carcass after him. It is believed that Paul here alludes to this inhuman practice. His old man he felt to be a noisome putrid carcass, which he was continually dragging about with him. His piercing desire is to be freed from it. Who shall deliver us? You remember once, when God allowed a thorn in the flesh to torment His servant, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, Paul was driven to his knees. "I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Oh this is the true mark of God's children! They of the world have an old nature; they are all old men together. But it does not drive them to their knees. How is it with you, dear souls? Does corruption felt within drive you to the throne of grace? Does it make you call on the name of the Lord? Does it make you say, like the importunate widow, "Avenge me of mine adversary"? Does it make you, like the Canaanitish woman, cry after the Lord Jesus? Ah, remember, if lust can work in your heart, and you lie down contented with it, you are none of Christ's!

3. He *gives thanks for victory*. Truly, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us; for we can give thanks before the fight is done. Yes, even in the thickest of the battle we can look up to Christ, and cry—Thanks to God! The moment a soul groaning under corruption rests the eye on the Lord Jesus, that moment his groans are changed into songs of praise. In Christ you discover a fountain to wash away the

guilt of all your sins. In Christ you discover grace sufficient for you—grace to hold you up to the end—and a sure promise that sin shall soon be rooted out altogether. "Fear not, I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by My name; thou art Mine." Ah, this turns our groans into songs of praise. How often a Psalm begins with groans, and ends with praises! This is the daily experience of all the Lord's people. Is it yours? Try yourselves by this. If you know not the believer's song of praise, you will never cast your crowns with them at the feet of the Lamb. Dear believers, be content to glory in your infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon you.

This article available in booklet format.

ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS

Martin Luther

1483-1546

Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.—1Pet.2:11

I will not determine here whether Peter speaks of outward impurity, or like Paul does, of all that is called carnal—that is, whatever man does without faith, while he is in the body and in a carnal life. I hold however that Peter had a different mode of expression, yet I do not think he uses the word *soul*, as Paul does, for spirit; but Peter has held more to the common Greek word than Paul. Yet much stress is not to be laid upon this; let it be understood of all kinds of lust, or all kinds of carnal desire or impurity. But this at least he would teach us, **that no saint on earth can be fully perfect and pure.** The high schools have even trodden this passage under their feet, and they do not understand it; they think it is said only of sinners, as though the saints had no wicked lust remaining in them. But whoever will study carefully the Scriptures must note a distinction. The prophets sometimes speak of the saints in a manner, as though they were indeed perfectly holy in every respect; while on the other hand they speak also of them as having evil lusts and being troubled with sins. In regard to these two distinctions those persons cannot judge. Therefore understand it thus: that Christians are divided into two parts; into an inward nature which is faith, and an outward nature which is the flesh. If we look upon a Christian as respects faith, then he is pure and entirely holy; for the Word of God has nothing impure in it, and wherever it enters the heart that depends upon it, it will make that also pure; because, in respect to faith all things are perfect. According to that, we are kings and priests and the people of God, as was said above in 1 Peter 2:9. But since faith exists in the flesh, and we still live on the earth, we feel at times evil dispositions, such as impatience and fear of death. These are all the fault of the old man, for faith is not yet mature and has not attained full control over the flesh.

This you can understand from the parable in Luke 10:30 of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves. They beat him and left him lying half dead. But the Samaritan afterward took him up, and bound his wounds, and cared for him, and saw to it that he should be nursed. There you perceive that this man, since he is to be nursed, is not sick unto death, his life is safe. All that is wanting is that he should be restored to health. Life is there, but he is not completely restored, for he lies yet in the hands of the physicians and must yet give himself up to be healed. So we have also the Lord Jesus Christ in his completeness; we are assured of eternal life, yet we have not perfect health; some of the old Adam still remains in the flesh.

Similar also is the parable in Matthew 13:33, where Christ says: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman takes and mingles in the meal until it is leavened throughout." When meal is made into dough, the leaven is all in it. But it has not penetrated and worked through it, but the meal lies working until it is leavened throughout, and no more leaven need be added. Thus through faith you have all that

you need to apprehend the Word of God, yet it has not penetrated throughout, wherefore it must continue to work till you are entirely renewed. In this way you are to discriminate in regard to the Scriptures, and not martyr them as the papists do.

Therefore I say, when you read in the Scriptures of the saints, that they were perfect, understand that as to faith they were entirely pure and without sin, but the flesh still remained and that could not have been entirely holy. Therefore Christians desire and pray that the body or the flesh be mortified, that they may be entirely pure. Those who teach otherwise have neither experienced nor relished this, which leads them to speak just as they imagine and conceive with their reason; wherefore they must err. In regard to this, those great saints who have written and taught much, have greatly stumbled. Origen has not a word of it in his books. Jerome never understood it. Augustine, had he not been driven to contend with the Pelagians, would have understood it no better. When they speak of the saints, they extol them so highly as if they were something different from, and better than, other Christians; just as though they had not felt the power of the flesh and complained of it as well as we do.

Therefore Peter says here, as ye would be pure and have complete sanctification, continue to contend with your evil lusts. So also Christ says in the gospel of John 13:10: "Whoever is washed, must also wash his feet." It is not enough that his head and hands be clean; therefore, he would yet have them wash their feet.

But what does Peter mean in that he says, abstain from the lusts that war against the soul? This is what he would say: You are not to imagine that you can succeed by sports and sleep. Sin is indeed taken away by faith, but you have still the flesh which is impulsive and inconsiderate; therefore take good care, that ye overcome it. By strong effort it must be done; you are to restrain and subdue lust, and the greater your faith is, the greater will the conflict be. Therefore you should be prepared and armed, and you should contend with it incessantly. For they will assault you in multitudes and would take you captive.

Hence Paul also says: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity" (Rom. 7:22, 23), so that I do what I would not. As though he had said, I fight indeed against it, but it will not finally yield. Therefore I would gladly be free, but in spite of my good will it cannot come to pass. What then am I to do? "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" ((Rom. 7:24). In this same manner all the saints cry out. But people without faith the devil leads in such a way that he permits them only to enter on a sinful course, and he follows them, but does not destroy them entirely by sin. But as to the others, he thinks, I have already taken them captive by unbelief. I will permit them to go so far only, as to do no great sin and have no great assault, and be kept from swearing and knavery. But believers have always opposition enough; they must ever stand in the attitude of struggle. Those who are without faith and have not the Spirit, do not feel this nor do they have such an experience. They break away and follow their wicked lusts. But as soon as the Spirit and faith enter our hearts, we become so weak that we think we cannot beat down the least imaginations and sparks of temptation, and we see nothing but sin in ourselves from the crown of the head even to the foot. For before we believed, we walked according to our own lusts, but now the Spirit has come and would purify us, and a conflict arises when the devil, the flesh, and the world oppose faith. Of this all the prophets complain here and there in the Scriptures.

Therefore Peter now means that the strife does not take place in sinners, but in believers, and he gives us the consolation that we may check evil lusts thus, namely, by barking against them. If thou then hast wicked thoughts, thou shouldst not on this account despair; only be on thy guard, that thou be not taken prisoner by them. Our teachers have proposed to relieve the matter by directing men to torture themselves until they had no more evil thoughts, that they at last became frantic and insane. But learn, if you are a Christian, that you must experience all kinds of opposition and wicked dispositions in the flesh. For wherever faith exists, there come a hundred evil thoughts, a hundred struggles more than before. Only see to it that you act the man and not suffer yourself to be taken captive. Continue to resist and say, I will not, I will not. (Lord Christ thou hast said: "Ask and ye shall receive." Help, dear Lord, against all temptations. Ed. 1539.) For we must here confess that the case is much like an ill-matched couple who are continually

complaining of one another, and what one will do the other will not.

That may still be called a truly Christian life which is never at perfect rest, and has not advanced so far that we feel not sin, but that we indeed feel sin, only we do not allow it admittance. Thus we are to fast, pray, and labor to weaken and suppress lust. So you are not to imagine you are to become a saint like these fools speak of. Since flesh and blood continue as long as sin remains; therefore we are to constantly war against it. Whoever has not learned this by his own experience must not boast that he is a Christian.

Before, we have been taught that when we made confession or joined some spiritual institution, we were at once pure and needed no longer to contend with sin. They have said, moreover, that baptism purifies and makes holy, so that nothing evil remains in the person. Hence they thought, now I will have a pleasing rest; then the devil came and assaulted them worse than before. Therefore, understand this well: Though you confess and receive absolution, you must do even as the soldier who in battle runs upon the points of the javelins, when the critical moment approaches and the conflict rages, compelling him to strike for the right, as if to repel outrage. Then he must draw out his sword and strike right and left. But now while the strife threatens only, there must be untiring vigilance. So, if you have been saved, be on your guard, inasmuch as you are not safe for an hour from the devil and from sin, even though you think you will have no more attacks. Therefore a Christian life is nothing else than a conflict and encampment, as the Scriptures say (Job 7:1ff); and therefore the Lord our God is called the Lord of Sabaoth, "*Dominus Sabaoth*" (Psa. 24:10), that is Lord over hosts. So also, "*Dominus potens in praelio*," the Lord is mighty in battle (Psa. 24:8). By these words, God shows that he is almighty for he triumphs in a wonderful way through us against the prince and God of this world, the Devil and the gates of hell. Yet we are very weak, hardly to be counted a feeble fly compared to Satan. Hence Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves."

And thus he shows how powerful he is, that he permits his people to be exposed in the conflict and rush upon the points of the javelins; yet while the trumpets are ever-sounding, he is ever-observant, saying, beware here, beware there; thrust here strike there. Besides, it is a lasting conflict, in which you are to do all you can to strike down the devil by the Word of God. We must therefore ever offer resistance, and call on God for help, and despond of all human powers.

Taken from his commentary on Peter and Jude by Kregel Publications

HELPS AGAINST TEMPTATIONS

Thomas Brooks

1608-1680

Satan is a spirit of mighty abilities; and his abilities to lay snares before us are mightily increased by that long experience of his. He has had time enough to study all those ways and methods which tend most to ensnare and undo the souls of men. He has made it his whole study, his only study, his constant study to find out stratagems to entangle and overthrow the souls of men. When he was but a young serpent, he did easily deceive and outwit Eve; but now he is grown that 'old serpent' as John says in Rev. 12; he is as old as the world and is grown very cunning in experience. If Satan has such a world of devices to ensnare the souls of men, then, instead of wondering that so few are saved, sit down and wonder that *any* are saved, that *any* escape the snares of this cunning fowler.

I intend to set before you some special helps against all his devices.

Now, to prevent objections, I shall first lay down this proposition:

Though Satan has his devices to draw souls to sin, yet we must be careful that we do not lay all our temptations upon Satan, that we do not wrong the devil, and father upon him that is to be fathered *upon our own base hearts*. Man has such an evil root within him, that were there no devil to tempt him, no wicked men in the world to entice him, yet that cursed sinful nature that is in him would draw him to sin, though he knows beforehand that the wages of sin is eternal death.

The whole frame of man is out of frame: the understanding is dark, the will cross, the memory slippery, the affections crooked, the conscience corrupted, the tongue poisoned, and the heart wholly evil, only evil, and continually evil. Should God chain up Satan, and give him no liberty to tempt the sons of men to vanity or folly, yet they would not, they could not but sin against Him by reason of that cursed nature that is in them. Satan has only a persuading sleight, not an enforcing might. He may tempt us, but without ourselves he cannot conquer us. In every sin our hearts carry the greatest stroke: the fire is *our* wood, though it be the devil's flame. Satan can never undo a man without himself; but a man may easily undo himself without Satan. Don't excuse yourself by your accusing him.

Now for the helps I want to offer.

1. **Walk by rule.** He that walks by rule walks most safely, most honorably, most sweetly. When men throw off the Word, then God throws off them, and then Satan takes them by the hand, and leads them into snares at his pleasure. He that thinks himself to be too good to be ruled by the Word, will be found too bad to be owned by God; and if God do not or will not own him, Satan will by his strategems overthrow him. They that keep to the rule, shall be kept in the hour of temptation, Rev. 3:10, "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee in the hour of temptation."

2. **Take heed of grieving the Holy Spirit.** It is the Spirit of God that is best able to discover Satan's plots against us; it is only He that can point out all his snares, and enable men to escape those pits that he has digged for their precious souls. Be sure the Spirit be not grieved by your enormities, nor by your refusing the cordials He sets before you, nor by slighting and despising His gracious actings in others.

3. **Labor for more heavenly wisdom.** Though there is no fear of knowing too much, there is much fear in practicing too little. There are many knowing souls, but there are but a few wise souls. There is oftentimes a great deal of knowledge where there is but little wisdom to improve that knowledge. Ah! souls, you have need of a great deal of heavenly wisdom to see where and how Satan lays his snares, and wisdom to find out proper remedies against his devices, and wisdom to apply those remedies seasonably, inwardly and effectually to your own heart, that so you may avoid the snares which that evil one has laid for your precious souls.

4. **Make present resistance against Satan's first motions.** It is safe to resist, it's dangerous to argue. Eve argues, and falls in paradise; Job resists, and conquers upon the dunghill. He that will play with Satan's bait, will quickly be taken with Satan's hook. The promise of conquest is made over to resisting, not to arguing: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," James 4:7. Ah, souls! were you better at resisting than at disputing, your temptations would be fewer.

5. **Labor to be filled with the Spirit.** The Spirit of the Lord is a Spirit of light and power; and what can a soul do without light and power "against spiritual wickedness in high places?" (Eph. 4:12). That is a sweet word of the apostle, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18); i.e., labor for abundance of the Spirit. He that thinks he has enough of the Holy Spirit, will quickly find himself vanquished by the evil spirit.

Satan has his snares to take you in prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness, in strength and weakness, when you are alone and when you are in company, when you come on to spiritual duties and when you come off from spiritual duties; and if you are not filled with the Spirit, Satan will be too hard and too crafty for you, and will easily and frequently take you in his snares, and make a prey of you in spite of

your souls. Therefore labor more to have your hearts filled with the Spirit, than to have your heads filled with notions, or your shops with wares, your chests with silver, or your bags with gold; so shall you escape the snares of this fowler and triumph over all his plots.

6. Keep humble. A humble heart will rather lie in the dust than rise by wickedness, and sooner part with all than the peace of a good conscience. Humility keeps the soul free from many darts of Satan's casting, and snares of his spreading; as the low shrubs are free from many violent gusts and blasts of wind which shake and rend the taller trees. The devil has least power to fasten a temptation on him that is most humble.

He that has a gracious measure of humility, is neither affected with Satan's proffers nor terrified with his threatenings. It is reported of Satan that he should say thus of a humble man: You do always overcome me; when I would exalt and promote you, you keep yourself in humility; and when I would throw you down, you lift up yourself in assurance of faith.

God has said that 'He will teach the humble,' that 'He will dwell with the humble,' and that 'He will fill and satisfy the humble.' And if the teachings of God, the indwellings of God, the pourings-in of God will not keep the soul from falling into Satan's snares, I do not know what will. And therefore as you would be happy in resisting Satan and blessed in triumphing over Satan and all his snares, keep humble; I say again, keep humble.

7. Keep a strong, close, and constant watch (1 Thess. 5:6). A secure soul is already an ensnared soul. That soul that will not watch against temptations, will certainly fall before the power of temptations. Satan works most strongly on the fancy when the soul is drowsy. The soul's security is Satan's opportunity to fall upon the soul and to spoil it, as Joshua did the men of Ai.

The best way to be safe and secure from all Satan's assaults is, with Nehemiah and the Jews, to watch and pray, and pray and watch. By this means they became too hard for their enemies, and the work of the Lord did prosper sweetly in their hands. Remember how Christ did chide His sluggish disciples, "What! could ye not *watch* with Me one hour?" What, can you watch with Me, how will you then *die* with Me? Satan always keeps a crafty and malicious watch, 'seeking whom he may devour.' Shall Satan keep a crafty watch, and shall not Christians keep a holy spiritual watch?

8. Engage not against Satan in your own strength, but be every day drawing new strength from the Lord Jesus. Undoubtedly, that soul that engages against any old or new temptation without new strength, new influences from on high, will fall before the power of the temptation. You may see this in Peter; he rested upon some old received strength—"Though all men should deny Thee, yet will not I," and therefore he falls sadly before a new temptation, denying Christ thrice, that had thrice appeared gloriously to him.

Ah, souls! remember this, that your strength to stand and overcome must not be expected from grace received, but from the renewed influences of heaven. You must lean more upon Christ than upon your duties; you must lean more upon Christ than upon your experience; you must lean more upon Christ than upon your graces, or else Satan will carry you into captivity.

9. Be much in prayer. Prayer is a shelter to the soul, a sacrifice to God and a scourge to the devil. There is nothing that renders plots fruitless like prayer; hence says Christ, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." Ah, souls! take words to yourselves and tell God that Satan has spread his snares in all places and in all companies; tell God that he digs deep and that he has plot upon plot, and device upon device, and all to undo you; tell God that you have neither skill nor power to escape his snares; tell God that it is a work too hard for any created being to work your deliverance, unless He put under His own everlasting arms; tell God how His honor is engaged to stand by you, and to bring you off, that you be not ruined by Satan's plots; tell God how the wicked would triumph if you should fall in his snares; tell God if He will make it His honor to save you from falling into Satan's snares, you will make it your glory to speak of His

goodness and to live out His kindness.

Many a man by a common hand of providence escapes many a snare that *man* has laid for him, but yet escapes not the snares that *Satan* has laid for him. Many men are lifted up above the snares of men by a common hand of *providence*, that are left to fall into the snares of the devil by a hand of *justice*. Deliverance from Satan's snares *does* carry with it the clearest evidence of the soul and heart of God to be towards us (Psa. 140, 141).

This world, this wilderness, is full of snares: all employments are full of snares, and all enjoyments are full of snares. In civil things, Satan has his snares to entrap us; and in all spiritual things he has his snares to catch us.

Satan, who acts by an untiring power, and who will never let the saints rest till they are taken up to an everlasting rest in the bosom of Christ, is so powerful and subtle that he will often make the greatest and dearest mercies to become our greatest snares.

How should the consideration of these things make your soul say with the church, "Make haste, my Beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountain of spices," and to love, and look, and long for the coming of Christ. Till you are taken up in the bosom of Christ, your comforts will not be full, pure and constant; till then Satan will still be dealing you blows and spreading snares to entangle you; therefore you should always be crying out with the church, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Taken from: *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*

TEMPTATION OF BELIEVERS

John Owen
1616-1683

The Enticement of Indwelling Sin

Sin not only deceives, it also entices. People are drawn away "and enticed" (James 1:14). Sin draws the *mind* away from a duty, but it entices the *emotions*. We will consider three things:

Sin's enticement of the emotions, how sin accomplishes this, and our need to guard our affections because of this danger.

The affections are snared when they are aroused by sin. For when sin prevails, it captures the affections completely within it. Sin continually obsesses the imaginations with possessive images. The wicked "devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds," which they also practice when they are given the chance (Micah 2:1). Peter says they have "eyes full of adultery, and they cannot cease from sin" (2 Peter 2:14). Their imagination continually fills their soul with the objects of their lusts.

The apostle describes the things in the world as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). The lust of the eyes enters the soul, forcing the imagination to portray its intentions. John speaks of this as the lust of the "eyes" because it constantly represents these images to the mind and to the soul, just as our natural eyes present images of outward objects to the brain.

Indeed, the actual sight of the eyes often occasions these imaginations. Achan declared how sin had prevailed over him in Joshua 7:21. First, he *saw* the gold and the Babylonian garments, then he *coveted* them. Seeing them, he imagined their value to him, and then he fixed them in his desiring heart.

The enticement of sin is heightened when the imagination dominates over the mind. It implants vain thoughts within the mind, and delights secretly in its complacency. When we indulge with delight in thoughts of forbidden things, we commit sin, even though our will has not yet consented to perform the deed. The prophet asks, "How long will your vain thoughts lodge within you?" (Jer 4:14). All these thoughts come and go as messengers, carrying sin with them. Such thoughts inflame the imagination and entangle the affections more and more.

As we have already seen, sin always seeks to extenuate and lessen the seriousness of sin to the mind. "It is only a small offense," it says. "It will be given up shortly." With such excuses it speaks the language of a deceived heart. When there is a readiness on the part of the soul to listen to these silent voices—secret insinuations that arise from deceit—it is evident that the affections are already enticed.

When the soul willingly listens to these seductions, it has already lost its affections for Christ, and has become seduced. Sin entices like "wine when it is red, when it gives its colour in the cup, when it moves itself attractively" (Prov 23:31). But in the end, sin "bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder" (Prov 23:32).

How, then, does sin deceive to entice and to entangle the affections? First, it *makes use of the tendency of the mind*. If the mind is like a sly bird, sin will not capture it. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (Prov 1:17). But if a bird is distracted, its wings are of little use to escape from the trap. Thus does sin entice. It diverts the mind away from the danger by false reasonings and pretenses, then casts its net upon the affections to entangle them.

Second, sin takes advantage of the phases of life, and *proposes sin to be desirable*. It gilds over an object with a thousand pretenses which the imagination promotes as "the *pleasures* of sin" (Heb 11:25). Unless one despises these pleasures, as Moses did, one cannot escape from them. Those who live in sin, the apostle says, "live in pleasure" (James 5:5). It is pleasure because it suits the flesh to lust after them. Hence the caution, given, "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14). That is to say, do not nourish yourself with the lusts of the flesh, which sin gives to you through your thoughts or affections. He also warns us, "Fulfill not the lusts of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). When men live under the power of sin, they fulfill "the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:3). When sin would entangle the soul, it prevails with the imagination to solicit the heart by painting sin as something beautiful and satisfying.

Third, it *hides the danger* associated with sin. Sin covers the hook with bait, and spreads the food over the net. It is, of course, impossible for sin to completely remove the knowledge of danger from the soul. It cannot remove the reality that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), or hide "the judgment of God, that they who commit sin are worthy of death" (Rom 1:32). But it so takes up and possesses the mind and affections with the attraction and desirability of sin, that it diverts the soul from realizing its danger.

In the account of the fall of man, Eve properly told the serpent, "If we eat or touch the fruit of that tree, we shall die" (Genesis 3:3). But Satan immediately filled her mind with the beauty and usefulness of the fruit, and she quickly forgot her practical concern for the consequences of eating. Likewise, David became so caught up in his lusts that he ignored the consequences of his great sin. It is said he "despised the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:9).

When sin tempts with such pressure, it uses a thousand wiles to hide the soul from the terror of the Lord. Hopes of pardon will be used to hide it. Future repentance also covers it, as well as the present insistence of lust and the particular occasion or opportunity. Sin uses many other excuses: extenuating circumstances, surprise, the balance of duties, the obsession of the imagination, and desperate resolutions. It uses a thousand such excuses.

Sin then proceeds to present arguments to the mind in order to conceive the desired sin. This we will consider in the next chapter.

Let us look now at the remedies for avoiding such deception of sin. Clearly, we need to watch our affections. The Scriptures say: "Keep your heart with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23). We keep our heart in two ways.

First, we guard our affections by mortifying our members (Colossians 3:5). The apostle is saying, "You are to prevent the working and deceit of sin, which is in your members." He also says, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (3:2). Fixing and filling your affections with heavenly things will mortify sin.

What are the objects of such affections? They include God Himself, in His beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "altogether lovely. . . the chiefest of ten thousand" (Song of Solomon 5:10,16); grace and glory; the mysteries of the gospel; and the blessings promised by the gospel. If these were the preoccupation of our affections, what scope would sin have to tempt and enter into our hearts? (See 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.)

Second, let us fix our affections on the cross of Christ. Paul says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal 6:14). When someone sets his affections upon the cross and the love of Christ, he crucifies the world as a dead and undesirable thing. The baits of sin lose their attraction and disappear. Fill your affections with the cross of Christ and you will find no room for sin. The world put Him out of a house and into a stable, when He came to save us. Let Him now turn the world out-of-doors, when He comes to sanctify us.

Remember also that the vigor of our affections toward heavenly things is apt to decline unless it is constantly looked after, exercised, directed, and warned. God speaks often in Scripture of those who lost their first love, allowing their affections to decay. Let us be jealous over our hearts to prevent such backsliding.

The Power of Temptation

It is the great duty of all believers not to enter into temptation. God indeed is able to "deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter 2:9). Yet it is our great task to use all diligence so that we do not fall into temptation. Our Savior expresses His concern for His disciples by teaching them to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13). Since our Lord knows the power of temptation, having experienced it, He knows how vulnerable we are to it (Heb 2:18). He rewards our obedience by keeping us "in the hour of temptation" (Revelation 3:10).

Let us learn more about the power of temptation in order to avoid it. Since temptation brings out many basic issues, Scripture has much to say about it. In the parable of the sower, Christ compares the seed sown on the rocky, thin soil to those who, "when they hear, receive the word with joy, but have no root, for they only believe for a while" (Luke 8:13). The preaching of the Word affects them. They believe. They make a profession. They bring forth some fruit. But how long do they continue? Christ Says, "In time of temptation they fall away" (Luke 8:13). Once tempted, they are gone forever.

Likewise, in Matthew 7:26, Jesus speaks of the parable of the "foolish man, who built his house upon the sand." But what happens to this house of professed faith? It shelters its occupant, it keeps him warm, and it stands for awhile. But when the rain descends (that is to say, when temptation comes), it falls utterly, and its fall is great. This foolish man is like Judas, who followed our Savior three years. All went well for a time. But he no sooner entered into temptation—when Satan winnowed him—than he was lost. Demas preached the gospel until the love of the world entered into his soul, and then he turned utterly aside as well.

Among the saints of God, we see the solemn power of temptation. Take Adam, "the son of God," created in the image of God, full of integrity, righteousness, and holiness (Luke 3:38). He possessed a far greater inherent stock of ability than we have, since he had never been enticed or seduced. Yet no sooner did Adam enter into temptation but he was undone, lost, and ruined, and all his posterity with him. What should we expect then, when in our temptations we must deal not only with a cunning devil, but also with a cursed world and a corrupt heart?

Abraham is called the father of the faithful for it is his faith that is recommended as the pattern to all who believe (Rom 4:11-17). Yet twice he entered into the same temptation (namely, his fear about his wife). Twice he committed sin. He dishonored God, and no doubt his soul lost its peace (See Genesis 12 and 20). David is called "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Yet what a dreadful story we read of his immorality! No sooner did temptation entangle him than he plunged into adultery. Seeking deliverance by his own devices, he became all the more entangled until he lay as one dead under the power of sin and folly.

We should also mention Noah, Lot, Hezekiah, and Peter, whose temptations and falls God recorded for our own instruction. Like the inhabitants of Samaria who received the letter of Jehu, we should ask, "If two kings were not able to stand before him, how then shall we stand?" (2 Kings 10:4). For this reason the apostle urges us to exercise tenderness toward those who fall into sin. Paul writes, "Consider yourselves, lest you also be tempted"

(Gal 6:1). Seeing the power of temptation in others, let us beware, for we do not know when or how we also may be tempted. What folly it is that many should be so blind and bold, after all these and other warnings, to put themselves before temptation.

We need to examine ourselves to see our own weaknesses, and to note the power and efficacy of temptation. In ourselves, we are weakness itself. We have no strength, no power to withstand. Self-confidence produces a large part of our weakness, as it did with Peter. He who boasts that he can do anything, can in fact do nothing as he should. This is the worst form of weakness, similar to treachery. However strong a castle may be, if a treacherous party resides inside (ready to betray at the first opportunity possible), the castle cannot be kept safe from the enemy. Traitors occupy our own hearts, ready to side with every temptation and to surrender to them all.

Do not flatter yourself that you can hold out against temptation's power. Secret lusts lie lurking in your own heart which will never give up until they are either destroyed or satisfied. "Am I a dog, that I should do this thing?" asks Hazeal (2 Kings 8:13). Yes, you will be such a dog, if you are like the king of Syria. Temptation and self-interest will dehumanize you. In theory we abhor lustful thoughts, but once temptation enters our heart, all contrary reasonings are overcome and silenced.

Inadequate Safeguards against the Power of Temptation

To be safe from such danger, we need to examine our own hearts. A man's heart is his true self. If a man is not a believer, but only a professor of the gospel, what will his heart do? Proverbs 10:20 says, "The heart of the wicked is of little worth." While outwardly it appears to have value, inwardly it is worthless. Because the sphere of temptation lies in the heart, an unbeliever cannot resist it when it comes like a flood.

No one, indeed, should trust his own heart. Proverbs 28:26 says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Peter did this when he boasted, "Although all shall forsake thee, I will not" (Mark 14:29). This was his folly, his self-confidence. The heart of a man makes such wonderful promises before temptation comes. But "the heart is deceitful" (Jeremiah 17:9). Indeed, it is "deceitful above all things." It has a thousand shifts and treacheries, and when trial comes, temptation steals it away just as "wine and new wine take away understanding" (Hosea 4:11).

We need then to examine some of the inadequate measures we often use in our attempts to safeguard the heart in the hour of temptation.

1. *The love of honor in the world.* By one's walk and profession one obtains reputation and esteem in the church. So some argue, "Can I afford to lose such a reputation in the church of God by giving way to this lust, or to that temptation, or in dealing in this or that public evil?" This seems so strong an argument that many use it as a shield against any assaults that come. They would rather die a thousand deaths than lose their reputation in the church.

But what about "the third part of the stars of heaven"? (Revelation 12:4). Did they not shine in the firmament? Were they not fully aware of their honor, stature, usefulness, and reputation? Yet when the dragon comes with his temptations, he casts them down to the earth. Those who have no better defenses than the love of honor are inadequately equipped to deal with temptation. Sadly, it is possible for those with great reputations to suffer destruction when their only defense lies in their own good name. If this does not keep the stars of heaven, how do you think it will keep you?

2. *The fear of shame and reproach.* Not for all the world would some people bring upon themselves the shame and reproach associated with certain temptations. Their concern, however, tends to focus only upon open sins, such as the world notices and abhors. This motive proves useless when dealing with sins of conscience, or with sins of the heart. Innumerable excuses are offered to the heart when one relies on this as the predominant defense against temptation.

3. *The desire not to disturb one's peace of mind,* wound one's conscience, or risk the danger of hell fire. One might think that this would act as a major safeguard to preserve people in the hour of temptation. Indeed, we should use this as a major defense, for nothing is more important than striving to maintain our peace with God. Yet several reasons indicate this motive alone is not effective.

The peace of some only provides a false sense of security made up of presumptions and false hopes. Even believers cling to this. David enjoyed this false peace until Nathan came to see him. Laodicea rested in it while on the verge of destruction. The church of Sardis also claimed this peace while she lay dying. It is only true peace in Christ that keeps us, and nothing else. Nothing that God will not preserve in the last day keeps us now. False peace acts as a broken reed, piercing the hand that leans upon it.

Even the true peace we desire to safeguard our soul may prove useless as a defense in the hour of temptation. Why? Because we are so vulnerable to excuses. "This evil is so trivial," we say. Or we argue that it is so questionable. Or we argue that it does not openly and flagrantly offend the conscience. We rationalize with such excuses while maintaining our own peace of mind. We even rationalize that others of God's people have fallen, yet kept their peace and recovered from it. Facing a thousand such arguments—set up like batteries of guns against a fort—the soul finally surrenders.

If we only focus on the one safeguard of peace, the enemy will assault us elsewhere. True, it is one piece of armor for our protection, but we are commanded to "put on the *whole* armour of God" (Ephesians 6:11). If we depend upon this one element of defense, temptation will enter and prevail in twenty other ways.

A man, for example, may be tempted to worldliness, unjust gain, revenge, vanity, and many other things. If he focuses his attention on this one safeguard of peace and considers himself safe, he will neglect other needs. He may neglect his private communion with God, or overlook his tendency to be sensual. In the end he may not be one whit better than if he had succumbed to the temptation that most obviously harassed him. Experience shows that this peace of mind fails, therefore, as a safeguard. There is no saint of God who does not value the peace he enjoys. Yet how many fail in the day of temptation!

4. *The thought of the vileness of sinning against God.* How could we do this thing, when to sin against God is to

do so against His mercies, and to wound Jesus Christ who died for us? Unfortunately, we see every day that even this is not a sure and infallible defense. No such defense exists.

Why do these motives fail us in the hour of temptation? Their sources betray their inadequacy. For they arise either from the universal and habitual disposition of our heart, or from the temptation itself. We should remain wary of such counselors.

The Power of Temptation

It is helpful to consider the power of temptation in the light of what we have just said. The power of temptation is to darken the mind, so that a person becomes unable to make right judgments about things as he did before entering into temptation. The god of this world blinds men's minds so that they do not see the glory of Christ in the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). Likewise, the very nature of every temptation darkens the heart of the person who becomes tempted. This occurs in various ways.

First, the imagination and thought can be so obsessed with some object that the mind is distracted from those things that could relieve and help it. Someone might be tempted to believe that God has forsaken him, or God hates him, so that he expresses no interest in Christ. He becomes so depressed that he feels none of the remedies suggested to him will help. Meanwhile, he becomes obsessed with the temptation that fixates him.

Temptation also darkens the mind by the tragic confusion of the inclinations of the heart. Look around you and see how readily temptation entangles people's feelings. Show me someone not occupied with hope, love, and fear (of what he should not do), and I will quickly point out his blindness. His present judgment of things will be obscured and his will weakened. Madness immediately ensues. The hatred of sin, the fear of the Lord, and the sense of Christ's love and presence depart and leave the heart a prey to the enemy.

Finally, temptation gives fuel to our lusts by inciting and provoking them, so that they are embroiled in endless turmoil. One temptation—whether it is a lust, or a warped attitude, or anything else—becomes one's whole obsession. We might cite the carnal fear of Peter, the pride of Hezekiah, the covetousness of Achan, the uncleanness of David, the worldliness of Demas, or the ambition of Diotrephes. We do not know the pride, fury, and madness of a wrong deed until we face a suitable temptation. How tragic is the life of someone whose mind is darkened, whose affections are entangled, and whose lusts are enflamed, so that his defenses break down. What hope remains for him?

We observe this power of temptation both socially and personally. Public temptations, such as those mentioned in Revelation 3:10, "try them that dwell upon the earth." They also come in a combination of persecution and seduction to test a careless generation of believers. Such public temptations take varied forms.

First, public temptations come as the result of God's judgment on those who neglect or disdain the gospel, or who, as false believers, act as traitors. God permitted Satan to seduce Ahab as a punishment (1 Kings 22:22). When the world yields to folly and false worship in their neglect of the truth, and in the barrenness of their lives, God sends "a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thessalonians 2:11). This delusion comes with a judicial purpose to those who are selfish, spiritually slothful, careless, and worldly. As well, those who do not retain God in their hearts, God gives up to a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28).

Second, some public temptations spread infectiously from those who should be godly, but who are mere professors. Christ warns, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). When some become negligent, careless, worldly, and wanton, they corrupt others. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6, Galatians 5:9). The root of bitterness that troubles a man also defiles many (Heb 12:15). Little by little some mere professors of the truth influence others for evil.

Third, public temptations, when accompanied by strong reasons and influence, are too hard to overcome. This often takes place gradually. When a colony of people move from one country to another, they soon adjust to the customs of the local inhabitants. Likewise, prosperity often makes people morally careless, and it slays the foolish and wounds the wise.

We also see the power of temptation personally. These personal temptations enter the soul by their union with lust. John speaks of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). They reside principally in the heart and not in the world. Yet they are "in the world" because the world enters into them, mixes with them, and unites with them. By such means, temptation penetrates so deep into the heart that no antidote reaches it. It is like gangrene that mixes poison with the blood stream.

Moreover, it is important to see that in whatever part of the soul lust resides, it affects the whole person. A lust of the mind (such as ambition, or vanity, or something similar) affects everything else. Temptation draws the whole person into it.

But some will argue: "Why be so concerned about temptation? Are we not commanded to 'count it all joy when we fall into diverse temptations'?" (James 1:2). Yes, we should accept these trials. The same apostle admonishes the wealthy to "rejoice in that he is made low" (1:10). But James adds, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (1:12). While God may try us, He never entices us. Everyone is tempted by his own lusts. Let us make sure that our own weaknesses do not entice us and thus seduce us.

As well, the objection may be raised that our Savior Himself faced temptation. Is it evil to find ourselves in a similar state? Hebrews 2:17-18 makes it clear that it is advantageous to us that Christ was tempted. He uses, as the ground of great promise to His disciples, the fact that they had been with Him in His temptations (Luke 22:28). Yes, it is true that our Savior experienced temptation. But Scripture reckons His temptations among the *evils* that befell Him in the days of His flesh, coming to Him through the malice of the world and its prince. He did not deliberately cast Himself into temptation. Instead He said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:7). Moreover, while Christ only had the *suffering* part of temptation, we also have the *sinning* part of it. He remained undefiled, but we become defiled.

Finally, some may argue, why should we be so careful about temptation when we have God's assurances? "God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13). "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter 2:9). Yes, God has given us these assurances, but it is questionable whether God will deliver us if we willingly enter into temptation. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (Rom 6:1).

It is wrong for us to enter deliberately into temptation and to think only of the near escape of our souls. We need to regard the comfort, joy, and peace of our spirits, and to realize that we sojourn here for the honor of the gospel and the glory of God.

The Dangers of Temptation

Having surveyed the power of temptation, we now want to consider the dangers of temptation's inception. Often we wonder if we have committed a specific sin. Rather, we should ask, "Have I entered into temptation?" We enter into temptation whenever we are drawn into sin, for all sin is from temptation (see James 1:14-15). Sin is the fruit that comes only from that root. Even to be surprised or overtaken in a fault is to be tempted. The apostle says, "Consider yourself, lest you also be tempted" (Gal 6:1). Often we repent of the sins that overtake us, without realizing how temptation starts in the first place. This makes us vulnerable to fall once more into sin.

Entering into temptation occurs in various ways. It often begins in a concealed and subtle way. For

example, a man begins by having a reputation for piety, or wisdom, or learning. People speak well of him. His vanity is tickled to hear it, and then his reputation affects his pride and ambition. If this continues, he begins to seek it actively, using all his energies to build up his own esteem, reputation, and self-glory. Having this secret eye to its expansion, he enters into temptation. If he does not deal with this quickly and ruthlessly, he will become a slave to lust.

This happens to many scholars. They find themselves esteemed and favored for their learning. This secretly appeals to their pride and ambition, and they begin to major on promoting their learning. While they do good things it is always with an eye on the approval of others. In the end it is all carnal, making "provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14).

It is true that God in His mercy sometimes overrules such false motives. In spite of the ambition, pride, and vanity of the servant, God comes in grace to turn him to Himself and to rob him of his Egyptian lusts. Then once more, God consecrates the tabernacle which once housed idols.

But it is not only learning which temptation subtly corrupts. Temptation makes every profession and vocation a potential snare. Some find themselves the darlings, the celebrities, the popular ones in their own circle of friends and associates. Once these thoughts enter into their hearts, temptation entangles them. Instead of seeking to gain more glory, they need to lie in the dust, out of a sense of the vileness in themselves.

Likewise, when a man knows that he likes preaching the gospel or some other work of the ministry, many things begin to work in his favor. His ability, his simple presentation of the message, his constant exposure before the public, and his success in it all, expose him to temptation. These things become fuel for temptation. Whatever we like to do tends to feed our lusts and tends to cause us to enter into temptation, whether it is initially good or bad.

A man enters into temptation whenever his lusts find an opportunity for temptation. As I have already stated, to enter into temptation is not merely to face temptation, but to become entangled by its power. It is almost impossible to escape from temptation if it appropriately meets one's lusts. If ambassadors come from the king of Babylon, Hezekiah's pride will cast him into temptation. If Hazael is made king of Syria, his cruelty and ambition will make him rage savagely against Israel. If the priests come with their pieces of silver, Judas's covetousness will immediately operate to sell his Master.

We see many examples of this situation in our own day. How mistaken people are who think they can play over the hole of an asp and not be stung, or touch tar without being defiled, or set their clothes on fire and not be burnt. So if something in your business, your lifestyle, or your culture suits your lusts, you have already entered into temptation. If we have a propensity for unclean thoughts, ambition in high places, sexual passion, perusal of bad literature, or anything else, temptation will use various things in our society to entrap us.

Furthermore, when someone acts weak, negligent, or casual in a duty—performing it carelessly or lifelessly, without any genuine satisfaction, joy, or interest—he has already entered into the spirit that will lead him into trouble. How many we see today who have departed from warmhearted service and have become negligent, careless, and indifferent in their prayer life or in the reading of the Scriptures. For each one who escapes this peril, a hundred others will be ensnared. Then it may be too late to acknowledge, "I neglected private prayer," or "I did not meditate on God's Word," or "I did not hear what I should have listened to." Like Sardis, we maintain dead performances and duties in our spiritual life (Revelation 3:1).

In the Song of Solomon, the bride acknowledges, "I sleep" (Song of Solomon 5:2). Then she says, "I have put off my coat, and cannot put it on," which speaks of her reluctance to commune with her Lord (5:3). When she finally answers the door, her "beloved had withdrawn himself" (5:6). Christ had gone. Although she looks for Him, she does not find Him. This illustrates the intrinsic relationship of the new nature of the

Christian and the worship of Christ. The new nature is fed, strengthened, increased, and sweetened by Christ. Our desire focuses on God, as the psalmist describes throughout Psalm 119. Yet temptation attempts to intervene and disrupt this relationship and desire.

Vigilance against the Dangers of Temptation

How then can we be vigilant, so that we "watch and pray"? (Matthew 26:41). This injunction from our Lord implies that we should maintain a clear, abiding apprehension of the great danger we face if we enter into temptation. If one is always aware of the great danger, one will always stand guard.

1. Always remember the great danger it is for anyone to enter into temptation.

It is sad to find most people so careless about this. Most people think about how to avoid open sin, but they never think about the dynamics of temptation within their hearts. How readily young people mix with all sorts of company. Before they realize it, they enjoy evil company. Then it is too late to warn them about the dangers of wrong companions. Unless God snatches them in a mighty way from the jaws of destruction, they will be lost.

How many plead for their "freedom," as they call it. They argue that they can do what they like and try what they want, so they run here and there to every seducer and salesman of false opinions. And what is the result? Few go unhurt, and the majority lose their faith. Let no one fear sin without also fearing temptation. They are too closely allied to be separated. Satan has put them so close together that it is very hard to separate them. He hates not the fruit, who delights in the root.

We need a moral sensitivity to the weakness and corruption within us. We need to guard against the reality and guile of Satan. We need to recognize the evil of sin and the power of temptation to work against us. If we remain careless and cold, we shall never escape its entanglements. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the danger of the entry of temptation.

2. Realize we cannot keep ourselves from falling into temptation.

But for the grace of God, we will fall into it. We have no power or wisdom to keep ourselves from entering into temptation, other than the power and wisdom of God. In all things we "are kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5). "I pray," our Savior says to the Father, "not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). In other words, Christ prays that the Father would guard us against the temptation of the world to enter into evil and sin.

Let our hearts admit, "I am poor and weak. Satan is too subtle, too cunning, too powerful; he watches constantly for advantages over my soul. The world presses in upon me with all sorts of pressures, pleas, and pretenses. My own corruption is violent, tumultuous, enticing, and entangling. As it conceives sin, it wars within me and against me. Occasions and opportunities for temptation are innumerable. No wonder I do not know how deeply involved I have been with sin. Therefore, on God alone will I rely for my keeping. I will continually look to Him."

If we commit ourselves to God in this way, three things will follow. First, we will experience the reality of the grace and compassion of God. He calls the fatherless and the helpless to rest upon Him. No soul has ever lacked God's supply when he depended upon God's invitation to trust in Him absolutely. Second, we will be conscious of our danger, and of our need for God's protection.

Third, we will act in faith on the promises of God to keep us. To believe that He will preserve us is, indeed, a means of preservation. God will certainly preserve us, and make a way of escape for us out of the temptation, should we fall. We are to pray for what God has already promised. Our requests are to be regulated by His promises and commands. Faith embraces the promises and so finds relief. This is what James 1:5-7 teaches us. What we need, we must "ask of God." But we must "ask in faith," for otherwise we will not "receive any thing of the Lord."

God has promised to keep us in all our ways. We shall be guided in such a way that we "shall not err therein" (Isaiah 35:8). He will lead us, guide us, and deliver us from the evil one. Base your life upon faith in such promises and expect a good and assuring life. We cannot conceive of the blessings that will ensue from this attitude of trust in the promises of Christ.

3. Resist temptation by making prayer of first importance.

Praying that we enter not into temptation is a means to preserve us from it. People often talk about their wonderful experiences in maintaining this attitude of prayer, yet less than half its excellence, power, and efficacy is ever known. Whoever wishes to avoid temptation must pray. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). By doing this, our souls are set against every form of temptation.

After Paul instructs us to "put on the whole armour of God" (that we may stand and resist in the time of temptation), he adds: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication" (Ephesians 6:11,18). Without this attitude, we lack any real help.

Consider Paul's exhortation. "Praying always" means at all times and seasons (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:17). "With all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" implies expressing desires to God that are suited to our needs according to His will, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. "Watching thereunto" means we are never distracted from this essential stance. "With all perseverance" means this is more than a passing whim, but a permanent inclination. By doing this we will stand.

If we do not abide in prayer, we will abide in temptation. Let this be one aspect of our daily intercession: "God, preserve my soul, and keep my heart and all its ways so that I will not be entangled." When this is true in our lives, a passing temptation will not overcome us. We will remain free while others lie in bondage.

4. Christ's word of patience includes God's pledge to keep us.

Christ solemnly gave this promise to the church at Philadelphia. In Revelation 3:10 He promises to keep those who keep His word from the great trial and temptation which was to come upon all the world. The fulfillment of this promise involves all three Persons of the Trinity.

The faithfulness of the Father accompanies the promise. We shall be kept in temptation because "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted" (1 Corinthians 10:13). "He is faithful who promised" (Heb 10:23). "He will remain faithful; he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). When we stand under this promise, the faithfulness of God works on our behalf for our protection.

Every promise of God also contains the covenant grace of the Son. He promises, "I will keep you" (Revelation 3:10). How? "By my grace that is with you" (see 1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul suffered intensely from temptation. He "besought the Lord" for help and God answered, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul could add, "I will glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The efficacy of the grace of Christ becomes evident in our preservation (see Hebrews 2:18; 4:16).

The efficacy of the Holy Spirit accompanies God's promises, as well. He is called "the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). This is not only because He promised the advent of Christ, but because He effectively makes good the promise within us. He preserves the soul of the one who follows these promises (see Isaiah 59:21).

5. God preserves us as we keep the word of Christ's patience.

When we keep Christ's word, we guard our heart against temptable tendencies. David prayed, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me" (Psalm 25:21). God gave him a disposition that left no entry points

for temptation to penetrate. In contrast, we read: "There is no peace for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21). The wicked face temptation as a troubled sea, full of restlessness and storms. They have no peace. God delivers us from such troubles as we guard our heart to keep Christ's word.

Negatively, we guard our heart by mortification. The apostle James indicates that temptations arise from our own lusts (James 1:14). By eliminating them, we destroy the entry points for temptation. Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). To keep close to Christ is to be crucified with Him and to be dead to all the carnal desires of the world. Achan failed to mortify the lusts of his heart. When he saw "a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold," he "coveted them" first, then he "took them" (Joshua 7:21). Sin seduced him. But a mortified heart and a crucified life will preserve us from these things.

Positively, we guard our heart by filling it with better concerns and values. The apostle Paul reckoned the things of the world mere loss and dung (Philippians 3:8). The new is so much better. As we daily taste the gracious goodness of the Lord, all else becomes worthless in comparison. One fills his heart with these better things by maintaining three concerns.

His first concern is *Christ Himself*. The love and presence of Christ always stay with him. He knows Christ is concerned about his honor, and that His plan is to "present him holy, and unblameable, and unreprouvable in his sight" (Colossians 1:22). His Spirit is grieved when this work is interrupted (Ephesians 4:30). Because he knows Christ's intention, he avoids resisting His purposes, expressing contempt for His honor, despising His love, or trampling His gospel into the mud. Dwelling in his heart is the constraining love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14).

His second concern is *Christ's own victories over temptations*. Christ's life on earth included His triumphs over the frequent assaults of the Evil One. He resisted all, He conquered all, and He has become the Captain of salvation to those who obey Him (Heb 2:10). How can any follower of Christ deny the reality of His victory by living as a defeated Christian because of temptation in his life?

His third concern is *approval*. He has learned to enjoy the favor of Christ, to sense His love, to appreciate His acceptance, and to converse with Him. He cannot bear to become separated from Christ, as the spouse declared in Song of Solomon 3:4. Once she recognized Him, in no way would she let Him out of her sight. Never again would she lose His presence.

When a believer keeps the word of Christ's patience, it does not merely influence his concerns. It also affects the governing principles of his life.

First, he lives by faith in God (Gal 2:20). Faith works in all areas of his heart, emptying his soul of its own wisdom, understanding, and self-sufficiency, so that it may act now in the wisdom and fullness of Christ. Proverbs 3:5 gives us sound advice to guard against temptation: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not upon thine own understanding." This is the work of faith: To trust God, and to live in such trust of Him. When a man trusts himself, "his own counsel shall cast him down" (Job 18:7). Only faith empties us of our own self-sufficiency. We should not live to ourselves and by ourselves, but only for Christ, by Christ, and in Christ.

Second, he lives with concern for others. He shows love for God's people by not causing them to stumble over his temptations. David prays in Psalm 69:6, "Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel." In other words, "Do not let me so misbehave that others, for whom I would lay down my life, should be ill spoken of, dishonored, reviled, and condemned because of my own failings." When someone preoccupies himself with the well-being of others, God saves him. In contrast, a self-centered man falls.

If God has promised that He will keep us, why do so many professors of Christianity fall into temptation?

Is it not simply because they do not keep the word of Christ's patience? Because of disobedience, Paul says, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). God chastens all those who fail to keep Christ's Word and neglect to walk closely with Him.

It would take too long to cite all the ways professors of Christianity fail to keep Christ's Word. We can simply summarize four ways they often fail. First, they conform to the world when Christ would redeem us from its delights and promiscuous compliances. Second, they neglect the duties which Christ has enjoined upon us to fulfill, from personal meditation on the one hand to public duties on the other. Third, they strive and disagree among themselves, despising each other and acting indifferent to the bond of communion between saints. Fourth, they make selfishness the end of life. When these traits characterize people, then the word of Christ's patience is fruitless among them, and God will not keep them from temptation.

Final Exhortations

If we want God to preserve us in the hour of temptation, we will take heed against anything that would distract us from keeping the word of Christ's patience. The following cautions will help us.

First, do not trust your own advice, understanding, and reasoning. Second, even if you discipline yourself earnestly (by prayer, fasting, and other such measures) to safeguard against a particular lust, you will still fail if you neglect such other matters as worldliness, compliance, looseness of living, or moral negligence. Third, while it is God's purpose to give the saints security, perseverance, and preservation from general apostasy, yet we must never use this as an excuse to abuse some other aspect of our walk with God. Many relieve their consciences with "cheap grace," only to find their perplexities intensified in other areas of life.

In addition, seek to determine the relevance of God's word to the particular context of your temptations. First, when you encounter the cult of celebrities, observe from His word how God overturns the values of human popularity. Second, consider the ways God sees things differently from the world. If you do so, you will be content to remain unnoticed by the world. Third, notice how God emphasizes faith and prayer. Esteem them better than all the strength and councils of men. Fourth, seek to recover God's ordinances and institutions from the carnal administrations that are under the bondage of men's lusts. Bring them forth in the beauty and power of the Holy Spirit.

The nature of worldliness is to neglect the word of Christ's patience. It slights God's people and judges them by the standards of the world. It relies on human counsel and understanding. It allows unsanctified people to walk in God's temple and to trample His ordinances. In all these ways let us remain watchful. Let us keep the word of Christ's patience if we cherish our safety. In this frame of mind, plead with the Lord Jesus Christ, in the light of His promises, to help you in your need. Approach Him as your merciful High Priest.

If you visited a hospital and asked how each patient fell ill, no doubt each would reply, "It was by this or that circumstance that I contracted the disease." After hearing them, would it not make you much more careful not to fall into their circumstances?

Or if you went to a prison, you might ask different criminals how they received their sentence. Would you not be warned that sin leads to certain judgment? "Can a man take fire into his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt?

Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" (Proverbs 6:27-28). Do we only realize the invincible power of temptation once it captures us? **We conclude with three warnings.**

First, if you ignore temptation, even though our Savior commands us to be vigilant as the only safeguard against it, then remember Peter. Perhaps you have been fortunate so far to escape trouble in spite of your

carelessness. But wake up, and thank God for His gentleness and patience with you.

Second, remember that you are always under the scrutiny of Christ, the great Captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10). He has enjoined us to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation (Matthew 26:41). As He saw the gathering storm, He alerted His disciples with this warning. Does not His reproof grieve you? Or are you unafraid to hear His thunder against you for your neglect? (Revelation 3:2).

Third, realize that if you neglect this duty and then fall into temptation—which assuredly you will do—God may also bring heavy affliction upon you. He may even bring judgment, as evidence of His anger. You will not consider this warning mere empty words when it actually happens to you. Then what woe will betide you if you are not found full of godly sorrow.

Let us keep our spirits unentangled by avoiding all appearance of evil, and all the ways that lead there. Guard yourself especially in your social contacts and your occupations, which all contain pitfalls to entrap us.

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MORTIFICATION OF SIN—A NECESSITY

Erroll Hulse

And every man that has this hope purifies himself—1 John 3:3

My friend, I ask if you are intent on purification of heart and life: If not—you are not a Christian. You are deceiving yourself. I promise you that without holiness no man will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). You ask, what is it to purify oneself? To purify an object one has to remove all that is impure. Romans 8:13 presents this purification in terms of **mortification**.

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live.

The text can be divided as follows:

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|---|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | The work to be done | <i>mortification of indwelling sin</i> |
| 2 | The workers | <i>those who believe</i> |
| 3 | The method employed | <i>through the Holy Spirit</i> |
| 4 | The condition attached | <i>if you keep on mortifying</i> |
| 5 | The promise assured | <i>you will live!</i> |

At the outset we should note that mortification is not an option. It is a necessity. If you do not mortify the misdeeds of the body you will be lost! Many today are tempted to think they can compromise with mortification of sin. They opt to take a middle way. This results either in complete apostasy, and we have observed some take that tragic route, and in others it has resulted in extreme pain like it did with king David. The terrible pain has directed them into the path of mortification they should have taken in the first place.

The Christian life is one of mixed experiences: joy, love, peace, trials of faith, temptation, and sometimes

frustration and grief. Many different spiritual experiences are described in Scripture—especially in the Psalms. Sometimes these experiences run concurrently. Hence Paul out of his own experience declares, 'Beaten and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything' (2 Cor 6:10). It is needful to assert this as it is wrong to think of the Christian life as all temptation and mortification on the one hand or all joy and gladness on the other. When Paul laments, 'Oh wretched man that I am' he is pointing to the reality of remaining sinful trends and it certainly does not mean that he went around in a ludicrous state of being miserable.

With regard to mortification the person who learns how to handle this area of spiritual experience really well: decisively and effectively, will as a result, enjoy peace and comfort.

1 The work to be done—*mortification of indwelling sin*

This work is a killing work (Col 3:5). To kill an animal, say a mammal, is to deprive it of its life so that it no longer has breath and so that there is no possibility of its living again. I remember witnessing the slaughter of a pig in which a long knife was used to pierce its heart. It was a violent affair with great squealing. Our old nature can squeal and squirm when the knife of mortification is plunged into it.

The term body and flesh is sometimes used in the New Testament in a very disparaging way. The KJV and the NJKV and the NASB translate the word *sarx* in Greek as flesh. The NIV translates *sarx* as sinful nature. Both translations have merit. I do not need to sin with my body as is made very clear in Romans 6:15-23. But in order to avoid all sin with my body I must submit it entirely to the service of Christ. And the reason is that remaining sin is dangerous. The acts of the sinful nature (flesh) are obvious says Paul in Galatians 5:19: 'sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.'

Sin is like the poison of a mamba snake. It's exceedingly deadly. It kills. Every sin if permitted will become imperious in its demands and every lust will aim at its maximum expression. Sin is like the Devil its originator. It is limitless in its capacity for evil. No expositor that I know has brought this out more powerfully than John Owen:

'Sin aims always at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, if it has its own way it will go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could, every thought of unbelief would be atheism if allowed to develop. Every rise of lust, if it has its way reaches the height of villainy; it is like the grave that is never satisfied. The deceitfulness of sin is seen in that it is modest in its first proposals but when it prevails it hardens mens' hearts, and brings them to ruin.' Owen quotes Hebrews 3:13 which tells us that sin deceives, 'the deceitfulness of sin!' Remember how sin deceived the Israelites in the wilderness when they hardened their hearts.

Therefore sin must be mortified in its beginnings, in its roots. Success in this business of mortification lies in cutting off the source. This leads to our great peace and happiness.

2 Who is to do this work?—*those who believe*

The work of mortification is intensely personal. It is a work that only you can do and there are no short cuts or easy ways. It can involve pain but there is no other way. Sin is like a tooth which is diseased, has developed abscesses and is beyond repair. It must be extracted if infection is to be avoided.

In recent years there has been a revived interest in the sovereignty of God and the doctrines of God's sovereign grace. These truths serve to strengthen the faith of God's people. However the truth of human responsibility must not be diminished. Everywhere in Scripture there is emphasis on the theme that man will give account of himself. And Christians are called upon to make right decisions. Great doctrinal statements are followed by appeals to duty. We are to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God (Rom 6:11). We are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1). We must engage

in spiritual warfare. We must put on the whole armour of God (Eph 6:12). We must put to death the misdeeds of the body.

Note well that all believers without exception are to engage in this work. 'The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin' (Owen). Note how Paul, the choicest believer, was heartily and actively engaged in this work. Paul declared, 'I beat my body and make it my slave (1 Cor 9:27) (beat: *hupopiazō* meaning to pommel, to treat severely, to strike under the eye so as to make it black and blue. By violent and repeated blows I subdue the flesh to bring it into subjection).

3 The method employed—through the Holy Spirit

Every method put to use to mortify sin which is not by the Holy Spirit is doomed to failure. Every system which attempts to deal with sin without Christ and the Holy Spirit is legalistic and miserable. The Pharisees failed completely. Luther tried the Roman system but became more and more miserable. Owen writes: 'The greatest part of popish religion consists of mistaken means of mortification—their vows, orders, fastings, penances, are all built on this ground; they are for the mortifying of sin. Their preachings, sermons, and books of devotions, they look all this way.'

Owen goes on to explain why these endeavours can never mortify one sin. He shows that they were never appointed of God. He cites the text, 'In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the traditions of men.'

Mortification of sin is Trinity centred and not self-centred. The child of God is motivated by a desire to please his Father and is set on honouring Christ to whom he is joined and from whom he derives his strength. But especially is mortification enabled by the indwelling working and power of the Holy Spirit. The work of mortification is a work of partnership in which we exercise our mind and wills to mortify sin. But we do so through the Holy Spirit who works in us. The Holy Spirit has given us a new heart and mind and has written God's laws on our hearts and inscribed them in our minds. We understand and love that writing and the Holy Spirit enables us by the power of a new affection to drive out that which is alien and opposed to God's mind and will.

The Holy Spirit is depicted in Scripture by emblems: water which fertilises and heals (Ez 47), wind which regenerates (Ez 37), and fire which purifies. The Holy Spirit who is jealous over us burns out the dross like fire burns (Isa 4:4). He is the One who baptises with fire (Mt 3:11).

4 The condition attached —if you keep on mortifying

There is no such thing as completed or perfect holiness in this life. Progress yes! Perfection no! When we have made progress in mortification, further battles will ensue which will be made more clear when I come to expound the question of secret sin and presumptuous sin. As we have seen, sin is deceptive and powerful. Just when we think we have rooted out a sin it can appear in a different form. Sin is insatiable in its desires. The sin of sexual lust lies buried in the flesh and therefore no believer can afford to be careless about the need to mortify that sin.

Mortification of sin takes place in the context of the arena of life. It is intensely practical. It involves daily devotion and watchfulness. Guard your heart with all diligence. Keep your conscience sensitive and alert. Avoid occasions of sin. Remove sources of sin. In terms of watching television this means strict control by way of selective viewing. American and Australian TV is so dominated by adverts and what is puerile that it is virtually useless. Now with channel five in the UK the trend is in that direction. There has been a steady increase in blasphemy, mockery of what is right, crude language, sexual perversity, corruption, violence and crime. With Philippians 4:8 in mind, the best option is make one's own videos and keep a library of valuable documentaries, travel, politics, music, ecology and especially children's programs which are healthy.

5 **The certainty attached** —*you will live!*

Mortification is an essential part of progressive sanctification. It is the negative but a necessity. If handled wisely it is swift and decisive and opens the way for the major work of transformation into the likeness of Christ (Rom 12:1,2). The positive side of progressive sanctification is conformity to Christ and it is this positive work which takes up most of our time. To be in Christ is to be alive! We are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (2 Cor 3:18).

Mortification of sin in the life of the believer leads to freedom. 'So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (Jn 8:36). Eternal life begins with union with Christ. 'I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full' (Jn 10:10). The redeemed are described in revelation in a two-fold way. They did not defile themselves with sin and kept themselves pure. But these are the ones who enjoy the company and the activities of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem and on the new earth and in the new heavens.

Secret sins and presumptuous sins

Mortification of sin involves irreconcilable spiritual warfare: the flesh against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh (Gal 5:17). Sin is not only deceitful, it is variable and subtle in its forms. Always present to some degree is pride. Sin is pervasive. Psalm 19:12,13 refers to hidden or secret sins and wilful or presumptuous sins.

"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins."

Who can understand his errors? Who can truly and rightly assess his sins and understand their roots and ramifications? Who can assess justly the guilt of sin? As we have seen sin is deceitful. Its trend always is to make excuses. Sin's behaviour is to call evil good and good evil, and put darkness for light and light for darkness (Is 5:20).

Cleanse thou me from secret sins. Secret sins are the sins known to us but not known to others. It is clear that nothing is hidden from God. 'For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths' (Prov 5:21). The Psalmist declares, 'You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar' (Ps 139:2). Ezekiel was shown the detestable practices carried on in darkness in the Temple in Jerusalem. This was supposed to be secret but it was seen by the Lord who saw fit to share what was going on with Ezekiel (Ez ch 8). The public expects a good example from religious leaders who profess to be righteous. When they are exposed for scandalous sin, that disgraces the cause the religious leaders stand for.

Sedgwick uses the illustration of a fire in the chimney. Though you do not see it yet it burns. Secret sins are dangerous because they make the way for open sin as James says, 'For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death (James 1:13-15).

Sedgwick suggests that secret sins are more likely to deceive us because often we make light of secret sin. He suggests that sin can be likened to the roots of a tree. The life of the tree is in its roots. The axe has to be laid to the root of the tree. To hate a man in our hearts is secret and nobody can observe that, but if you were to set out to kill that man it would become a public matter and a notorious sin condemned by the world.

A constraining motive to be rid of secret sin is that such sin nurtured will destroy my life of prayer, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me' (Ps 66:18 KJV). Appropriate therefore is the prayer, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting' (Ps 139:23,24).

A further motive to mortify secret sin is that secret sins will be judged as well as visible and public sins,

'For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil' (Ecc 12:14). Joseph lived in God's presence and therefore was able to say to Potiphar's wife, 'How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?' (Gen 39:9).

To be cleansed from secret sins is not only to be forgiven those sins but to cure them, to be rid of them.

Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins. Presumptuous sins are sins which arise out of pride and lead to presumption. This is illustrated by King Uzziah of whom we read, 'But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered into the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.' Clearly this was a work confined strictly to the priesthood and although he was the King, Uzziah was trespassing on holy ground. The priests did their best to restrain King Uzziah, but it was too late for he was struck with leprosy immediately.

Apostasy is a sin of presumption. It is a very deliberate sin which keeps on sinning in spite of knowing the truth. It is a terrible sin to treat as unholy the blood of the covenant. For a person to turn back from his testimony is being entangled in his sins, and to be overcome in that state is worse for that poor soul than the beginning (2 Pet 2:20).

The glory of Christ in taking away our sins

The sheer magnitude of what was involved to come into this world and conquer sin for us was daunting to Christ. We see that in his words in the garden of Gethsemane, 'Father if it is possible let this cup pass from me.' Such was the perfection of his active obedience in his life and passive obedience in his atoning propitiatory death that the vastness of his glorious achievement can be summed up in these words: 'By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy' (Heb 10:14).

No celestial being could have done what Jesus did. The finality and glory of his accomplishment is expressed in the words 'he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven'. There is no more atoning work to be done. When he cried on the Cross, 'It is finished' it was indeed the end of his suffering. It is his unique achievement that we remember at the Lord's table. Because of his humility even to the death of the Cross, the Father has exalted Him to the highest place and has given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. The name Jesus points especially to his human nature. It is a man, one man, the last Adam, who has accomplished this stupendous work of deliverance from the guilt and power and ultimately from the presence of sin.

Human accomplishments fade into insignificance in comparison with this extraordinary work of salvation. And to think that he did it not for friends but for sinners who hated him. 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: 'While we were still sinners Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8).

The highest praise in the coming new world is the song of acclamation, 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!' To him be glory forever and ever!

Taken from: *Reformation Today* article: "The Puritan Doctrine of Sin."

