

Temptations and Blame-Shifting

by R. Stanley

Christians must take ownership of their choices and actions, and seek God's help and power to overcome temptation and achieve victory.

Scripture: James 1:12

Topics: "Temptation", "Spiritual Victory"

Description

R. Stanley preaches on the absolute victory that God wills for His people, emphasizing the necessity of battling through temptations. He draws insights from Martin Luther, Matthew Henry, and John Wycliffe, highlighting the commonality and seriousness of temptation in the Christian life. Through a comparative study of Adam and Christ's temptations, he shares ten valuable lessons on overcoming temptations and achieving triumph.

Transcript

God's will for His people is absolute victory. But there is no victory without battle. Martin Luther testified, "My temptations have been my Masters in Divinity!" Matthew Henry, the great Bible Commentator, observed, "The best of saints may be tempted to the worst of sins!" John Wycliffe, the Star of Reformation, asserted, "How much higher the hill is, so much is the wind there greater; so, how much higher the life is, so much stronger is the temptation of the enemy."

Temptation, being the most common and the greatest problem of Christian life, cannot be slighted. There are very few Christians who are really watchful and they are the ones who are truly triumphant. Temptation is not sin, but yielding to temptation is. When we sin we start giving excuses and blaming everything and everyone. This explains the continuously defeated lives of many Christians. I was meditating on the temptation of Adam versus the temptations of Christ from Genesis 2 & 3 and Matthew 4 respectively. This comparative study has given me ten lessons.

1. Do not blame the circumstances.

Jesus was in the "wilderness" while tempted by the devil. It was a barren desert and a wasteland of rock and sand. But Adam was in the most beautiful and fruitful garden man had ever known. It was a garden of abundance and plenty. Jesus in the wilderness had nothing to eat whereas Adam lacked nothing. Jesus overcame the temptation whereas Adam yielded to it. God wants us to be victorious whether we are in a green garden or a dry desert, whether in plenty or poverty. We are not to go "under" the circumstances but

live "above" them.

Apostle Paul triumphantly shouts, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom 8:35-39). Here is a picture of marriage. The partners have fallen in love with each other. They are unmindful of other things. They have promised to stand together "in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity." It's a covenant relationship bound by the cords of love. The love of Christ is greater than all other forces which work against us on earth or in the heavenlies. We will not yield to the pull and pressure of circumstances. Temptations from without have no power unless there is a corresponding desire within!

2. Do not blame lack of fellowship.

Jesus had no one with Him for fellowship and support. The wild animals were His company. He had to fight the temptations all alone. But Adam and Eve had each other for companionship and fellowship. They had each other's support to stand against the enemy. But they failed. Jesus overcame.

Several young people who leave the campus prayer fellowship when they graduate backslide and cool off. They show lack of fellowship as an excuse. True we are strong and safe in the warmth of fellowship of believers. But that does not release us of our individual responsibility. "Each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom 14:12). Fellowship is a great blessing but God will not wink at our failure in solitude. When due to some reason or other we are placed where we don't have other believers for fellowship, we are to be only extra careful and more alert. All that we learn in the fellowship of God's children should be put into practice while alone.

Joseph was alone while tempted. There was no fellowship in the pit or palace or prison. He had to stand alone and he took sides with God and came out triumphantly. God in His providence does put His children in solitude at times to strengthen their muscles. We cannot always be enjoying the excitement of the Mount of Transfiguration. We cannot pitch tents up there and stay back. We will have to come down to the valley of temptation to face the reality of life. We can't escape.

3. Do not blame the succession of temptations.

Jesus overcame eventhough temptations flooded upon Him one after another. Though in Matthew 4 only three temptations are recorded, we know for sure that the devil departed from Him only "until an opportune time!" (Lk 4:13). A particular temptation stops or weakens when we yield. Because Jesus never yielded, the devil kept on changing his tactics and intensifying his fury. So the Bible says He was tempted in "all" points. For Jesus the temptations were a series and He overcame whereas Adam failed even at the first single temptation.

Folks commonly complain, "How can I withstand if temptations come one after the other?" No one but Job other than Jesus has the answer for us. A messenger reported to Job that his servants were killed by the Sabeans. "While he was still speaking," the second messenger came with the news of his sheep burned up by a fire from God. "While he was still speaking," another came with the news of the carrying away of the camels by the Chaldeans. "While he was still speaking," another brought the news of the death of his children due to the collapse of the house. Have trials or temptations visited any of us in such quick succession and awfulness? "In all this Job did not sin!" (Job 1:13-22). Instead of worrying, he resorted to

worshipping. Instead of crying over his losses, he was crowning God with his praises. No degree of temptation justifies any degree of sin!

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown!" (Js 1:12).

4. Do not blame the place.

It was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness just as it was God who put Adam in the garden (Mt 4:1; Gen 2:15). Jesus overcame, but Adam gave in. The environment or the place cannot serve as an excuse for our failure.

Though his brothers sold away Joseph into Egypt, it was "God" who sent him there (Gen 45:4,5). Egypt was known for its low morality. The Egyptians wouldn't hesitate to kill a man to take away his wife (Gen 12:12). The moral decay was there at all levels. Potiphar was an officer of Pharaoh and his wife was enticing Joseph the overseer of his house (Gen 39:5-7). In such a place of debauchery, Joseph said no to sin!

Daniel is another young man to challenge us. He was taken captive to Babylon. Again where the cup of iniquity was overflowing. Idolatry, drunkenness and all sin were the norm of the society. But Daniel dared to be different. He refused the delicious but defiling dishes of the King.

I've heard many a Christian say, "If only I can get a job in a Christian institution, I will..." Beloved, whatever may be the type of place, if it is God who put you there, you have no excuse for your failure.

5. Do not blame your ignorance.

God's commandment to Adam and Eve was specific and clear. No interpretation was necessary. It was simple and direct (Gen 2:16,17). Yet they failed. But we have no record that the Father God had ever told Jesus not to turn stones into bread or not to jump from the tower. How did then Jesus overcome the enemy who tempted Him to do these things? He operated on the "principles" of God's law. He had rightly understood the mind of God so He could identify or discern the plan of Satan against God's purposes.

In the first temptation, to turn stones into bread, was a challenge of His Sonship and the sufficiency of the Scriptures. In the second temptation, to jump from the temple tower, was a call to spectacularity and a suggestion to test God. The devil was cleverly trying to sow doubt in Christ's mind about God's ability. The third one was to attempt a short-cut method to acquire sovereignty. Yielding to any of these would violate God's principles.

Never say, "I didn't know, so I failed." God has deposited His truth in our hearts. He has written His law in our minds. He has given the all-sufficient Bible in our hands. The Holy Spirit in us is constantly teaching us what to accept and what to reject. We don't need a specific commandment for each situation. The Bible nowhere says, Thou shalt not smoke! But the principle is there--we are not to defile our body which is the temple of the Spirit; we are not to be brought under the power of any; and so on.

6. Do not blame others.

When God asked Adam whether he ate the forbidden fruit, he threw the blame on his wife. "The woman whom You gave to be with me she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Gen 3:12). To Jesus came one of the

most powerful temptations through Peter. While He was speaking about how He would suffer and be killed in Jerusalem Peter rebuked Him saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Jesus at once recognised satanic suggestion to avoid the cross and he sharply answered Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Mt 16:21-23). Jesus did not for a moment entertain the temptation just because it came through His closest associate. This is what Adam should have done when Eve gave him the fruit. Instead of saying, "Get behind me, Satan," he perhaps said, "Get near me, Sweetheart!" What a tragedy for mankind!

Temptations may be through someone we love most. It may come from the most unexpected quarter. The devil comes not in black with a horn and tail. He came to the garden as a beautiful creature. "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). Hesitate not to say no to a friend who tempts. Better displease man and please God than please man and displease God. Better grieve man and gladden God than gladden man and grieve God. Thomas Adams warned, "We have many leaders into temptation, but it is our fault if we follow them." King Solomon advised youngsters, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Prov 1:10). The sin you do two by two you must pay for one by one!

7. Do not blame God.

God was more than a spiritual reality for Adam and Eve. He was their personal and literal friend, guide and provider. They could "hear" the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden (Gen 3:8). God spoke to them face to face. Even while enjoying this literal and immediate presence of God, they failed. On the other hand, Jesus overcame the enemy even though angels came to minister to Him only after the devil left Him (Mt 4:11).

Never say, "If only God had sent me help at that moment..." Never complain, "God forsook me!" He is Immanuel and He is always with us, whether we "feel" His presence or not. The throne of Grace is open day and night. God is never too busy to help us or be interested in the smallest detail of our life. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). Jesus is not a silent spectator of our temptations but our sinless sympathizer and succourer.

God is not silent when the enemy is surging. "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a banner against him" (Isa 59:19).

8. Do not blame your nature.

Adam and Eve failed even when they were in a state of innocence (Gen 2:25). Jesus was not in a state of innocence when He came into this world. He had the knowledge of good and evil so He could love what was right and hate what was wrong (Heb 1:9). He had a nature like ours. "Because God's children are human beings--made of flesh and blood--Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form" (Heb 2:14). He was absolutely victorious while in a body like ours!

"That's my nature. How can I change it?" This is the common excuse by folks for falling into sin. But God has made ample provision through His promises and power that we may be victorious right here now in this world. "His divine POWER has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious PROMISES, that through these you may be partakers of the DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:3,4). God is not like the present day politicians who are heroes in promising but zeroes in performing. They promise

the sky but can't even give a roof, because their resources are limited. But our God is faithful to His promises and abundant in resources. With all these promises and power to change our nature, we have no excuse whatsoever.

9. Do not blame your bodily cravings.

Jesus overcame the temptation when He was really hungry after forty days of fasting, whereas Adam and Eve failed even when they had all the fruits and vegetables at their disposal (Mt 4:2; Gen 2:16).

God has given us enough and more. We must learn to be content. Be content with your wife, your husband, your possessions, and so on. "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor 6:13).

God was greatly displeased when David said yes to his bodily craving and took another man's wife. God expressed His grief and disappointment through Nathan, "I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?" (2 Sam 12:8,9).

Don't throw the blame on your body saying the flesh is weak. That's why God has given us the Holy Spirit. If we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. The Cross of Christ with the power of Resurrection is to give us victory over the passions and desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16,24).

Satan, like a fisher, baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish. He never sets a dish before men that they do not love. Beware! Thomas Kempis pointed out, "Temptations discover what we are!" True!

10. Do not blame Satan.

Eve threw the blame on the serpent (Gen 3:13). May be she justified herself that Satan presented a temptation that was too much for her to resist. "Good for food... pleasant to the eyes... desirable to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness had the same triple strength (Mt 4:4,7,10). The offer for Him was also very attractive. But He refused. Because, He knew that "all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 Jn 2:16).

No doubt Satan is strong but that's no excuse for us because He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). We ought to be victorious! Satan is a defeated foe. Christ is the Victor and Christians are to be victors, not victims.

No temptation is too strong to resist. God's Word says, "No temptation has come to you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, so that you will not give in to it" (1 Cor 10:13).

Conclusion

Temptations will follow us till we breathe our last. Someone said, "That person who is no longer tempted has long since been laid to rest!" There is no order so holy, no place so sacred, where there will be no temptation. Christ has taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." God

promises a safe landing but not a calm passage.

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