

# Uses of Temptation

by Harmon A. Baldwin

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*The sermon emphasizes that temptations and trials are essential for spiritual growth and holiness, teaching believers to embrace them with joy and faith.*

**Scripture:** Romans 5:3, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 12:5, James 1:2, 1 Peter 5:10

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Temptation And Trials"

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## Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about the benefits of temptations and trials in the journey towards holiness. He emphasizes that temptations humble, purify, and instruct individuals, leading them to become partakers of God's holiness. Baldwin refutes the idea of obtaining holiness through sufferings but acknowledges that pains and trials, when accepted with a surrendered heart to God's will, can lead to spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of God's love and power.

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## Transcript

"Temptations," says Thomas à Kempis,

are often very profitable to men though they may be troublesome and grievous: for in them a man is humbled, purified, and instructed. All the saints have passed through and profited by many tribulations: and they that could not bear temptations became reprobates and fell away.

We have already mentioned some of the temptations and trials that come to those who are seeking holiness, but these were along one line only, and did not include the thousands of tests that come to the soul as a result of its being saved, and which have nothing to do, directly, with holiness. Thank God, however, that since these "offenses must come," it is possible to make even these things "work for us," and that to the end that we may become "partakers of his holiness." The writer is radically opposed to the teaching that we must obtain holiness through sufferings, or bodily pain, as taught by Madam Guyon and other mystics of the middle ages, yet it must be admitted that the pains and trials with which we are beset are permitted for our good, and for our furtherance in the way of holiness. St. Paul says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

Self-inflicted pains, penances and flagellations are relics of heathenism, and have more of a tendency to bolster up the soul in its self-righteousness than to humble it; but the pains and afflictions providentially received while in the true way we are stretching after God, are beneficial, and tend to humble the soul and lead Godward. Of course, the benefit of these things is conditioned on the way the soul behaves itself in

the midst of them. For if one sets to complaining, and endeavoring to fight against them in his own strength, much or all of the intended benefit will be lost; but if he abandons all to the will of God, and, to the best of his ability, rejoices that he is counted worthy not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake (Phil. 1: 29), he will come out better than if he had been constantly blest. But it is hard for one in whom the carnal nature still remains to see that "all things," even temptations, "work together for good." God is so good, however, that he will not allow an honest soul to settle down in ease and carnal security, and so he keeps it constantly on the move, hurrying it from one furnace to another, heating the last hotter than the first, giving it that amount of suffering that will the best temper it and make it to "know him and the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10).

The following from Madam Guyon, referring specially to a person seeking holiness, or entire sanctification, is rather strong, but has in it much food for careful thought:

The more God loves a soul and designs it for great things, the more he pushes it forward without mercy and without giving it a moment of rest: it finds no rest of spirit nor the least thing in the world to depend upon. There are only precipices, unfathomable depths, and assurances of total loss; so that the more the soul desires to rest, the less it finds to rest upon -- filled as it is with the strangest bitterness.

The following also from Benjamin Pomeroy, one of the last of the Methodist giants, is to the point and will be better understood:

But in later years I have been made to rejoice in prospective good, foretokened in these sore trials; and even at times have been happy in misery when the Spirit made me miserable or even permitted it, as that was a sign of God's hope for me, and that some higher and nobler purpose was yet to be wrought out in and through me; and if I could but survive the crucible, he would prepare me not only for more glorious revelations of the unseen and heavenly, but through these terrible prostrations and humiliations I should be so prepared that the abundant revelations should not exalt me above measure; that while honored with the reflection of Christ's glory, I might not be tempted to call it my own, or attribute the chief grace of God in me to hereditary or acquired gifts.

We would here also add the following from Fletcher:

Our Lord 'was made a perfect Savior through sufferings,' and we may be made perfect Christians in the same manner. We may be called to suffer, till all that which we have brought out of spiritual Egypt is consumed in a howling wilderness, in a dismal Gethsemane, or on a shameful Calvary. Should this lot be reserved for us, let us not imitate our Lord's imperfect disciples, who 'forsook him and fled;' but let us stand the fiery trial, till all our fetters are melted, and all our dross is purged away. Fire is of a purgative nature: it separates the dross from the gold; and the fiercer it is the more quick and powerful its operation. \* \* \* \* Therefore if the Lord should suffer the best men in his camp, or the strongest men in Satan's army, to cast you into a furnace of fiery temptations, come not out of it till you are called. 'Let patience have her perfect work:' meekly keep your trying station till your heart is disengaged from all that is earthly, and till the sense of God's preserving power kindles in you such a faith in his omnipotent love as few experimentally know but they who have seen themselves, like the mysterious bush in Horeb, burning and yet unconsumed; or they who can say with St. Paul, 'We are killed all the day long -- dying and behold we live.'

Should thy conflicts be 'with confused noise, with burning and fuel of fire;' should thy 'Jerusalem be rebuilt in troublesome times;' should 'deep call unto deep at the noise of his water-spouts;' should the Lord 'shake not the earth only, but also heaven;' should all his waves and billows go over thee; should thy patience be

tried to the uttermost; remember how in years past thou hast tried the patience of God; be not discouraged: an extremity and a storm are often God's opportunity. A blast of temptation and a shaking of all thy foundations may introduce the fullness of God to thy soul, and answer the end of the rushing wind, and of the shaking, which formerly accompanied the first great manifestations of the Spirit. The Jews still expect the coming of the Messiah in the flesh, and they particularly expect it in a storm. When lightnings flash, when thunders roar, when a strong wind shakes their houses, and the tempestuous sky seems to rush down in thunder showers; then some of them particularly open their doors and windows to entertain their wished-for Deliverer. Do spiritually what they do carnally. Constantly wait for full 'power from on high;' but especially when a storm of affliction, temptation, or distress overtakes thee; or when thy convictions and desires raise thee above thyself, as the waters of the flood raised Noah's ark above the earth; then be particularly careful to throw the door of faith, and the window of hope as wide open as thou canst; and, spreading the arms of thy imperfect love, say with all the ardor and resignation which thou art master of, --

'My heartstrings groan with deep complaint,

My flesh lies panting, Lord, for thee;

And every limb, and every joint,

Stretches for perfect purity.'

Let us now examine a few passages that speak of temptations, trials, etc., and notice the close connection between these things and holiness. They bring forcibly to our minds the fact that all things can be made to work for our good.

1. Chastening. The chastening of the Lord is given when some word has been spoken or some spirit either manifested or apparently manifested which was contrary to the love of God, or the rules of Christian propriety. It is directly given by God and causes the soul to feel reprov'd and humbled, if properly accepted. It is a blessed thing to live where we can hear the reprov'ing voice of God and feel the fatherly stroke of his chastening rod. Comparatively few live in such a place. Paul says (Heb. 12: 5, etc.), "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons. \* \* \* \* For they [our earthly fathers] verily for a few days chasteneth us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The connection between holiness and chastening is here seen at a glance. The object God has in view in his chastenings is "that we might be partakers of his holiness." His reproofs constantly and faithfully administered, point out to us the numerous places in our lives where we can improve, leaving off the wrong and taking on the right; they point out the inward tendencies to sin, if any remain; they often cause pain, but in this the Lord only shows his earnest desire that we shall be like him.

2. Tribulation. Paul says (Rom. 5: 3-5); "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Here the first step in the ladder is "tribulation," and the last is the "love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." This in its fullness is the experience they received at Pentecost. Tribulations are hard to bear, but if the soul resigns itself without reserve to be led by God, the end of such faith will be entire cleansing. So when

tribulation comes decide that God has something in view for you that he cannot give in any other way, and be patient under the test. This will naturally beget a deeper experience; and as experience increases, hope naturally bounds heavenward and takes away all shame; for the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

3. Temptations and trials. James says (Jas. 1: 2, 3): "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall [not run] into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." He does not say that temptations are joy, but that we should "count it all joy" when they come, put that much in the joy column, because they are for our good. They try our faith; this trial of faith works patience; and when "patience has her perfect work" the soul is "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." The first round of this ladder is "divers temptations," and the last is perfection -- "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Then never complain again at your lot; but, when you are tempted, look ahead for the excellent glory which God will reveal in you, after the temptation is passed, and rejoice.

4. Sufferings. Peter says (1 Pet 5:10): "But the God of all grace, who hath called you unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." Here is a ladder with five rounds. The first is suffering-"after ye have suffered a while," and the second is perfection -- "make you perfect;" then follow three steps upward in this glorious experience -- "stablish, strengthen, settle you." Almost any one who desires God at all would be willing to take the second and other upward steps, but most will naturally shrink from the first. We must take the first step of a journey, however, before we can take the second. Note the five steps of the ladder: (1) Suffering, (2) perfection, (3) establishment, (4) strengthening, (5) settling. In writing to the Hebrews the author of the epistle, under the figure of Christ's sufferings, taught this same thing, and clearly shows what these sufferings are. "Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. The sufferings then are the reproaches of Christ, which Moses counted "greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Again he says: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2: 10, 11). Here it is clear that they "are all of one" from the fact that they all endure sufferings; and since his sanctified ones endure sufferings "with him," "he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Who is willing to take this way with the "Captain of our salvation"?

5. Infirmities. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." It is comparatively easy to see how the other things may help us, but how can our infirmities be of any avail in helping us on to God? When we see our weakness, and the inability within ourselves to accomplish anything aright, it drives us to our only refuge, the cross of Christ: so through the discovery of our weakness his "strength is made perfect" in us, and "the power of Christ rests" upon us. There are three steps in the above passage: (1) Weakness, or infirmities; (2) sufficient grace, (3) God's "strength made perfect." His perfect strength is displayed in us in perfect pardon and perfect cleansing, which is perfect victory over and deliverance from sin, inward and outward. This is holiness.

Since it is written, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God," let us thank God that "in all these things" we may be "more than conquerors," and that "none of these things shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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