

## The Christian Life (24): Sanctification (Part 9)

Having considered the broad topic of mortification, we now want to consider the more specific subject of temptation. The Greek word rendered "tempt" or "temptation" (*peirazo*) literally means "to try or entice." It can refer to a positive trying or testing or a negative enticing or inducing. The first is from God and for our good the other is from our enemies for our harm. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials (temptations), knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (Jas.1:2), "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone'" (Jas.1:13). Temptations and trials relate to each other in that temptations often come in the midst of trials, and God sits as sovereign over both our temptations and trials.

It is important to understand that the word *tempt* has a twofold significance in Scripture, though it is not always easy to determine which of the two applies in a particular passage: (1) *to try* (the strength of), *to put to the test*; and (2) *to entice to do evil*. When it is said that "God did tempt Abraham" (Gen.22:1), it means that He tried him, putting to the test his faith and fidelity. To tempt is to make trial of a person in order to find out what he is and what he will do. But when we read that Satan tempted Christ, it signifies that Satan sought to bring about His downfall, morally impossible though it was.<sup>1</sup>

### I. Satan and Temptation

1. *Satan has an ally within the best of saints.* Temptations can originate from within or without. Within from the flesh and without from Satan and the world. But even if a temptation originated from without, it would have no effect if there were no ally within. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (Jas.1:14). Thus without the temptations of the devil and world, our flesh would still tempt ourselves, and regardless of the origin of the temptation, all Satan and the world can do is tempt us to tempt ourselves. "There is no temptation that Satan presents that does not entice our deceitful heart to fall into it. Even if there were not a devil in hell to tempt you to sin, your heart would constantly tempt you" (Gray).<sup>2</sup>

Blame not the devil. Temptations meet with corruptions that suit them. When the devil comes to you, your heart, like flax among fire or gunpowder having a spark of fire in it, is suddenly blown up. Therefore, blame not the devil but your own heart. Neither the devil nor the world could have you were it not for thine own heart, which, like a false traitor, lodges within your breast and betrays the soul to the snares and temptations of the devil.

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Should God chain up Satan, and give him no liberty to tempt or entice the sons of men to vanity or folly, yet they would not, yet they could not but sin against him. Satan has only a persuading deceit and not an enforcing might. He may tempt us, but without ourselves he cannot conquer us; he may entice us, but without ourselves he cannot hurt us. Our hearts carry the greatest stroke in every sin. Satan can never undo a man without himself; but a man may easily undo himself without Satan. Satan can only present the golden cup, but he has no power to force us to drink the poison that is in the cup.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Pink, *The Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer*, 118-119

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Gray, *Loving Christ and Fleeing Temptation*, 457

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:149-150

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Works*, 1:152-153

And so a temptation can originate from without or within. If without, and the temptation is fully resisted, the soul is free from sin and guilt. "As long as one does not listen to this, or inclines himself in any way, but chases such suggestions away as flies from his countenance, it is not his sin, but the devil's" (Brakel).<sup>5</sup> "Sensitive Christians often charge those sins upon themselves which, of right, ought to be laid on the devil. The devil suggests thoughts of blasphemy which the nature of man rises against, yet they charge those upon themselves. It is no sin to be tempted from without, but the sin is to yield to the temptation" (Love).<sup>6</sup> Prior to providing a few ways we can "distinguish those motions to sin which arise from the flesh and those which come from the devil," Christopher Love gave two brief clarifications: "Whether temptations come from the devil or from corrupt nature, yet you may be sure they are both sinful, and therefore are both to be rejected" and "we are not to be so careful to distinguish between these motions as to resist them, for a man to be more curious how to distinguish than carefully to resist them is but curiosity, not sincerity."<sup>7</sup>

Older writers have provided a number of ways to "distinguish between the bite of the serpent and the disease of the mind, between those suggestions which come from Satan, and which breed out of our own hearts" (Watson).<sup>8</sup> Thomas Watson provided three,<sup>9</sup> Christopher Love five,<sup>10</sup> John Downname five,<sup>11</sup> and Wilhelmus a Brakel two.<sup>12</sup> (1) "We may know a motion comes from Satan by its suddenness. Temptation is compared to a dart, because it is short suddenly (Eph.6:16). David's numbering the people was a motion which the devil injected suddenly" (Watson).<sup>13</sup> "Motions to sin that come from Satan usually seize suddenly upon a man. Before that instant of time that such motions were suggested, they were never thought of. Perkins says that they flash like lightning into a house suddenly" (Love).<sup>14</sup> (2) "Motions to sin that come from Satan arise in a frightful manner" (Brakel).<sup>15</sup> "The motions to evil which come from our own hearts are not so terrible. Few are frightened at the sight of their own children; but motions coming from Satan are more ghastly and frightful, as motions to blasphemy and self-murder" (Watson).<sup>16</sup> (3) "When evil thoughts are thrown into the mind, when we loathe and have reluctance to them; when we strive against them, and flee from them, as Moses did from the serpent, it shows they are not the natural birth of our own heart. Satan has injected these impure motions" (Watson).<sup>17</sup> "Temptations from Satan are usually accompanied with much horror and fear when they are first suggested. When a temptation is so strongly suggested that it makes a man quake, and horror comes upon him, this is an argument it comes from the devil" (Love).<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the one who is assaulted must note this as a trial from God (who gives the devil free reign) as a sorrowful cross, and not as his sin. This consideration will strengthen him and enable him to endure these onslaughts all the better. All he needs to do is flee the temptation. He must especially not concern himself with it, but rather despise it as an abomination of the devil, who will for this reason be punished. Such a per-

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<sup>5</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3:240-241

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:176

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:176

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 261

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 261

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:177-180

<sup>11</sup> John Downname, *The Christian Warfare*, 103-105

<sup>12</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3:240-242

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 261

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:180

<sup>15</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3:241

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 261

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 261

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Love, *Works*, 1:179

son cannot repel this, but it will strengthen him to give no heed thereto, and it will thus be less injurious. And if he receives some breathing room, he must earnestly pray to the Lord – yes, during these assaults he must cry with his heart to God. He will have that much more liberty to do so if he takes note that it is not his sin, but rather that he is being tormented with these thoughts.<sup>19</sup>

2. *Satan has control over legions of demons and this evil world.* Satan is described as the "god" and "ruler of this world" (2Cor.4:4; Jn.14:30) as he has temporary authority over it as a judgment from God. He is called "the tempter" (1Thess.3:5) who tempts us with "fiery darts" (Eph.6:16). This he does with the assistance of fallen angels called demons, who influence and control the world. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph.6:11-12). "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph.2:1-2). In both of these passages we have reference to "the devil" or "prince of the power of the air" who works in and through "the rulers of the darkness of this age," who influence or control the "sons of disobedience." Thus because Satan and demons are purely spiritual beings, they have the ability to work directly and indirectly upon our minds. For we struggle not against flesh and blood but spiritual forces; "that is, with spirits, with abilities transcending the power of the flesh and blood" (Goodwin).<sup>20</sup>

It is something for a man to have all the world against him, to have all mankind against him: if all mankind should be against one man, you would say, There were a great strength; but behold more than that, here is something more than flesh and blood that every man does wrestle against: 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood:' all mankind is but flesh and blood, and so there is a weakness; but we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, for authority; and against powers, for strength; and against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places. Oh, what a mighty power then has Satan to infest, molest, and to tempt the children of men.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, we can say Satan tempts us as his fiery darts come through demons who influence the world around us. It's for this reason, the world is a source of temptation. "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Prov.1:10). "A violent man entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good" (Prov.16:29). "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come" (Lk.17:1). These temptations can come through those we love. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen.3:6). "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath" (Prov.6:4). "But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'" (Matt.16:23). It's for this reason, temptations are often ascribed to Satan himself, though we experience them through demonic hosts and an evil world (fully or partially as we can be tempted by good and bad people).

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<sup>19</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3:241-242

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Works*, 3:259

<sup>21</sup> William Bridge, *Works*, 1:130-131

3. *Satan has various schemes and devices to tempt both sinners and saints.* Scripture speaks of the "devices" (2Cor.2:11) and "schemes of the devil" (Eph.6:11). Satan is described as our adversary who "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pet.5:8), who must be "resisted" (Jas.4:7), and his fiery darts "quenched" with the shield of faith (Eph.6:16). "Satan is well experienced as he's studied man for many thousand years. Having gotten in all these years so much tempting skill and policy, he is able to discern what that bait is that will take soonest with the children of men, according to their natures, constitutions, complexions, ages, sexes, etc." (Bridge).<sup>22</sup> Thus we must not be "ignorant of his devices." In his treatise, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, William Gurnall suggested two basic schemes of Satan: "His first main design is to draw into sin. The second main design is to accuse, vex, and trouble the saint for sin" (Gurnall),<sup>23</sup> whereas in his treatise *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, Thomas Brooks provided four: Satan draws souls to sin; keeps us from holy duties, keeps souls in a sad and doubting condition, and seeks to destroy all sorts and ranks of men in the world (that is, he blinds the eyes of the unbelieving world).<sup>24</sup>

(1) Satan entices us to sin. "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt.4:1). As Satan tempted our Savior, so he tempts us with the "lust of the flesh (hedonism), the lust of the eyes (materialism), and the pride of life (popularity, acceptance, and arrogance)" (1Jn.2:16). He tempts us to these sins by knowing who and when to tempt. "The devil is old but not infirm. His temptations are like the arrows of a skillful archer that seldom fail to hit their target. Over the centuries he has mastered the art of wickedness. Satan knows by experience when the best time is to shoot his arrows. He knows what bait to use whenever he fishes. He tempts young people with beauty, the thrifty with money, and the ambitious with power. He has an apple for Eve, a grape for Noah, and a bag for Judas" (Beeke).<sup>25</sup> "Satan suits his temptations to our predominant lusts and idols; he knows which lusts and idols within our bosoms our heart follows, and according to those lusts he frames his temptations" (Gray).<sup>26</sup>

(a) He presents the bait but hides the hook. "Satan presents the golden cup, and hides the poison; he presents the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin, and hides from the soul the wrath and misery that will certainly follow the committing of sin" (Brooks).<sup>27</sup> This is how he caught our first parents. "Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Gen.3:4-5). "Here is the bait, the sweet, the pleasure, the profit. Oh, but he hides the hook, the shame, the wrath, and the loss that would certainly follow" (Brooks).<sup>28</sup> "Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth will be filled with gravel" (Prov.20:17; Job 20:12-19).

(b) He tempts in strategic times and seasons. "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1Cor.7:5). "As a cunning fisher casts in his hook when the fish will bite best, so the devil can hit the very joint of time when temptation is likeliest to prevail" (Watson).<sup>29</sup> This is why Satan tempted Christ after He fasted forty days. "Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread'" (Matt.4:3). "Satan tempts when he sees us weakest. He breaks over the hedge where it is lowest. He often tempts us when

<sup>22</sup> William Bridge, *Works*, 1:129

<sup>23</sup> William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:71

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Works*, 1:10-138

<sup>25</sup> Joel Beeke, *Striving Against Satan*, 69

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Gray, *Loving Christ and Fleeing Temptation*, 458

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Works*, 1:12

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Works*, 1:12

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 262

we are alone; as he came to Eve when her husband was away, and she was the less able to resist his temptation. He has the policy to give his poison privately, when no one is by to discover the treachery" (Watson).<sup>30</sup> (c) He presents repentance as an easy thing. Satan loves to portray God as all mercy and repentance as easy. "Why! Suppose you do sin, says Satan, it is no such difficult thing to return, and confess, and be sorrowful, and beg pardon, and cry, 'Lord, have mercy upon me;' and if you do but this, God will pardon and forgive your sins" (Brooks).<sup>31</sup>

(2) Satan disturbs our holy duties. Satan knows the benefits that come from holy duties. He seeks to spoil our public and private duties. Hearing sermons, public prayer, sacraments, Bible reading, private prayer and meditation, are all enemies of Satan. "Satan makes us focus on how difficult it is to practice spiritual disciplines. He discourages us from persevering in prayer, in Bible study, in fellowship with believers, and in holiness. He plants the thought that it's better for us to neglect these disciplines altogether than to undertake them in a mechanical and unsatisfying manner" (Beeke).<sup>32</sup> "Satan has his temptations in reference to holy duties. His policy is either to hinder from duty or discourage in duty" (Watson).<sup>33</sup> (a) He hinders from duty. "We would have come once and again, but Satan hindered us" (1Thess.2:18). "So many duties of religion would have been performed, but Satan hindered" (Watson).<sup>34</sup> (b) He discourages in duty. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being watchful in it with thankfulness" (Col.4:2). "The Devil is afraid of a serious lively prayer at his heart; he knows that can pull down in a minute what he has been contriving for a thousand years; and therefore if he cannot withhold us from holy duties, he will do his utmost to disturb us in them" (Steele).<sup>35</sup> "When any one has been performing holy duties, he tells him he has played the hypocrite; he has served God for money, he has had sinister ends: his duties have been full of distraction; they have been fly-blown with pride; he has offered the blind and the lame, and how can he expect a reward from God" (Watson)?<sup>36</sup>

We are not ignorant of his devices. Hence we see him, 'when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them' (Job 1:6). And being questioned, says, that his business is to 'go to and fro in the earth,' and 'walk up and down in it;' as if he walked only out of curiosity or for some charitable end: but as our Lord Jesus went up and down doing good—this was His work from morning to night—so the Devil walks up and down doing evil. He is in every pew, at every elbow, throwing in his fire-balls, and enticing poor souls to commit folly with him; and when God is treating with the soul about heaven and hell, then comes he and thrusts the world between, or some vanity therein, to break the treaty, and spoil that sacred conference; so that, of all roads, no road is so full of thieves as the road to heaven.<sup>37</sup>

(3) Satan distorts the word of God. This was his first temptation to Eve. "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'" (Gen.3:1)? "Satan draws men off from the love of the truth to embrace error. 'That they should believe a lie' (2Thess.2:11). He is called in Scripture not only an unclean spirit, but a lying spirit. As an unclean spirit he labors to defile the soul with lust, and as

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 264

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Works*, 1:31

<sup>32</sup> Joel Beeke, *Striving Against Satan*, 77

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 275

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 275

<sup>35</sup> Richard Steele, *A Remedy For Wondering Thoughts In Worship*, 9

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 276

<sup>37</sup> Richard Steele, *A Remedy For Wondering Thoughts In Worship*, 114-115

a lying spirit he labors to corrupt the mind with error" (Watson).<sup>38</sup> This Satan does through demons who indwell and influence false teachers who deceive the people. As Satan is "the father of lies" (Jn.8:44), he mediates these lies through "doctrines of demons" (1Tim.4:1), who influence and control "false teachers" (2Cor.11:13-15). It's through these that saints are tempted to stray from the truth.

(4) Satan disrupts our peace. Satan is described as "the accuser of the brethren" who accuses us before God day and night (Rev.12:10). "As the Holy Spirit's work is not only to be a sanctifier, but also a comforter, whose fruits are righteousness and peace, so the evil spirit Satan is both a seducer unto sin, and an accuser for sin, a tempter and a troubler, and indeed in the same order. As the Holy Ghost is first a sanctifier, and then a comforter, so Satan is first a tempter, then a troubler" (Gurnall).<sup>39</sup> "Satan, in tempting, assaults and weakens the saints' peace. If he cannot destroy their grace, he will disturb their peace. He envies the Christian his good day; and if he cannot keep him from a heaven hereafter, he will keep him from a heaven upon earth" (Watson).<sup>40</sup> Satan knows the power that results from the joy and peace of a Biblically grounded assurance. Thus he aims at disrupting our peace by weakening our faith. "He tempted Peter to deny his Master – 'Satan desires to sift you – but I have prayed that your faith fail not.' Satan hoped by that gross sin to have drawn him into despair" (Goodwin).<sup>41</sup> He was not content with Peter's denial of Christ, but aimed at his utter despair in denying Christ. "Above all graces in us, he is the greatest enemy to faith; therefore, the apostle was jealous of Satan in nothing more than in this, lest he had been dealing and tampering with, and perverting their faith: 'For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain' (1Thess.3:5)" (Goodwin).<sup>42</sup> This is further seen in the penitent man in Corinth, who having been "delivered up to Satan" in his excommunication (1Cor.5:5), was to be forgiven and restored, "lest Satan should take advantage of us" (2Cor.2:11). He was to be received back into fellowship before Satan tempted him to despair. "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow...for we are not ignorant of Satan's devices" (2Cor.2:6-7, 11).

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 270

<sup>39</sup> William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:85

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 279

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Works*, 3:256

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Works*, 3:257