

DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE WORD TEMPTATION

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth He any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust [desire], and enticed." – James 1:13,14.

MANY people – and particularly those of oriental countries – have within them a fatalistic tendency; as, for instance, the Mohammedans would be inclined to say respecting any calamity that came upon them, "It is of God," and simply to submit themselves and make no further effort. These people would be inclined to have a similar attitude in respect to sin, and to say, "It is God's will that I should do wrong; and I am not, therefore, blameworthy. If His will is that I should sin, I will sin. If His will is that I should bear the marks of sin, I will bear the marks of sin." This is a grave error. God tempts no man to sin.

It is, of course, quite proper that we should recognize God's hand in His dealings with us and should be very submissive. But the Apostle points out that temptations are not of God, but of one's self. Many Christians are inclined to take the opposite standpoint to that of the Orientals and say, "There are no temptations from God; hence all our temptations are from the Adversary."

But the Apostle James points out that our temptations are the result of our own natural desires and weaknesses. These are stimulated from without – often from our companions and associates in life. All about us there are examples and influences toward evil, in various forms – enticements. These might be charged back primarily to Satan; for all sin entered into the world by him. Satan had to do with the beguilement of our first parents, and so had to do with the introduction of sin. And Satan and his demon hosts now operate, as far as possible, in conjunction with

our weaknesses. But this does not clear us of personal responsibility; for none of these have power to coerce our wills. Our responsibility may vary according to the natural strength or weakness of our character. Therefore we are to "judge nothing before the time." It is a matter that God alone can fully judge – as to how much one can overcome.

God's people are to realize, then, that no temptation is of God; and, resisting temptation, they will be on God's side. They are to be overcomers of temptation, resisters of temptation, whether from within, or from the Adversary, or from the weaknesses of others, which might lead them into sin, into things contrary to God's will.

The Apostle says that God tempteth no man. If we should think of God as tempting us to sin, it would be a horrible thought; for by reason of His power, none could resist what He brought to bear upon us, and we would surely be overcome. But when we know that our temptations are *not* from God, we know that He will help us and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear; but that He will, with every temptation, provide a way of escape. He will protect us according to His promise, as we need protection and assistance. With this thought in our minds, we can be strong.

HOW GOD TEMPTED ABRAHAM

When we look back to the Old Testament, we read that "God did tempt Abraham," saying, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest,...and offer him for a burnt offering." The question arises, How shall we reconcile this statement, "God did tempt Abraham," with the statement of the Apostle that God "tempteth no man"? The reply is that St. James in our text is limiting the word temptation to temptations to evil. God tempts us to *do good*. He sets before us the "exceeding great and precious promises," the wonderful **[R5702 : page 171]** promises He has made to us. They act as magnets drawing us, as we might say. In

this sense of the word we are tempted of God. But God does not tempt us to do evil, to commit sin. God tempted Abraham, tested him, not with a view to do him harm, but with a view to doing him good; and because Abraham stood the test, God could accord to him the greater blessings. And He did so! He gave him great blessings in this life, as well as a promise of greater blessings to be his in the life to come, in the resurrection.

The test for Abraham was that he should offer in sacrifice his son Isaac, in whom centered all the promises. By his prompt obedience Abraham gave proof of his loyalty. He accounted that God was able even to raise his son from the dead, that the promises might be fulfilled. (Hebrews 11:18,19.) When his loyalty had thus been tested to the limit, when the knife was raised to slay his son, the Lord through the angel stayed his hand and provided him with a ram for a sacrifice.

WHY GOD CANNOT BE TEMPTED TO EVIL

The further statement of our text is that God cannot Himself be tempted with evil. We inquire how this is. We remember that our Lord Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners"; but that He "was in all points tempted like as we [His disciples] are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 7:26; 4:15.) If Jesus was thus holy, and fully in accord with the Father, and the Father cannot be tempted, how could Jesus be tempted? We answer, Our Lord was perfect in the flesh, perfect as a human being. But humanity has its limitations of knowledge and of endurance. The human brain and the human body are not adapted to know everything or to bear everything. This is one reason why God does not tell us everything. We must walk by faith. The man who is begotten of the Holy Spirit, and who is able to understand many of the deep things of God, cannot appreciate *all* of the eternal things; for they are beyond his grasp.

We might take, for illustration, a dog, a very wise dog, capable of carrying out our directions to a considerable extent. Yet if we should try to talk to the dog about trigonometry, or higher mathematics in any form, or about astronomy, he would be – we could not say *bewildered*, but – unable to understand *at all*. And so between humanity and God there is a wide gulf. It is [R5702 : page 172] not possible for humanity to grasp all the parts, all the details, of the Divine Plan. Even with the begetting of the Holy Spirit we see things "through a glass darkly," and not face to face, the Apostle tells us. We shall, when perfected on the Divine plane, behold things fully, completely; we shall see from God's standpoint.

OUR LORD'S TEMPTATION

So our Lord Jesus, naturally perfect as a man, at baptism was begotten of the Holy Spirit and became a New Creature; but that New Creature lived in and operated through the human body; and as long as He was in the flesh, Jesus was subject to limitations. He was also surrounded by imperfect beings, their desires, their views, their imperfections. In order to sacrifice the earthly interests, then, He would need much faith. Therefore, He had severe trials of obedience to God, of faith in God. He was not tempted because of sin or weakness; for he had neither sin nor weakness. He was not tempted in the same respects as a natural man would be; for He was not like a natural man – He was spirit-begotten. He was tempted in respect to His obedience to God, in respect to trust in the Father's providential care. And we are tempted in like manner, for our development, that we may faithfully lay down our lives, may gladly give up the things that are seen, that we may attain to the things not seen.

In respect to strength and knowledge, our Lord as a man was evidently different from the Father. The Father could always know at once the good from the evil, and is not weak in any sense of the

word – to be tempted by anything – is strong to carry out His own will, having no inclination whatever to sin, but a repugnance to it. Infinite strength dwells in God. Because our Lord Jesus assumed the same attitude toward sin, we read of Him: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9.) All of the brethren of the Lord Jesus must take the same stand everywhere regarding sin, and especially sin in ourselves, and the tendency toward sin in us. A continual battle is going on in the Lord's disciples as they endeavor to follow His example.

So then, God tempts no man, neither is He tempted of any, to sin. He cannot be tempted of evil. Evil can have no influence with Him. Our Lord Jesus is now in that condition where He cannot be tempted. He is of the Divine nature, and perfect in power. And so when we shall have reached this same condition by the resurrection "change," we shall likewise not be subject to evil or temptation. We shall have perfect power, and shall be in full accord with that which is right, that which is of God.

