

Holiness and Temptation

by Lewis T. Corlett

The sermon emphasizes the importance of heart holiness in preparing Christians to live victoriously in the midst of temptation and adversity, and provides practical advice on how to resist temptation and walk by faith.

Scripture: James 1:13

Topics: "Heart Holiness", "Resisting Temptation"

Description

Lewis T. Corlett preaches on the significance of heart holiness in preparing Christians for life, death, and entering God's presence, restoring normal relationships as intended by God. He emphasizes that temptation is a common experience for all individuals, including Christians, and explains the process of temptation and how it becomes sin. Corlett delves into the importance of holiness in meeting the challenges of temptation, highlighting the role of divine love in strengthening legitimate desires and resisting temptation.

Transcript

Heart holiness primarily prepares the Christian to live. It likewise provides the necessary requisites for death and the essential preparation to enter into the realm of God's immediate presence. It does not place an individual either in an abnormal or a subnormal relationship to the conflicts of life. More properly it could be said to bring an individual out of the subnormal or abnormal into the normal realm in which God intended man to live. Sin has brought an abnormality into life, but grace restores normal relationships. The experience of heart purity gives the foundation and strength for the Christian to join with the Apostle Paul in saying, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39). Christian experience gives the basis for successful living in the midst of life's conflicts and in spite of unfavorable circumstances and unpleasant associations.

Temptation Comes To All Men

One of the problems of Christian living is the proper understanding of temptation. Many young people especially, have become discouraged and despondent because they did not understand enough about temptation to realize that the Christians would have to face temptation. In fact, all men are tempted. Sinners receive just as strong temptations as do the people who have the Lord. Many times the one who

is not a Christian does not recognize temptation because he is yielding to it and going with the tide. The Christian is going against the tide and refusing to yield to temptation; so at times he becomes more conscious of the ordinary battles of life.

God placed man in this world as a free moral agent. This gives him the power of choice, which can be exercised in a variety of realms. In order to be fair to man God had to put him into a world where he could exercise this power of choice; but, if He created him with the power of choice, He must also make him responsible for his choices. Thus man was created in what is called a state of probation, where God gave him circumstances and environment in which he could exercise this power of choice. He will be in this state of probation as long as he lives in this world. No one will be exempt from temptation until he leaves the realm of mortal life; so the individual Christian must not think that he is an exception because he battles with temptation. That is the normal life under God's program and plan for man. God allowed temptations because of their beneficial effect. Man could not become what he ought to be unless he was tested and tried and forced to make continued choices for the right and for God. Temptation is one of God's arranged plans to bring man closer to himself. As man refuses to yield, he at the same time renews his choices in favor of the divine purpose and program.

What Is Temptation?

Temptation is primarily solicitation to evil. Generally it is a suggestion to satisfy legitimate desires in a wrong manner. This is where the enemy of man's soul often confuses him as he works upon the normal appetites and passions of man, awakening and arousing them and then suggesting that they should be satisfied in an illegitimate manner. Another phase of the temptation is a suggestion to choose the self-life with its ambitions and desires as against God. Satan does not care how he gets a good person. He is satisfied if he can draw the Christians attention to himself and bring about conflict between the self-life and God. This is primarily the field in which are located the majority of temptations of the sanctified.

Temptation is always accompanied by a desire to follow the suggestion. First in the process the attention is drawn either to a mental contemplation or to an object outside of man. If that attention is centered on either one, a legitimate desire is aroused for that object. The suggestion is made from the tempter that it would be advantageous to enjoy the situation. The next step is the suggestion of how to obtain this end. Then the will is attacked, and the individual must make a decision as to whether or not the suggestion for satisfaction in an illegitimate manner will be carried out. The desire will at times be very strong and it may last for a period of time, but the guilt and condemnation do not come to an individual because of the desire. Temptation has not become sin simply because desire has been awakened. Temptation becomes sin only when the will decides in favor of the suggestion of the tempter. At times the battle is intense, and the child of God is perplexed because of the intensity of the desire and the length of the conflict; but, as long as the will is held steady in alignment with the will of God and against the suggestion to evil, the individual has not sinned. The poet brought this out very clearly with the suggestion also of a means of deliverance.

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin; Each vict'ry will help you some other to win; Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue; Look ever to Jesus, He'll carry you through.

Temptation becomes evil only when the will yields to the solicitation made by the enemy of man's soul, agreeing to it and planning to carry out the suggestion if proper circumstances should arise.

Holiness Meets The Need In Temptation

The entire plan of God has been arranged by divine wisdom to provide the ways and means whereby every member of the human race could live victoriously in the midst of any and all kinds of evil associations and surroundings. In order for God to begin a work of salvation in man's heart, man had to consider himself, his sins, his future in relationship to God. He settled it that he would swear allegiance to God and placed Him as the standard in all things. When he became sanctified this decision was intensified as he surrendered the claims of all his self-life to the claims of the Master. Both of these decisions gave to man a settled, determinative purpose to keep God as the standard and criterion for life. As the One who is to be pleased, He is the One to be followed; He is the One to give direction. Thus the attention of the Christian is centered in God and directed to His will and purpose with a strong yearning of his being to be ever pleasing in His sight. This provides a foundation upon which man may meet temptation.

The first step in temptation is getting the attention of the Christian. When the sanctified man's attention is centered upon God, his ideals are regulated by the divine standard, his goals are lost in divine objectives. Consequently, when his attention is directed to some legitimate matter, he looks at this in a true light; for, while the tempter is endeavoring to get him to see things for personal satisfaction, his experience with God keeps uppermost the standards and ideals received from God and also brings him constantly face-to-face with his settled purpose to please God. This will offset much of the strength of temptation once the child of God becomes conscious of what is taking place. Even when the temptation unconsciously gets the attention of the Christian, this overshadowing of the divine program colors the mind of the individual as he judges the thing that is brought up for consideration. Holiness with its ideals and standards and its experience enables an individual to have a reserve and a momentum for good, as well as a foundation, which are very advantageous and beneficial in the hour of temptation.

The second step in temptation is the arousing or awakening of desire. Man cannot be brought to a point of decision unless his emotions are aroused and aligned with the suggestion, as was pointed out in the former paragraph. This desire is not sinful, and yet it strengthens the power of the tempter as the desires are awakened. Holiness provides a very splendid defensive armor for this awakening of the desire in the mind of the Christian.

Holiness is more than emotion, and yet it is partly emotion. Holiness does more than work on the desires of man, and yet it does shape and strengthen legitimate desires. The essence of God is love; this essence of His nature is given to man in regeneration when "the love of God is shed abroad" in his heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto him. In sanctification this love takes full possession of man's heart and is intensified in the unity and harmony of man's moral nature with the divine. This love generates desires in the motive life of man which can be satisfied only in fellowship and companionship with the Spirit of God. The strong desire of this love in the human heart is always to please the One who is the object of the love, which is Jesus Christ the Lord. This strong affection is one of God's means of offsetting the desires which are awakened in temptation. The primary craving of man's redeemed nature is to please the One who has given him these great benefits. Thus, when a desire is awakened by the tempter for satisfaction on a lower plane, the Christian weighs this new desire against the predominating emotion and affection, which is this love for God. As this new desire is considered in the light of this controlling emotion, the lesser desire renounces its power as the stronger one becomes the controlling element in the moment of conflict.

The third step in the process of temptation is the attack upon the will. Many times this comes in so subtle a manner that the Christian gives consideration to the matter before he is conscious of the deceitfulness in the suggestion of the tempter; but he has already set up a criterion in his life by which his decisions of will are to be reached. In the first work of grace he turned his back upon the claims of Satan upon his life and

swore allegiance to the God of the skies. This implied and included that all decisions of will would be made in harmony with the divine will. Then in the process of being sanctified he brought his entire redeemed being with its powers, abilities, and possessions into complete alignment with divine purpose, cutting loose from all the claims of self and the ambitions for personal development and advancement for selfish gains. He placed his self-life on the altar for sacrifice or service according to divine direction. Thus from the point of allegiance and devotion the will of man has vowed and pledged complete obedience to the divine purpose and plan, so that when the suggestions are brought to the will for satisfaction of self the will has already made a settled conclusion that they must first be considered in the white light of the divine standards. As this comparison is continued day by day, the will is strengthened as it continues to choose in accordance with the great, settled choices that were made in the past. The will is strengthened, resistance to temptation is developed, the tempter is defeated, and the child of God rejoices in victory that is brought about

Temptations Of The Sanctified

Special consideration should be given to some of the suggestions of the enemy which constitute the temptations to the people who are sanctified. There comes a period in the life of every child of God when the enemy of his soul recognizes that it is useless to suggest that he turn aside from following God and engage in outbroken sin. When he knows that the purposes, affections, determinations of the soul are to follow God, he then attacks him in a more subtle manner than necessary with those he tempts to outbroken sin. One of the ways in which he approaches the individual is to get him self-centered under the guise of religion. This may take many forms. It may be the development of an oversensitive conscience regarding personal decisions and appearances. The tempter keeps the attention of the believer upon himself, so that he wonders constantly whether he is doing everything that he ought to do. He wonders whether other people think he is sanctified or whether he is setting the right example for others. He tries to do everything everyone suggests and ends in confusion and bewilderment. Even though the enemy does not cause this child of God to backslide, his usefulness in the kingdom of God is lessened because he has become so conscious of self that he is afraid to do anything for the kingdom of God lest he do it improperly. He goes about constantly with his finger on his spiritual pulse, wondering whether he has the blessing or not. Every time a preacher gives a close message, he goes to the altar to be certain that everything is fixed up with God. Satan has won a victory by making this child of God a liability to the church instead of a soldier in the army of the Lord. This person may make it home to heaven because God looks upon the heart and realizes the struggle in the soul; yet how much better it would have been for the sanctified believer to keep his gaze upon God and be ready for sacrifice or service to advance His kingdom!

Another form of temptation suggested by the enemy of man's soul is that the sanctified person should sit upon the judgment seat and adopt the "holier than thou" attitude. It may not be recognized as this, but judgment is passed upon others who fail to meet his standards. Thus the tempter gets an individual to be a judge of his fellowman under the guise of religion and an effort to hold up a standard. This brings confusion and often bitterness of spirit among the children of God, which breaks confidence and weakens the unity of the group in spite of its being done under the guise of intense religion. The enemy again has conquered; and, if the individual is not very careful, there will be harshness of spirit and mind which will be detrimental to the kingdom of God and may end in the damnation of the individual yielding to this temptation.

Another form of temptation that the enemy may suggest to a sanctified person is to get him to develop an attitude of self-pity. This may also be done under the guise of religion as the person's attention is directed toward the price that has been paid to get saved or sanctified. He may also give in to the suggestion that his lot in life with its battles, its conflicts, adversities, or afflictions is worse than anyone else has to endure. He fixes his attention upon the suffering and endurance that the child of God must go through, and his mind is taken away from God and unconsciously placed upon the self-life. This attitude is detrimental and will weaken the Christian no matter how it may come about. The individual unconsciously becomes self-centered in feeling sorry for himself, and the power and glory of God are offset in his life by the yielding to the claims of self-pity.

Temptations Vary According To Age Of The Person

With advancing age things which once caused a battle cease to be troublesome because of victories over temptations and the changes due to increasing age. For instance, it isn't likely that an elderly person handicapped by rheumatism would have a very strong temptation for the dance floor, while some young person might be bothered with that. On the other hand, the older person will be tempted to think that the younger generation is not as good as the young people were in the earlier years of his life. The young people are tempted to feel as if the old people do not understand or care. But all should consider that every person has about all the temptations he can handle, for the devil is no respecter of persons. He will see to it that every individual is tested and tempted from every angle possible. Each one, regardless of age, should earnestly try to encourage others in the hour of temptation rather than to condemn them.

Victory Over Temptation

Every man can have victory over every temptation. God desires this and has provided every means necessary for man to have it. A few suggestions may help the Christian in gaining victory over temptation. First, temptations do not come from God. James says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (Jas. 1:13). God does not give the temptation, but He allows the temptation or permits the tempter to make his onslaught against man's soul. The child of God should remember that God is not endeavoring to trip him up but is allowing these things to come into the life that will be beneficial if His child will react properly to them. Paul in writing to the Corinthians states, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." This indicates that God understands the strength of every temptation the enemy may bring against His children. He knows how much they can stand. He understands their frailties and is acquainted with their weaknesses, and does not allow the tempter to bring anything to bear upon His children which they could not endure.

These provisions should be kept uppermost in the mind of the Christian. God is a loving, tender Heavenly Father who is controlling the tempter in his approaches and attacks upon His children. God is behind all, working for each person's greatest development. He knows that His children cannot reach that state of highest development unless they suffer temptations, and He allows those temptations to come in the way that will bring the greatest development. A Christian may understand this after he has gone through the temptation even though he questioned it when he was struggling with it. He must remember that God is all-wise and in His wisdom and power is controlling all things. He must join with the Apostle Paul and say, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

With this consciousness that God is controlling, man must also have the knowledge that God has already provided a way to escape. The Apostle Paul states this, "But with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). God not only does not allow stronger temptations to come than a Christian can face, but He also provides a way whereby His children can escape from temptation. The way of escape may not always be evident; but if His child will trust in Him and hold steady, victory will come. The way out will be seen. God's plan will be discerned, and the sense of joy and victory will be greater than anyone could contemplate. The Holy Spirit is God's Executive in the world, and He is guiding the individual into all truth. He is allowing those things to come to the individual's life which will increase his appreciation of both the character and the wisdom of God. The Spirit of God is an active Partner in victorious Christian living, and, regardless of how dark the hour, how strenuous the temptation, or how fierce the conflict, He will not forsake. He will stand by and guide to victory.

Another aid to victory over temptation is learning to walk by faith in the Christian life. The more the individual Christian is susceptible to living by feelings, the more easily the tempter finds ways to confuse him. Feelings vary; emotions at times are fickle. Outward circumstances or inward moods may bring feelings which are not, on the surface, conducive to Christian victory. The child of God must recognize that his Heavenly Father is always consistent; He never changes. Finite man is subject to moods and emotions, but God is the same at all times. As this consciousness deepens in the thinking of man, his confidence and assurance before God becomes more stable, his faith is steadier, his life is enriched, and he begins to comprehend with the Apostle Paul the beautiful thought expressed: "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:15-18). He learns to walk by faith, depending upon the guidance of the Spirit; and in doing so he learns to give the benefit of the doubt to others and to leave externals in the hands of God. Thus he removes himself from temptations of questioning others or perplexity regarding circumstances which come. He knows his God is over all, that his God is interested in him, and that He will provide victory as faith is maintained.

Holiness provides the foundation for victory over temptation, gives the motives which are necessary for the quickening of right desires, and gives man the conscious, abiding fellowship and guidance of the Spirit of God, who will lead to glorious victory each one who trusts in Him.

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