

# **Enduring Temptation**

*Sources, Resources and Purpose*

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## Three Sources of Temptation and Testing

We begin our study by reading three passages of Scripture, the first of which is found in Genesis 49. We shall read there from the address of Jacob to his twelve sons, and these verses to his firstborn, Reuben.

Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, pre-eminent in dignity and pre-eminent in power. Unstable as water, you shall not have pre-eminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch! (vv. 3–4)

Those few words record a sorry lapse in the life of Reuben that cost him his birthright. He was the firstborn son of Jacob, and normally with that position came the rights of the firstborn, guaranteed to him by the principle of Scripture that said that if a man has two wives and one is less favoured than the other, nevertheless, if the eldest son be the son of the less favoured, he shall still be the firstborn and have firstborn rights.<sup>1</sup> And Reuben was Jacob's firstborn by his less-favoured wife, Leah. Nevertheless, the birthright was his, but he lost it in a moment of temptation, in a moment of yielding to illegitimate pleasure. He remained one of the twelve tribes. His name shall be on one of the gates of the eternal city, but he lost his birthright, being 'unstable as water'.

That is an event and a description that we shall remember as we come to our main portion of reading this evening. But for the moment we turn to a New Testament passage found in Hebrews 12.

See to it . . . that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it [that is, the blessing] with tears. (vv. 15–17)

Here then is the record of another man who not so much lost his birthright as sold his birthright. He was the elder son of Isaac, legally entitled to the birthright, but in a moment of temptation, he sold it. And oh, how cheaply he sold it, for a mere basin full of porridge, satisfying an urgent but trivial need. In that moment, he sold his birthright, and then lost his blessing. Yes, afterwards he was given a minor blessing, and when we read the terms of that minor blessing, we might indeed be thrilled at the grace of God and the grace of his father, Jacob (Gen 27:37–40), but he missed the major blessing that could have been his. And when,

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. — Although it is more fully enunciated in Deuteronomy 21:15–17, the principle can be seen in operation in the life of Leah in Genesis 29:30–35.

afterwards, he changed his mind, it was too late for the thing to be undone. There was no room for repentance, because the blessing that should have been his had gone to somebody else. What a sad and sorry thing temptation is when it leads to permanent loss of that order.

With these two examples in our mind, then, I want us to read together from the Epistle by James and chapter 1.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (vv. 2–3)

Let us notice that term as we proceed, for we shall meet it many times again this evening, so let's get it right from the start. Some translations have it 'knowing that the proof of your faith works *patience*.' If you translate it that way then you should understand that it is patience in the old English sense of *endurance*. It is positive, vigorous, active persistence and endurance. We are to count it all joy, James says, when we fall into manifold temptations 'knowing that the proof of your faith produces endurance'.

And let [endurance] have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. (vv. 4–6)

As we read it, we can't help remembering about Reuben, that man who was as unstable as water, unstable in all his ways.

For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 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 fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (vv. 7–18)

We remember those two men who, by natural birth, had right to the birthright; and then we think of ourselves who, by divine birth, have been brought forth as a kind of firstfruits of God's creatures.

The Lord give us true understanding of his holy word.

### Three sources of temptation and testing

Now, it has been thought appropriate at this time that I should try and talk with you on things that relate to our practical daily Christian life. Therefore, as I thought of these things, I could think of nothing more practical than the topic of temptation. Temptation is a thing that all of us have to face sooner or later (and mostly sooner). Sometimes it comes suddenly and is soon passed, and sometimes its tests go on week after week and month after month. Be it short and sharp or long and drawn-out, temptation is a thing that all of us, as believers, must face.

The New Testament indicates that temptation comes to us from at least three different sources, and sometimes the temptations will come from all three at once. Here in chapter 1, James reminds us that temptation, in the bad sense of that term, never comes from God. God himself is not tempted by evil and he does not tempt anybody to evil. We shall have to consider the point of that remark later on, but let's notice that temptation to do wrong never comes to us from God. Where does that kind come from then? It comes from two possible sources.

There is a great deal of temptation that comes simply from within, from our own evil desires. Every one is tempted, James says, when he is drawn away and enticed by his own wrong desires. Temptation comes from within. Then of course, there is temptation that comes from without, and notably from the devil himself. We read of our Lord Jesus that he indeed was tempted by the devil. He never did have any wrong desires within him. Nonetheless he was tempted, and tempted externally by the devil himself; and if the devil has the effrontery to tempt our blessed Lord, we may be certain that he will not be slow in tempting us as well. Indeed, Paul reminds us in his second letter to the Corinthians of his concern for the believers. He says, 'I fear lest that old serpent, the devil, who by his craftiness deceived Eve in his cunning, should corrupt your thought from the simplicity that is towards Christ' (see 11:3).

Temptation then comes from within, from our wrong desires; and temptation comes from without, from the activity of Satan. Then we shall have to have a third category in our study, and we shall not normally talk about it as 'temptation', but rather as *testing*. We shall think of such things as happened to Abraham, which we have recorded in Genesis 22. In our beloved Authorized Version of that chapter, we are told that, 'it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham . . .' (v. 1). And somebody perhaps will say, 'But how could that be? If James said that God never tempts anybody, why does this verse say that God tempted Abraham?' And the answer is of course that there are two kinds of temptation. One is a temptation to do evil; that is our modern sense of the term. In that sense, God does not tempt anybody. But in our ancient English there is another meaning of *temptation*. It means 'to try, to prove, to put through a trial'. In that sense, God 'proved', he 'tried' Abraham. And in that sense, God will allow us to be tried. Peter speaks to us of that kind of trial, likening our faith to a lump of gold and God to the goldsmith who is intent on purifying that gold. Therefore he tries it, proves it, and purifies it until it comes through its test more resplendent and valuable than ever (1 Peter 1:6-7).

We are thinking about three kinds of *testings* then. Two kinds are temptations to do wrong, and one kind is a trial to bring out what is good and demonstrate its validity and value. And of course we shouldn't forget that while God never tempts us to do wrong, God does allow Satan to tempt us. It is surely true that, before Satan does it, he has to ask permission, as he

had to ask permission in the case of Job, and as he had to ask permission in the case of the twelve apostles. As our Lord said, 'Satan has asked to have you, that he may sift you as wheat' (see Luke 22:31). And that is a matter for great encouragement, isn't it? Satan is not allowed to tempt and test a believer just as he will; he must seek permission from the Almighty. Sometimes God is pleased to give Satan that permission, as he did in Job's case and in the case of the twelve apostles, and as he will from time to time in our case.

And so, because this is exceedingly practical and altogether general, and sooner or later will affect every life of every one of God's dear people, let's spend our time thinking together about this topic and how, by God's grace, we may resist these temptations to the glory of God.

## **Temptation in the New Testament**

Let's begin by putting this whole topic of temptation in its New Testament context and letting it show us how fundamentally important this matter is. Our danger here actually would be to look upon temptation as a small thing. You know the kind of thing we might think of: a dear believer is going round the shop getting his weekly groceries, and he gets a little bit hungry. Before he knows where he is, he has stolen a chocolate bar. He oughtn't to have done it, and in the end he blushes with shame and goes back and pays for it. Yes, well, that is bad of course, but temptation in the New Testament sense is a thing far more serious and fundamental than that. So let's take some time first of all, learning what the Lord Jesus had to say about temptation, and then see how his apostles followed him in his teaching, and the profound importance they attached to this practical matter.

### **Jesus, temptation and true believing**

Let's read Luke 8:11–15, and here we come to the parable of the Sower and to our Lord's explanation of its significance.

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

Now, notice that. It is in time of 'temptation', or 'testing'.

And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with . . .

And here comes our word again: 'patience', if you like, but it is the same word that James uses. It means *patience* in the sense of *endurance*. They 'bear fruit with endurance'.

Our Lord depicts four groups of people listening to the word of God; there are four different kinds of results. And I put it to you at once: of the four, which represent the true believers?

'Well,' you say, 'there's no difficulty in that at all. The true believers are group four. The true believers are those who receive the word and bring forth fruit with endurance.'

None of the others?

'No,' you say, 'none of the others. Obviously not the first lot. They hear the word, but that's all that happens. Before they have a chance to receive it and get saved, the devil comes and away goes the word. They are never saved.'

That's clear then: they are not believers. What about the second group, however? It says that for a while, they believed. Would you classify them as true believers?

'Certainly not.'

Why not?

'Well,' you say, 'listen to what our Lord speaks about them. He says they wither away.'

Yes, and they do that because they have no *root* in them. With joy they believed, like the people that John the evangelist tells us of. When they saw the Lord's miracles, they believed on him, but our Lord didn't commit himself to them, for he knew what was in them and saw they had no root in themselves (John 2:23–25). Their belief was superficial and presently it expired. It is like those people that John talks about in chapter 8 of his Gospel. They said they believed on the Lord Jesus, and so our Lord Jesus said to them, 'Now, good gentlemen, if you *continue* in my word, then you shall really be my disciples, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free' (see vv. 31–32). But alas, they didn't continue in his word. In fact, it was not long after that they were seriously objecting to what he said, and presently they picked up stones to stone him, so shallow had their so-called belief been. And our Lord had to tell them straight that they had no root in themselves. They were not Abraham's children. They were not God's children. They were of their father, the devil (see vv. 39–47).

I'm going to suggest to you, therefore, that we must watch that second group of people in the parable carefully. They are the ones that are going to interest us in our present discussion. What happened to them? Well, for a while, they believed, but 'in time of temptation' they fell away, and so manifested that they had no root in themselves and were not believers at all.

That does put things on a very basic level, doesn't it? For, among other things, the parable is going to teach us that temptation is the method that, in the end, will show who are genuine believers and who are not really believers at heart. Temptation then is no superficial thing, is it? These manifold temptations that we shall have to face are obviously profoundly important. They will in the end demonstrate whether we are genuine believers, whether we have root in ourselves, whether we endure, or whether we fall away because we have no root and were never genuine believers at all.

Let's sum up the lesson that our Lord is teaching by the parable. It is that the genuine believer endures, and therefore he brings forth fruit. Let's go back to the parable itself. Doesn't every farmer know that the only seed that is of any use is the seed that actually goes on growing and persists in growing and carries on growing? Whether the rain comes and the hail and the frost, or whether the wind comes, or whether the drought comes, whether the sun burns hotly or it is shivering cold, the only seed that is any use is the one that carries on

growing and brings forth fruit whatever the weather. And so our Lord announces a rule. What is the secret? What is it that distinguishes the genuine from the not genuine? The not genuine has no root. It may persist for a time but come wind or drought or sun, it withers away and, because there is no root, there is no endurance; and because there is no endurance, there is no fruit. The genuine has root, and because it has root it endures; and because it endures, it brings forth fruit. Because, truth to tell, there is no fruit without enduring. So this was the lesson that our Lord taught. The mark of the genuine believer is that he endures temptation.

Let's repeat it again. What was wrong with the second group in the parable? Why didn't they endure? What was it that caused them not to endure? Well, actually it was this: they had no root, and then temptation came. In the time of temptation, because they had no root, they fell away. The mark of the genuine is that in that same time of temptation, because the genuine had a root, it endured.

Perhaps you say to me, 'Mr Preacher, I find that kind of teaching alarming. Are you saying that the genuine believer always endures temptation and never falls? And are you saying that if somebody who professes to be a believer falls under a temptation of some kind or another, he is thereby shown to be not a believer? What do you mean?'

Well, what I mean is what the Lord Jesus said, but let's settle that practical question. Does our Lord mean that if you are a genuine believer you will never fall to temptation, and does he mean that if you give in to temptation that shows you are not a genuine believer? No, of course he doesn't mean that. How do we know? Take the famous example of Peter himself. Our Lord warned him, did he not? 'Peter,' he said, 'Satan has desired to have all twelve of you to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith shall not fail.' And in that severe temptation, Peter fell, didn't he?

'Yes,' you say, 'but he was still a true believer.'

That is perfectly true, thank God. He was a believer, wasn't he? He fell to the temptation but, as we know, and as the future proved, Peter had the root in him, and though he fell on that occasion he did not remain fallen but came back to the Saviour. And though he fell on that occasion the root was in him, and the Saviour prayed that his faith should not fail. It did not fail, and Peter got up again after his fall and was restored to the Lord and, with an endurance that lasted a lifetime, he brought forth tremendous fruit. Oh yes, any one of us could be overtaken in a fault, and we have to consider ourselves lest we be tempted, for if we were tempted, who knows but what we might fall, but if there is the root in a man or a woman, then Christ would see to it by his intercessions that they get up again and return to the Lord and things are put straight, and that the person goes on with endurance to bear fruit.

So it is possible for the believer to fall to this or that temptation, but then let's listen. When that same terrible testing period came on the twelve, it found a man called Judas, and the love of money proved to him an overwhelming temptation, and he fell too, didn't he? He never came back. Why not? Because the temptation showed what had always been true: he had no root in himself. He never had been a genuine believer. When the temptation came, he fell away to perdition.

Temptation then is a serious, profound and basic matter in the Christian life. Our Lord assures us that as sure as the sun and the rain come upon the crops, presently temptation will



come our way; and the basic effect of temptation will be that it will show who are true believers and who are not. It will show that by the fact that those who are true believers and have the root within them will persist and endure and bring forth fruit. And the man or woman who does not have the root in them will fall away and be lost.

### **James and rejoicing over temptation**

So let's come to the Epistle of James. And what does James say? He says, 'My dear brethren, count it all joy when you fall into manifold temptations' (see 1:2).

You say, 'How could I possibly do that? How do I count it all joy when I fall into temptation if temptation is so serious a matter and it will show in the end whether I am a true believer or not? How could I count it all joy?'

We must first learn what tested faith produces. As we face the great tests of life we can count it all joy as believers when we fall into manifold temptations because we may know one basic, absolutely immovable, utterly reliable, truth; and that is that the proving of your faith produces endurance. What a lovely assurance this is from God himself. It is the armament and the sure foundation with which every believer may confidently face the temptations that come. James says we are to know that the proof of our faith, the proving of it, the testing of it, works endurance (see 1:3). That is, of course, if there is faith there to start with. If the root of the matter is in us to start with then the believer is entitled to know that the proving of his faith will work endurance.

I remember once, many years ago, I went to work in the north-east of England, and I discovered there was a gentleman living across the road who had been an atheist and had not long found the Saviour. And when I met him he was vigorous and happy in his faith. He said to me, 'David, there's just one thing that worries me.'

I said, 'What's that?'

'Well, suppose, for instance, one of these days my little girl were to run out in the street and get knocked over and killed by a lorry. I don't know if I could still go on believing. How could I go on believing there is a God of love who cares? And of course, if I couldn't believe in a God of love anymore, well then, where would I be?'

I told him it raises the whole question of salvation, because if there is no God of love, there is no God that gave Christ to die at Calvary. If God doesn't love me today, he has never loved me. There is not a God who loved me yesterday and forgets to love me today. And my friend saw the point of it, but he said, 'You know if a man were to run over my little girl and she were killed, I don't know if I could still go on believing that there is a God of love.'

Oh, what a temptation. How many a believer has been called to face grievous temptations of that kind? I was in East Germany not so many months ago, and I met a good friend of mine. At the end of the last war, when he and his brothers and sisters were little children they, along with their mother, were simply put on the railway and taken to the border and cast loose into a foreign country with absolutely nothing. They had to face the devastation of the war, with very little food anywhere, and rampant disease, and what he told of God's faithfulness to him in those days made a delightful and wonderful story. Now he is a grown-up man and an elder in his assembly, thanking God for his goodness. His two children had now grown up to young manhood and womanhood, and they were giving themselves vigorously to work for the Lord

Jesus among young folk, prepared for all the sacrifices that that means in a communist country like East Germany. I was told that these two lovely young folk were going off one night to a young folks' meeting to work and witness for the Saviour, and there came a car accident and both of them were killed.

What do you say to such a brother, when you stand to face him with the word of God? Oh, what a temptation to have stood in a communist country for the Lord, to see your two children bearing the sacrifices that inevitably come in a country like that when young folks take their stand for the Lord vigorously and publicly, and then to see them both killed. Don't you think the enemy whispered in his ear from time to time: 'Is that all God can do for you? Where now is your God?'

Oh, what a temptation. It was a marvellous victory to see in that man's face, both the tears of grief and the determination to go on trusting the Saviour. Few of us are called to such extremes of temptation, of trial, of testing, are we? But this we may know, James tells us that when temptations come, bitter as they can be, extreme as they may be, we can count it all joy, not because the experience is joyful, but because we can be sure in our hearts that if we are genuine believers the testing of our faith will work endurance.

### **Paul and temptation**

James isn't the only one to tell us that, is he? Paul talks about the same topic in Romans 5. It is utterly basic in this matter of temptation. In Romans 5, Paul is telling us that if we have been justified by faith, we can have peace with God, and we have access into this grace wherein we stand, and we can enjoy, we can in fact confidently exalt in, the certain expectation that we shall at last attain the glory of God (vv. 1-2). Oh, the wonder of our eternal security—the fact that we shall be at last conformed to the image of God's Son!

'Yes, but you can have confidence in another matter,' Paul says; 'namely, you can be confident in the face of tribulation' (see v. 3).

You say, 'How could I possibly be? If the waves of tribulation were to rise against my little boat and threaten to swamp it, how could I be confident?'

'You can be confident,' says Paul, 'knowing this absolute basic thing in your spiritual armoury: that the tribulation, when it comes, produces . . .' (now here comes our word) 'produces *endurance*.'

James says it. Paul says it. Our Lord says it. How do you know the good seed? Why, because it endures!

### **Peter and the refining temptation brings**

And it is not only our Lord and not only James and not only Paul, but Peter adds his testimony to this delightful certainty with which we face our temptations and our trials. In his first epistle he says, 'Now look here, your faith is like a lump of gold. Just as a goldsmith will sometimes put a lump of gold through the crucible of the fires to melt away the dross, so God will allow your faith to be tried and tested' (see 1:6-7). And in consequence you may feel, one of these days, very much like a lump of gold when it's been put through the crucible.

Have you noticed that effect in the Lord's people? Here is a good man who has come up through the Sunday school and the Bible class. He is firm in his faith for the Lord; he knows what he believes, and he believes it for certain. Then he moves out into the world to a university maybe, and under the withering attacks of rationalism you can see the doubt inserted. And presently he goes to throw it off and crush it, and hold onto something else that he thought was certain, and that melts in his hand as well. And in his desperation he tries to latch onto something else, and that seems to melt away as well, until what he once thought was solid now seems to him to be like so much melted butter, and he can't find anything to grip hold of!

I have met more than one such person. The old confidence has gone, and now inside there is nothing solid, like a lump of gold that once was solid but has now been melted in the crucible until it is all watery. Yes, and God in his mercy is watching, and just as no goldsmith would allow that gold to perish (because it's too valuable), so our blessed Lord watches the faith of his people. He is not going to let you perish. He will use the trial to get out the dross, but no little bit, not the tiniest bit of gold, will be allowed to perish. And presently, the man will be brought through with his faith more solid, more valuable, than ever.

Our Lord says it; and James says it; and Paul says it; and Peter says it. Where you have the root of it in yourself to start with, where you are a genuine believer, then even if temptation comes, in whatever form trials come, you may in your heart (sad and sorrowful though you may be) put up a fierce defiance and be counting it all joy in the knowledge that the trial, the temptation, will prove the thing genuine and work endurance.

Let's listen to one final word from James. 'Only, my brethren, let endurance have its perfect work that you may be complete, wanting nothing' (see 1:4). You say, 'Why does God put me through these tests and trials and allow me to suffer temptations, just so that these things can work endurance?'

Well, my dear friend, it is because endurance is the only way God knows of producing fruit. Isn't that true? We come back to our parable. 'The sower goes out to sow.' You might look at such a scene and say, 'That's lovely. Look, that seed has really taken root. I do believe that leaf is now springing up and coming through the earth, with a lovely green leaf. I do believe it has got the root of the matter in it, and it's going to grow!'

Oh, yes, but it hasn't got much fruit on it at the moment, has it? When will we get the fruit? We won't get any fruit in fact, unless the thing grows with endurance. 'Look,' says James, 'if your faith is genuine, then when the temptation comes it will have the effect of producing endurance. Oh, my brethren, let endurance have its perfect work that you may be entire, wanting nothing.'

And what in the end shall be the full fruit of it? James says, 'Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he has been proved genuine he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him' (see v. 12). Everyone who loves the Saviour shall get the crown, thank God. He has promised it to them that love him.

And from our point of view, how do we know those who really, truly, genuinely love him? We know it by the fact that they endure. Isn't that so? You see, my dear brothers and sisters, if I came to you and said, 'I'm a believer you know,' you'd say, 'Thank the Lord for that. We're delighted to hear it, my brother.'

How would you judge whether I were genuine or not? You'd say, like James, 'It's nice to hear you say that you are a genuine believer, but we shall be looking for the evidence. We shall be looking for the works. We shall be watching to see if you endure.'

What other evidence could we have?

'Oh, my brethren,' says James, 'you can face trial and tribulation with confidence that, if you are genuine believers, then it will produce endurance, but the only way known to God of producing fruit, of getting the crown at last, is if the seed endures and brings forth fruit with endurance.'

May the Lord use his word to fortify our hearts, so that on this foundation of certainty we may face the practical lessons on temptation that await us tomorrow.

Now, shall we pray.

Oh, Lord, we thank thee for thy word, for this wisdom that comes from above and sheds light on our earthly pathway here. Oh, Lord, thou knowest how complicated our lives can be and what the pressures are that are constantly upon us. We bless thee for this divine assurance from thy word that, where there is faith in the Saviour, the result of trial will be endurance. Write into our hearts and into the hearts of all that love thee, this assurance, this steadfastness, this encouragement, this hope that we may face life's temptations and, as our brother James exhorts us, to count them all joy.

Oh, Lord, we do beseech thee, lift our eyes from this dark world for the coming of the Saviour. Set our eyes and affections, we beseech thee, on the crown of life that awaits us in his hand. And, by thy grace, help us to use all the divine resources that thou hast given us to face temptation and, in spite of it all, to stand. And having done all to stand and to endure and bring forth fruit for thy glory. Thus bless thy word to our hearts this evening, we beseech thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Temptation From Our Own Hearts

Let's begin our study by reading three passages from the Epistle by James that shall remind us of the three areas from which we may expect temptation, or trials, and testing.

Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 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 fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (1:13–18)

Then let's read from chapter 5. If in our first passage we were thinking of temptation that comes from our own hearts, our own evil desires, now here we shall read of a good man who suffered temptation that was brought by the devil.

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast [or, endure]. You have heard of the steadfastness [or, endurance] of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (v. 11)

And then finally in chapter 2 of this same letter we read of Abraham's case. In some translations we are told in Genesis 22, to which our verses will now refer, that 'God did tempt Abraham' (v. 1 KJV), though to help ourselves in modern English, we would prefer to put it 'God tried', or 'tested' Abraham. The word *temptation* in the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, has a far wider meaning than we commonly use in English. When we are thinking of temptation to do wrong, then we must remember that James 1 says, 'God does not tempt anybody' (see v. 13). He cannot be tempted himself to do wrong; he certainly never tempts anybody else to do wrong. Temptation of that sort comes either from our own evil hearts, or from the devil. But there is another sense in which the word *temptation* is used in the Bible that we tend, in modern English, to translate by 'testing' or 'trying'. As in Genesis 22, God did try or test Abraham, not to make him do wrong, of course not. It was not to break his faith, certainly not, but to test that faith and to try that faith and give Abraham the opportunity of demonstrating that his faith was genuine. In that sense of the word then we understand this experience to which James refers in chapter 2.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God. (vv. 21–23)

The Lord give us good understanding of his holy word.

Now, in these two short studies together, we are considering the intensely practical matter of temptation. We have previously thought of some of the basic principles that the New Testament introduces us to in respect of this topic. Now I want to take examples from the three areas from which we may expect temptation, or testing, to come our way. But before we do that, let's just briefly sum up the things that we have found already.

### **Our study so far**

We have thought of the fundamental importance of this matter of temptation, and that we should judge the importance and gravity of it by what is involved in being tempted. In our modern sense of the word we can of course talk about being tempted to eat too much food, and I, as a preacher, can testify to that temptation, but what is a man to do when faced with such excellent delicacies and marvellous cuisine that preachers are so frequently faced with? These things are glorious indeed, and temptation hard to resist, but then I have to remember that if I give way to my physical appetite too much then I could ruin my figure! But I could also ruin my health, as the doctors tell me, and that would be more serious, wouldn't it? And more serious too, if I did it too much, I could fall into the sin of gluttony, which no Christian ought to fall into. Here is temptation then, in what we may say is a small matter.

Yes, and we could be tempted as genuine believers in more serious matters. Take a man who no doubt is a genuine believer, but in a moment of financial difficulty and panic, he gives way to the temptation to commit some not completely honest thing in business. And of course, when it is discovered, to his great regret maybe, it can ruin the man's testimony, even though there is no doubt he is a believer. Or another man or woman, in a moment of weakness and peculiar temptation, can fall to some moral indiscretion and live to regret it to the end of his or her days, finding his or her testimony ruined by it. That is serious enough, isn't it?

We saw, however, that temptation has a graver side even than in ruining our testimony. We were reading our Lord's parable of the Sower in which he indicates that temptation has, for its gravest effect, the fact that it will show in the end who is a true believer and who is not. So we remembered that group of whom our Lord spoke who, when they hear the word, receive it forthwith, and for a while they believe, but then something disastrous happens. 'They fall away,' says our Lord, 'in the time of temptation.' Why do they fall away? He explains, 'it is because they never did have any root in themselves.' So while they professed to believe and, in some shallow kind of sense did believe, yet there was never any genuine work of God's Spirit in their hearts; they never were really true believers. And in the time of temptation, they are exposed for what they always were. They never did have any root. They were not, in the fuller sense of the word, true believers. You say, 'How would you tell a true

believer then? Well he's the one whom our Lord mentions and describes in the fourth group of that parable, the one who not only hears the word and believes it at the beginning but goes on believing it, and, because he has root in himself, come hail or sunshine, wind, storm or calm, he goes on. As our Lord puts it: 'He endures and brings forth fruit with endurance' (see Luke 8:15). So in the gravest sense of the word, the end result of temptation or testing will be that it demonstrates finally who is a genuine believer and who is not.

Then we noticed the next big principle to which James introduces us. He reminds us that every believer can have absolute confidence in the face of such testing and temptation, so much so that he tells us that we are to 'count it all joy when we fall into various kinds of temptation, knowing that the proof of our faith works endurance' (see 1:2-3). A true believer need not fear, for if the root of the matter is in him, then the proving of his faith, the testing of it, the temptations, will in the end cause him nevertheless to endure, and in enduring he will demonstrate himself to be genuine.

We noticed that Paul says the same thing in Romans 5:3: 'tribulation works endurance,' where first of all there is genuine faith. And we noticed also that Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 1. However severe may be the trial of faith through which a believer is put, God regards his faith as a precious lump of gold, and not one little bit of that gold shall perish. We are to count it all joy then. Even though the experience may be bitter and painful, we can count it joy in this respect: knowing that where there is faith to start with, temptation, trial, and testing will in the end produce endurance.

Then we noticed finally what is the blessed result of temptation and endurance. 'Blessed is the man that endures temptation,' says James (see 1:12). And why would that be? Well, of course, endurance is the secret of bearing fruit, isn't it? We noticed in our Lord's parable it is not enough for the seed to fall into the ground and simply produce a green shoot. If it never got beyond producing that, there never would be any fruit. If it's going to bear fruit, then that little shoot will have to persevere and endure and face the sunshine and face the storm, the rain and the dryness and, enduring in spite of it, grow and bring forth fruit. 'Count it all joy,' says James, 'when you fall into various temptations and testings, only let endurance have its perfect work that you may be complete and wanting nothing' (see vv. 2-4).

Oh, what glories God has ahead for every believer! Think only of that crown of life that the Lord Jesus shall give to all those that love him. Think of the glories that he will put upon the shoulders and upon the heads of those who have demonstrated here in this life that they were, right from the beginning, genuine believers, that they did really love the Saviour and have demonstrated it through the years by their endurance. Think of all the glories he shall put upon them. And the secret is that they have been prepared to carry those glories by the discipline of temptation and trial and testing that has made them strong and caused them to endure and, in the end, they have brought forth the rich fruit of Christian character.

So we thought together about some of these fundamental principles. Now let's come to three areas from which we may expect temptation to come and then we can see what we can do about it, and what are our resources to meet temptations and trials when they come.

## **Temptation from our own evil hearts**

Area number one is the one that James talks about in his first chapter, verses 13–18, where he tells us straight that when we are tempted, we are not to say, ‘I am being tempted by God.’ This, of course, is temptation in the sense in which we are being tempted to do something that is wrong. We must never say ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God never tempts anybody to do wrong.

You say, ‘Where does the temptation come from then?’ Well, it certainly doesn’t come from God and, incidentally, it doesn’t necessarily come from the devil either, does it? You know, sometimes I think we blame the devil for a lot of things that he isn’t responsible for. He is responsible for a vast amount of spiritual misery, but not quite all of it. Some of the temptations that we suffer come, certainly not from God, but they don’t even come from the devil; they come from our own fallen hearts: ‘But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire’ (v. 14). Here is temptation that comes from our own evil hearts.

Now, when we read these words, particularly in our ancient translations, we are in danger perhaps of narrowing their meaning too much. We read, for instance, that ‘every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed’ (KJV); and when we hear that word ‘lust’, we recognize it as a very ugly word and are inclined to think of one particular group of immoralities. Yes, of course they are serious enough, but let none of us think, however old we may be, that we are beyond being tempted. Last night, when we were thinking of the phrase here in James 1 that God has ‘brought us forth as a kind of firstfruits of his creatures’ (see v. 18), it reminded us a little bit of that story about Reuben referenced in Genesis 49. He was the physical elder son of Jacob, and therefore by rights the birthright should have been his and would have been his, but there came temptation. It was in an unguarded moment. Perhaps it was quite unpremeditated, who knows? Reuben was tempted to sins of the flesh and, for a momentary gratification of unlawful desire, Reuben fell and lost this birthright. He wasn’t thrown out of Israel; he wasn’t rejected as one of the tribes. As we said, Reuben’s name shall be one of the names on the gates of the eternal city. But yielding to that temptation lost him his birthright. We must never take temptation lightly. No believer can lose his salvation, of course not, but a believer may lose his crown, may he not? Let the Lord himself speak to our hearts and preserve in them a godly fear that where others have been tempted and have yielded to temptation, we might pray God’s constant protection from such sins of the flesh.

### **The heart’s demand for prosperity**

It wouldn’t be right for us to limit that idea of lust simply to one particular group of sins. The Greek word means something broader than that. It means any wrong, evil, selfish desire, any desire for something that I want for my own sake, even when God says, ‘No,’ or, ‘Not yet,’ but I determine to have it, and my old nature longs for it. In the end, I give way to the temptation that comes from my evil heart, and I take what I shouldn’t, or insist on having what God has said, ‘No’ to. The example that James gives us is not sexual immorality, but our attitude to material possessions. Look what he says.



Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. (1:9–11)

And you say, 'What is James talking about? I thought he was talking about temptation in verses 2–8, and he is obviously talking about temptation in verse 12. What do those other verses that come in the middle of that section have to do with temptation?'

Well, of course what they have to do with it is this. This was precisely the area in which some of our early Christian brothers and sisters felt grievous temptation. Let me try and explain it. If you go back to the Old Testament, you will find in its early books the general kind of promise from God that if his people behaved, if they kept his law, if they did his will, he would bless them. And when God was talking to Abraham and to the Jews, his blessing very often meant material goods: cattle, sheep, oxen, homes, children, a healthy wife and family, a good farm and so forth. Israel were promised that if they kept his word, God would bless them, as was appropriate, of course, for God to do in those very far-off days when God, as Paul puts it, was treating his ancient people like a father treats little children (see Gal 3–4). And you have to tell the little child that, yes, if he or she behaves then he or she shall get rewarded in the shape of an ice cream or something. And of course it is the general basic lesson, isn't it? Ultimately in this universe, they that do the will of God shall be abundantly blessed. But you know, as life went on, the Jews found that things weren't quite as simple and straightforward as they had thought. You come to the Psalms, for instance Psalm 73, and you will find the psalmist scratching his inspired head and saying to himself, 'But how is this? I don't understand it. Look, it's the wicked that prosper in the world. How come? Then look at those ungodly men downtown there. Why, they're the leading businessmen of the place. And that other unprincipled rogue, he's the most successful farmer there is. His flocks always seem to do very well! How does it come to be that the wicked prosper in this world, and not only prosper but sometimes, because they are prepared to descend to illegal and unlawful ways, they inflict suffering on those that try to be honest?'

And so the psalmist records that therefore the righteous come home, full of bitter tears and sorrow, and in their hearts the question rises, 'How can this possibly be? Doesn't God know? Doesn't God see? Look what that rotter has done to me! Look at his unprincipled ways! Look at the way I'm suffering, and I have to tried to obey the law. It isn't fair! Doesn't God know?'

Of course the Old Testament had an answer. It said that when the Messiah came, then he eventually would put down all evil; he would put the wicked in their place and give them their true deserts, and the righteous would shine forth in the kingdom of their Father and be rewarded. And the Messiah did come, didn't he? Jesus Christ our Lord came. But you know what happened. There were many indeed at the first, apostles included, who when they decided that Jesus was the Messiah, fell into the mistake of thinking that he was going to put the world right there and then. They thought he would drive out the Romans; he would put down the wicked; he would judge the oppressors: liars and cheaters and fraudulent actors would all be put down, and the righteous would be rewarded. They found out that wasn't so.

Our Lord was Messiah, but he hadn't come to put down evil immediately. He had come rather to die for sinners and to start the day of grace, when men and women might find forgiveness of sins and peace with God through faith in Christ's great atoning sacrifice. But the day of judgment wasn't yet come and wouldn't come until he returned again.

And do you know, that was a tremendous disappointment to a lot of people. They had professed to believe on him because they thought that, since they believed in Jesus as the Messiah, he would stand up for them and they would get their rights. Of course they would enjoy the great material blessings—the milk and honey of the land—and the evil would be put down. And when they found it wasn't so, they got very disappointed. They thought being a Christian meant material blessing now, and they found often it meant the very opposite—persecution now, and suffering wrongfully and suffering innocently for the Lord's sake. Then the temptation rose up within them, for they were determined to have enjoyment now, wealth now, peace and plenty now; and following a Messiah, if it meant suffering and losing your possessions, no, they didn't want that.

How many a man has been tempted along that line since? There was a man called Demas. Do you remember him and what the apostle says of him? He began so well, didn't he? And then he forsook the apostle. Why did he forsake him? Paul tells us: 'He loved this present age' (see 2 Tim 4:10), and the attraction and the temptation of enjoying himself now and having his peace and plenty and his comfort now, and position and esteem in the world now, proved too much, and he left. He abandoned the Lord's work. He loved this present world. Paul warns us through his letter to Timothy that those who determine they are going to be rich, by hook or by crook, stand in grave danger of piercing themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim 6:9).

So, it is not merely some narrow area of sexual misdemeanour that the apostle is talking about when he talks of our lusts, our selfish desires. It can be wrong and selfish desires for anything. And in the context, he is talking about the desire for success in this world, material possessions. There is nothing wrong in them, but if I am faced with the choice of loyalty to the Lord Jesus, with suffering and loss, or else material prosperity at the cost of being disloyal to the Lord Jesus, it can become a very big temptation, can it not? And there are many men and women who, under this temptation, have chosen this present world.

### **Our resources for withstanding our evil desires**

What can I do about it? How can I strengthen myself against such temptations? You say, 'They don't affect me. I haven't got two pennies to rub together anyway and I'm very happy, so that kind of thing doesn't affect me.' Perhaps it doesn't now, my good young man. You wait until you're fifty years old.

How can I help myself?

### **Ask for God's wisdom to discern reality**

James says there are a number of things we can do. If we are going to combat this kind of unlawful, selfish desire then first we must seek the wisdom of God.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (1:5)

If we come and tell him honestly that we don't have the wisdom to make the right decision, and ask, please, will he give us the wisdom to see things as he sees them, then he will graciously give us the wisdom. But facing this kind of temptation does mean that we shall need to look at material things as God looks at them.

There is nothing wrong with material blessings, is there? I've heard a rumour (and it's more than a rumour) that where Christ is at this moment it is fabulously wealthy. Isn't that so? You couldn't possibly describe the absolutely stupendous wealth with which Christ is now surrounded. There is nothing wrong with riches, so what is wrong then? It would be wrong if my heart is so intent on riches that to get them I am disloyal to the Lord. How shall I be helped? The answer is to look at material blessings as God looks at them.

James says, 'Consider this, you believers. Are you a poor man? Ah, but think of this, that if you've been saved then what a tremendous rank has already been given you! You may be poor in this world's goods, but you are to glory in your high estate' (see v. 9).

Oh, let's sit back on our seats for a moment and do just that, shall we? You haven't got two pennies in your pocket? Never mind, my brother; never mind, my sister. Just consider your estate. Child of God, son of God, heir of God, joint heir with Jesus Christ, and when he comes into his vast inheritance and asks of the Father to give him the uttermost parts of the world for his possession, he is going to share it with you! You have all the dignity of being a child of God! Do consider your high estate. And when I think of it, what difference does it make in the end to that high estate whether I have a penny or a million pounds? The thing becomes insignificant, doesn't it?

I have a sister and, if you promise not to tell on me, I'll tell you a story about her. She is a wonderful woman, and she has many arts and crafts at her disposal, but she isn't much of an astronomer. One day her sons and daughters brought home an enormous great telescope for looking at the stars, and they set it up in the backyard; and they were all looking through it and eventually mother looked through it. She couldn't see the star very well, so she said, 'Well I'll tell you what to do, let's take it to the bottom of the garden and we'll see it a bit better there.' As if moving a telescope a few yards to the bottom of the garden would somehow bring it nearer the star! You say, 'But what's ten yards compared with the light-years of distance between us and that star?' Yes, well she soon saw her mistake.

Tell me, my brother, my sister, what is the difference between one penny and one million pounds, compared with the incalculable wealth of Christ? Oh, pray consider your high estate. Go home tonight and, as you lay your head on the pillow, think of it. Let the exceeding riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints soak into your heart. As you think of it, it will help to put life's material things in their true perspective.

And what about the rich brother? Well, he's not condemned for being rich. There is nothing wrong with riches in themselves, though of course they carry their danger, don't they? It is hard, for instance, for a rich man to enter into the kingdom, says our Lord (see Matt 19:23), but there is nothing wrong with riches in themselves. A man who is rich will do well

to seek the divine wisdom and look at his riches as the divine wisdom looks at them. And what is that? Well, 'let the rich man rejoice in that he has been made low' (see v. 10).

You say, 'That's a hard saying, isn't it? What do you mean "made low"?''

No, it isn't a hard saying: it's reality. Oh, what a tragedy it would have been, my rich brother, if depending on your riches, you had missed salvation. You think of old Naaman, with all his wealth. He was a leper, and he came to be healed of Elisha, and Elisha didn't bother to get off his seat but sent the messenger saying, 'Let him go and dip in the Jordan seven times.' Naaman flew into a rage, and he nearly missed the cleansing because of his wealth and his pomp and he felt it an insult to be asked to dip in the Jordan. Thank God wiser counsels prevailed and he was brought low as a humble sinner. And now, suffering from the leprosy with all its threat of death, he was brought low to realize it in the nick of time, brought low to submit to God's way of salvation and saved through it. Oh, thank God for that (see 2 Kings 5).

Thank God, young man, if you have learnt not to trust your intellectual riches, but you have been brought low to see yourself as God sees you: in spite of all your tremendous IQ, a sinner in the sight of God, unable to solve life's ultimate question, a sinner like anybody else, in need of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. And you have been brought low in repentance, and you have trusted the Saviour. Alas, for those many folks that are rich intellectually and, because they trust their wisdom, they haven't been brought low yet, and they refuse to be brought low. If they go on like it, they shall perish eternally.

We need to get divine wisdom on these things, don't we? To see this world's transitory riches as God really looks at them in the light of the great eternal issue.

### **Recognize the presence of the fallen nature**

We can do another thing, and we ought to. How shall I resist temptation at this level? By never forgetting that I still have a fallen, evil nature. Never forget it. What is it that causes me to sin? 'Well it's not God,' says James. 'He doesn't tempt anybody to sin.' Where does the temptation come from? From my own evil heart, that's where it comes from.

But you say, 'Me? But I am a believer, and I've been a believer this last fifty years and perhaps more.'

Yes, and still let us never forget it. We still have a fallen, evil nature within that hasn't been improved all these long years, and we are responsible under God and by the help of his Holy Spirit to keep that old flesh in its place and to crucify it and keep it under and to mortify it. And you know if we forget that we've still got it and relax our guard and don't continue to mortify it, then sure as eggs are eggs, one of these days it will rise up in all its old virulent power and evil, and present us with enormous temptation.

We need to remember it, don't we? This evil thing, this evil fallen nature of ours, is still with us, for the flesh is in us. Though, thank God, if we are believers, we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit (see Rom 8:9). But the flesh is still with us, isn't it? It is the source of selfish desire, and if we let it get the upper hand, there is nothing it is not capable of.

Let me read you what James says of it in a later chapter when he comes to describe it. He says in chapter 4:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (vv. 1–3)

What an evil thing the fallen nature is, isn't it? There is nothing selfish desire is not capable of, even in a believer. Isn't that true?

Tell me, was David a believer before his sin with Bathsheba? How many delightful psalms had he written before he committed those grievous sins? Desire came and then, instead of stepping on it and putting it in its place, he played with it, and it led to stealing, didn't it? Yes, and it led to worse. It led to murder in the end.

You say, 'But those folks that James is talking about in chapter 4, you're not saying they're believers, are you?'

Well, I wasn't saying anything. I'll tell you what James says about them. He says they are spiritual adulteresses (see v. 4). What is an adulteress? Well, she is a woman that is married to one husband who then proves disloyal to him and goes off with somebody else. When he calls these folks 'adulteresses', he is using a figure, isn't he? It is the figure of Israel married to Jehovah, the believer part of a virgin espoused to the Lord Jesus, but then they've yielded to wrong desire, selfish desire and loved things more than they loved him, and loved the world and become disloyal adulteresses.

You say, 'There is forgiveness with the Lord.'

There surely is. Oh, the mercy of his forgiveness, and David himself was restored and forgiven and becomes an example for us. You say, 'But I still can't believe that those folks that he's talking about in James 4 were ever true believers. Would they let their own desires become so ruthless that they would elbow other folks out of the way and push them and, if need be, kill them (if not literally, then metaphorically) to get their own way?'

All right, so you say they're not believers? But that's the point, isn't it? For when we yield to our old, evil nature like that, if we carry on in it, that is precisely the question mark that we should put over ourselves. Are we believers that have backslidden—spiritual adulterers—or is it that we were folks who believed for a while but never had the root inside us? That is precisely the whole question, isn't it? Yes, that is why temptation is so grave a matter.

'How shall I demonstrate that I am a believer?'

Why, my brother and sister, if like me you have fallen many a time, then if you are a true believer you will come back to the Lord and seek his forgiveness, as Peter did, as millions have done since, and ask his pardon. And by his grace you will get up again and determine now to mortify the flesh and keep it in its true place. The man or woman that goes on and gives full free reign to his undisciplined, unbridled desires, raises the big question mark: is he really a believer?

### **Recognize that the source of temptation is not God**

What else can I do to help me in time of temptations? James says, 'Get it into your head that it's not God who is tempting you' (see 1:13). Why is that important? Well, it's important for this reason amongst others. In the ancient world, where people were pagans and worshipped

all sorts of idols, it not infrequently happened that they deified their own desires. So, if a man felt his pugnaciousness, his aggressiveness, and his love of violence and beating another fellow up, he attributed it to the god of war. He felt that when he got that feeling it was the god of war inspiring him, and he was jolly proud of it, instead of being sorry about it. And when they found lust and immorality pressing, some of them said it was the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and she made them do it. And she was a goddess of course, and you can't resist goddesses; you have to do what goddesses say. Yes, and that's the trouble when our modern world virtually deifies our urges and excuses all sorts of evil behaviour, because that is the natural thing to do. 'Nature demands it of us', they will say, and they are doing what the old pagans did—deifying their own psychological urges and then using that as an excuse for why they didn't resist them.

We mustn't do that. Those wrong desires that come from within are not gods and goddesses. They certainly are not the Holy Spirit of God. They are my old fallen nature, and it can be resisted, thank God, by the grace and power of his Holy Spirit; and they are to be resisted.

### **Recognize what God does do for his children**

On the other hand, I can let myself think of the loveliness of God. Would God tempt me to do evil? Of course he wouldn't. Would God ever seek evil for me? Of course he never would. Think only of what he has done. 'Of his own will he brought us forth' (1:18). My good brother, my sister, do tell me, are you born again? Have you become a child of God? That is marvellous. Whose idea was it? Was it yours? Was it that you were walking in your back garden one of these lovely summer days, and you said, 'This is glorious, I think I've had an idea now. Instead of being a creature of God, what about my becoming a son of God? I think I'll suggest the idea to the Almighty. He hasn't thought of it maybe.'

Well, of course you say, 'Don't talk so stupidly.' The idea that you should be born again and become a child of God, heir of God, joint heir with Christ, of course it wasn't your idea. It was God's idea! He did it of his own free will. Of his own free will, he 'begat us', he 'brought us forth'. Oh, how he intends to do us good. He not only brought us forth, but he brought us forth as 'a kind of a firstfruits of his creatures' (v. 18). If, without being asked, of his own initiative, long before we even existed, he had planned it all that we should be children of God, can I not trust him?

'There is no change with him,' says James (see v. 17). He never varies. If he loved me in past eternity he loves me now; he'll love me forever, and never once will he seek my harm but always my good. Does it seem, my dear brother, my dear sister, that the world is having a very happy time and somehow your faith, as you call it, is keeping you back and making you look silly? And why can't you enjoy yourself like the rest, and isn't God an old killjoy? Oh, in that moment when temptation comes like that, do step back a pace or two and consider the tremendous salvation that God designed, without being asked, and accomplished by his grace. You have been begotten again and become a firstfruits of his creatures. He doesn't change. And if he says, 'No,' today to sinful desire, it's not because he's a killjoy, but because his will is best.

Ah, dear old Reuben, can you picture him in that moment when temptation assailed, when all his appetites felt that this was the golden opportunity and, if he didn't take it now, he was depriving himself of some good? What would the moderns say about it? If only in that moment, he had stepped back two paces and begun to think of the great mercies of God, that by God's own providence, God had ordered and arranged it that he should be the eldest son and have the birthright. If in that moment, he had weighed that little gratification of his appetites against the great honour of eternally being the birthright son. But, no, he let the momentary glamour befuddle his brain and judgment and shut out the great kindness of God, and he sinned, to his everlasting sorrow.

### **The other areas from which temptation comes**

We haven't the time to consider in such detail the other areas from which temptation comes. That won't matter. Our lessons have been enough for tonight, but just let me briefly mention them as we close.

If some temptation comes from our fallen, evil desires, other temptation will come from Satan. What is he concerned about? Well, of course he is concerned about anything in which he may harm the child of God and, more often than not, he is not concerned with driving us or tempting us to some lurid misdemeanour. He is going after something far deeper. He is trying to put a wedge between my heart and God, between me and the Saviour.

It happened with Job, didn't it? You remember his story. God said to Satan: 'Satan, have you considered my servant Job?'

'Yes, I have,' he said, 'and I could tell you the truth about Job now. He simply loves and serves you for what he gets out of it. You've made his life so pleasurable that of course he serves you. If you were to allow him to suffer, then he'd turn round and blaspheme you to your face.'

God said, 'All right then, Satan, you are permitted to attack him to certain limits.' And Satan stripped the man of virtually all he had, health included, and still Job did not sin.

'The Lord gave,' he said, 'and the Lord has taken away. That is fair enough' (see 1:21).

Ah, but that wasn't the end of the trial. When Satan could do no more in that direction, he used Job's friends, alas, and they came along to Job and they said, 'Job, you might as well be honest; you must have done some terrible sin. Just look at you with this terrible illness and all these calamities that have come upon you. It must be that, underneath, you have been a hidden sinner. Now come on, Job, admit it!'

They were grossly wrong, of course. Not all suffering comes as the result of personal sin, but that is what they said to Job; and they so infuriated the man that in the end, he went almost beyond the limit. It was so unfair, he felt, and in the end he began to harbour hard thoughts about God himself. 'Look here,' he said, 'if God would only come down and stand in front of me I'd tell him to his face, and I'd prove it to him. It isn't fair, God! I've lived the best I know how. Of course I've not been perfect, but I've done this and I've done that. I've helped the poor; I've relieved the widow; I've been just; I haven't been immoral. I've done everything I know how to live a godly life, and it isn't fair I should suffer like this. The trouble with God is you can't get at him. He hides behind his heaven. If only he'd come down here and talk, I'd prove it to his face. I'm not unjust. This is grossly unfair!'

That was serious, wasn't it? You can see how serious it was for a believer, under pressure from Satan, to come to doubt the fairness of God. We'd better talk with bated breath and sympathy hadn't we? It's okay for us to sit in health and peace and say, 'Oh, we bless the hand that guided.' Let's wait until a grievous affliction and long running pain makes us cry out that it isn't fair. Have you noticed that in many a heart that is the reaction in the end: 'What have I done to deserve this? I haven't been perfect, but why should I have to suffer all this?'

That is Satan at his job, trying to break a believer's faith in the fairness and justice and love of God. How can I shield myself against it? We haven't the time to think tonight how Job was shielded against it and won through, though James tells us to observe how he endured and came through and, in the end, justified God and said, 'God was right,' even if it meant admitting that everything Job had thought was right, was wrong (see 5:11). God was right. Job won his battle and his faith in God remained. How can I come through my periods of temptation and testing from the very devil, when it seems that God isn't fair and God doesn't care tuppence?

Let me remember Calvary and 'he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Rom 8:32). Let me ponder that love and see whether it does not win the battle and lead me to say, 'Yes, I don't understand what God is doing, but the God who gave his Son for me, I can trust him even in the dark.'

## Testings

Then there are testings. We won't call them 'temptations'. There are testings that come from God himself. We have had temptations from our own evil hearts, and temptation as in the case of Job that came to him via Satan (though with God's permission) as Satan tried to get him to doubt God. Where else do testings come from? They come from God himself, but not now tempting us to destroy our faith, but testing us to strengthen our faith and to give us the chance of demonstrating that our faith is genuine.

That was what was happening with Abraham on Mount Moriah. In Genesis 15 we read that 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness' (see v. 6). So he was a believer; that's lovely. He was really a believer. He was not putting his trust in Isaac or Sarah or anything else, but putting his trust in God.

You say, 'Yes, that's what everybody has to do to be justified. To be justified before the Lord you have to put your faith solely in God, not in your own works, not in the church, not in anybody at all. You have to put your faith solely in God. And 'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.'

Do you think he really believed like that? Wasn't he a little bit wobbly after that point, for a little while? He said he believed God, but he came to a very curious scheme, along with Sarah and Hagar, didn't he? Was that really faith in God? You say, 'No, it wasn't. He never ought to have taken Hagar. That was a bit wobbly. That wasn't faith; that was the flesh rather.'

And I'm afraid it was, but do you think he was a true believer at heart?

'Yes,' you say, 'I think he was a true believer. He went a bit wobbly in the middle, but he was a true believer.'

Yes, so he was, and you watch the climax, for in the end God gave him the chance of demonstrating that he was a true believer, that his faith was in God and in God only. So when



Isaac was grown up, God said to Abraham: 'Now, Abraham, let's just get this straight. Who is it your faith is in? Is it in me, or is it in Isaac? Let's settle it, Abraham. You give me Isaac.'

What, and be left with nothing but God?

Precisely. That's what faith is, isn't it? It is faith in God, full stop. And Abraham triumphed. When God saw he was ready for the examination, he put Abraham to it: 'Come on now, Abraham. Demonstrate what you say. You say you are a believer, that your faith is in me and in me only. Come on, Abraham, now demonstrate it.'

And Abraham walked up Mount Moriah and gave Isaac to God to demonstrate his faith was genuine faith in God plus nothing.

So, when the time is right and we are fit for the examination, God will deal with us all. If I have been justified by faith, thank the Lord for that, but if the faith is genuine, sooner or later, God will give me the chance, under testing, of demonstrating before him that my faith is the genuine thing, and he will give me the chance of showing it by my works.

So the Lord bless his word and use it to strengthen each one of us, as long as we are here in this world of our probation and trial, that from whatever source the temptation comes, from whatever source the trial, we may triumph in the Lord Jesus and bring forth fruit to his glory. Remember, 'happy are those who endure temptation, for when they are shown to be genuine, they shall receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to them that love him' (see 1:12).

Shall we pray.

And so blessed Lord Jesus, we lift our hearts to thee as we come to thee from thy holy word. We bless thee that, because thou hast suffered being tempted, thou art able to help those that are tempted. We bless thee, because thou doest ever live, thou art able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by thee. And therefore now this evening we pray that thou wilt write thy word on our hearts. Grant, Lord, that we shall not go away and forget it, but by thy word and by thy gracious promise and by the power of thy Holy Spirit, fortify us, we do beseech thee. And give us wisdom that, facing temptation, we may learn to endure and by thy grace to triumph. Forgive us for wherein we have fallen hitherto and grant us restoration and grace to get up and go again, and live to thy glory, as we thank thee for the ultimate triumph, knowing that temptation and the trial of our faith works endurance, and thou will grant at last the crown of life to those that have loved thy name.

Part us then with thy blessing, we beseech thee, for thy name's sake. Amen.

## About the Author

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