

LESSON SEVEN WHEN I AM TEMPTED

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." (James 1:12)

The spiritual warfare within you will continue for as long as your body has the breath of life. On this "spiritual battlefield" you will be called upon to evaluate the circumstances, develop alternatives, and make decisions. This very process of reasoning demonstrates the freedom of your will and the personal and individual responsibility associated with that freedom. You will be tempted in many ways, this fact must be accepted: no one is without temptation. Unless you honestly and sincerely recognize that temptation will assuredly come to you, you cannot conscientiously prepare yourself to cope with it. Temptation is an "IN BEING" reality as you will see in just a moment. For this reason, this lesson is entitled "When I Am Tempted" rather than "IF" I am tempted.

This is a very vital subject at this time, for the devil (the adversary) has taken a new interest in you since you have become a new child of God.

THE BATTLE CAN BE WON

As you must accept the fact that temptation will come your way, you must also recognize that there is a way to resist and win through Christ the battle for your soul. We, as Christians, have been promised that with each temptation there will be provided a safe route to follow. The promise of victory goes even further to protect us from overbearing temptation, that is, temptation beyond our ability to resist. The task for the Christian then is to develop the will and master the technique revealed in God's word that will enable him to overcome temptation that could lead him back into darkness and a life of sin.

"Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor. 10:12,13)

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE

The first basic step is overcoming temptation that exists in our daily lives is to avoid it when possible. As Paul says, "Neither give place to the devil." (Eph. 4:27) This obvious first step may seem too simple to consider seriously, for due to its simplicity it is seldom considered and used. All too often we see the potential danger but feel we are completely capable of handling the situation and allow ourselves to be drawn in where we would really prefer not to be. So as Christ worded his model prayer: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" we have the first principle in dealing with temptation - AVOIDANCE.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God, RESIST the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." (James 4:7,8)

DRAW NEAR TO GOD

The world in which we live and our relationship to it are real. This relationship is necessary lest we draw into complete isolation, an act which in itself would deny God's power for us to prevail. Notice our first principle was avoidance when possible, not complete withdrawal from life. So as a non-swimmer must find help in crossing a river, we too must find assistance from a source greater than ourselves, that being our heavenly Father. Peter recorded: "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation" (2 Pet. 2:9); and the Psalmist David said, "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber... The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul." (Psa. 121:2,3,7)

Therefore,

"Be strong and of a good courage, be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1:9)

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE

Two factors are to be considered in discussing the next principle of overcoming temptation and these are TIME and RESULTS. (These two factors combine in the principle ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCE.)

In considering time, we have Past, Present, and Future. In considering results we have Constructive, Destructive, and Indifferent. Under any given circumstances, honest application of these simple factors will provide valid guidance for one who is following Christ. For example, when you are invited to participate in some kind of activity ask yourself, "If I do this what will be the benefits? the results? the rewards? Will they be confined to the immediate present or will they be of value in the future? Is there any similar experience in the past which bears on this activity?" In this process you are examining the activity primarily as it relates to time. Now consider the results. "If I accept and participate in this, will it be constructive and edifying? To whom? Is there any possibility that it will hurt my influence or cause someone to be offended in Christ?" Here you are examining the consequences. Of course, any activity which you know to be directly opposed to God's will will be shunned immediately.

When you conscientiously consider these factors, you have a strong indication of the reply you should make. One of the most difficult things to do is to objectively question any activity we really want to do. A true sign of spiritual maturity is displayed when one examines his life (work, play, and worship) with a view toward a closer relationship with God.

In considering time and results, we evaluate a proposed or possible action with a view toward "ultimate consequence" that draws us closer to God should be considered favorably, and that which separates us from God must always be rejected.

It is essential that we realize that the essence of all sin is "Self Pleasing" --- pleasing ourselves rather than pleasing God. James put it this way:

"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death." (James 1:14,15) Let us examine how Jesus responded when Satan tempted him to please himself rather than please his heavenly Father. The account given in the fourth chapter of Matthew reveals that when each temptation by Satan, Jesus replied with "it is written," and

quoted passage from the scriptures. Christ not only knew God's will, but was determined to do God's will rather than please himself.

Now, since our behavior is generally aimed at pleasing someone: a group, an individual, or ourselves, consider this fact: a Christian is not his own, but has been purchased by God for His purpose.

"For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:20)

As a Christian, you have put on Christ, crucified your "old self" and now have an entirely new relationship with God. As his child you have One who is vitally interested not only in your soul, but stands as an eternal source of strength, courage, and counsel. Prayer, reading, meditation, and worship are the elements of communication with the Father. Use them continuously. These elements allow you to pause and consider the "Ultimate Consequence" in an attitude of open reception to all factors. Once considered, an act that draws you closer to God and his purpose can be followed with a high degree of confidence that you are pleasing God. The Bible records the joy of one who acts in harmony with God's will.

"Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." (Rom. 14:22)

We have thus far considered the principles of Avoidance and Ultimate Consequence. Master these two now and develop others as your understanding of God's word deepens. Make your fight to overcome evil a matter of life and death. As a matter of fact that's what it is.

AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER

Though yielding to evil temptation is sin, it is not irrevokable condemnation. Should one succumb to temptation, the same God who received you, cared for you, loved you, continues to do so even though you have betrayed yourself. Understand clearly that God's laws are not for His benefit - He needs none. They are for your benefit that you may be one of his. In His love, grace, and mercy, He provides, through Christ, a way for Christians to obtain forgiveness. This does not mean that we have a license to continue yielding to sin, for God is not mocked. He knows our hearts. But when we through our weakness slip, He, through love and strength, helps us up. Our genuine sorrow and sincere determination to do better conditions our hearts to ask God's forgiveness in penitent prayer. Some of the most comforting words to the child of God are found in 1 John chapter one and two:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness . . . and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 1:9; 2:1).

The greatest tragedy is failing to realize that you are forever carrying a sense of guilt that, in itself, denies the power of God. Our Savior knows only too well what we are up against and he stands ready and understands our cry for forgiveness.

"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Our lives must be filled with positive direction toward the precious goal set for Christians when Christ departed this earth to prepare heavenly mansions for his disciples. We, like Paul, must keep an attitude of striving for self improvement, for more productive service for our Lord.

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to the things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling . . . (Philippians 3:13,14).

This attitude will insure we never become insensitive to the spiritual and material needs of our fellow-man. We will also see more clearly the temptations that hide in pride and conceit as we develop genuine humility in our own character. The Bible speaks of evil as a lion, a wolf in sheep's clothing, and even as a cunning serpent. Sin has been categorized as:

1. Lust of the Eye,
2. Lust of the Flesh, and
3. Pride of Life.

"Love not the world . . . for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:16).

Recognizing your personal tendency toward one or all of these is the next step in spiritual growth. For only as we come to identify our weaknesses can we take positive action to guard against them. Examine closely those things that attract in the strongest way and determine if they are favorable in the light of ultimate consequence. If not, AVOIDANCE is the answer.

You are not alone in this wonderful venture as a child of God. Consult fellow Christians, confide in them, discuss your problems and faults. Pray together with them and come to know a union with Christ that truly passes all understanding.

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

Never feel over-confident, but for your sake and the sake of others be strong in the Lord and give a full life in the service of Christ.

"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

BE THOU FAITHFUL