

Temptation #5

It was the 12 century before Christ. Eli the Old Testament priest was growing up in a nation that was struggling economically and spiritually. But far away from the nation of Israel there was another struggle that was going on. For many years, this struggle was believed to be pure legend. But now, on the basis of archaeological findings, most scholars feel that this event really happened. The accounts that we have of this event, however, are a mixture of some fact with a lot of Greek mythology.

King Priam of Troy had kidnapped the beautiful wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. We actually can't be dogmatic as to how willing a party Queen Helen was to this whole fiasco, but we do know that King Menelaus was outraged. He was so angry that he gathered together a huge army to sail to Troy to retrieve his wife, Helen.

King Menelaus had troubles almost from the start. He lost many of his 1,000 ship fleet in a fierce storm. And finally when he did arrive and set up camp, he found the city of Troy to be seemingly invincible. For 10 long years, King Menelaus sieged Troy without any success. Finally, his troops became so discouraged that the King began to be fearful that they would mutiny against him. With his prospects looking dim indeed, King Menelaus came up with an ingenious plan. He had a huge, hollow, wooden horse built. He then filled the inside of this wooden horse with armed soldiers and placed it right in front of the city gates of Troy. King Menelaus then boarded his troops onto his ships and set sail, apparently back to Sparta in defeat. King Priam didn't realize, of course, that the ships were just sailing around the corner of the peninsula where they would be out of sight so that they could wait for the cover of darkness to return back into the port.

Now King Priam and the citizens of Troy were presented with an interesting dilemma. Here was this huge wooden horse sitting in front of their city gate. This was totally unprecedented. Why did the Spartans spend so much time making this enormous wooden horse? After much discussion and debate, they decided that King Menelaus had commissioned this horse to be made as a gift to the goddess, Athena. The Spartans had obviously admitted defeat and were now trying to appease the superior Trojan gods so that they might have a safe trip back home. So, now wanting to offend the goddess, Athena, the citizens of Troy opened the gates and rolled the wooden horse into their city, placing it in a prominent location.

After darkness fell, the armed soldiers inside of the horse opened the trap door and jumped to the ground. The rest of the Spartan army that had now returned back to the harbor was silently gathering around the city gate. After the gate was opened from within, the entire army was able to storm the city, catching the Trojan army completely by surprise. The city of Troy, that had been so strong that it could defend itself successfully against a decade long siege, fell in one night because it could not defend itself against an attack from within.

These past Sunday mornings, we have been looking at the subject of temptation. This is relevant to each of our lives for we all face temptation. There are 2 fronts from which we are tempted. Sometimes we are tempted from without. Sometimes the devil or one of his demons or the world system that he has authored tempts us to disobey one of God's commandments. We looked at this temptation from without last week and saw that the defense that God has given to us to resist this type of temptation is the word of God. As we looked at the example of the Lord Jesus Christ who was tempted by the devil himself, we saw Jesus use the Scriptures like the sword that it is to defeat the temptations of the devil.

Now this week we want to look at temptations that we face from within. Inner temptations are quite different not only in their source of origin but also in their nature.

Our Scripture reading from James 1 outlines the inner battle that we face very clearly, doesn't it?

First, we are enticed by our own lusts. We all have fleshly desires that sometimes demand to be met. When they try to lure us into fulfilling them outside of the will of God, we are tempted to sin against God. Now we must remember again that temptation itself is not sinful. The fleshly desires that we have are not evil. They have, in fact, been created within us by God. But when these fleshly desires demand center stage and try to rule over our lives they bring us to the point of making a moral decision. This is temptation.

If we put the fleshly desire in its proper place and resist its rule in our life, we not only have not sinned, but we are strengthened. We grow in our faith and our relationship with God. But if we give in to that fleshly desire, sin is born. We act upon that fleshly desire and it produces sin in our lives. Now Jesus made it clear that the sin can occur within our minds without ever becoming an action. Jesus said that a man who looks on a woman to lust after her in his heart has committed adultery with her in his mind. Jesus said that a person who harbors anger against a person in her heart has committed murder in her mind. If we allow temptation to give birth to sin in our minds to the point where we fantasize or imagine an action to take place, we have sinned against God. And what we allow into our thought life often becomes reality in our lives eventually. For as the Proverb states, *as a man thinketh, so he becomes.*

This is the process that James speaks of here. A fleshly desire tempting us bringing us to a point of moral decision. The wrong choice giving birth to sin. And, of course, the eventual wages of sin is death.

Now we all know this process only too well for we all are sinners and we all have experienced it. And we cannot look to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ in confronting this type of sin because he did not have a sinful nature. Last week, we were able to look at the example of Jesus Christ in facing temptations from without because Jesus faced the devil in one of the greatest battles of temptation in all of human history. The Lord Jesus Christ was victorious over the enemy. It is always best when you can look at the strategy of a complete victory and emulate that example in your own battle. We can do that with outer temptations following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what do we do with temptations that come from within? What help do we have with temptations that come from our own sinful, fleshly desires?

Happily, even though the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be our example here because he was completely sinless, born of a virgin without a sinful nature, Jesus Christ has provided a defense for temptations from within in the redemptive work that he accomplished.

If you were with us last Sunday, we will recall that our defense against the enemy's onslaughts was the Word of God. It was the Word of God that Jesus Christ used to defeat the enemy's advances. Now there are actually 2 who are called the Word of God in the Scriptures. Both are living and powerful and sharper than any double-edged sword. The first, that we saw last week, is the written Word of God. This is objective revelation of God's truth that has been written down for our benefit. Over a period of some 1,500 years, over 40 prophets of God wrote down God's message to us as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. God so superintended this process that we have all that we need for spiritual life and godliness. God inspired his written Word and he has preserved his written Word so that we have the Bible today as a continuing objective guide for life and godliness. The Bible is God's written Word and it is our defense against the temptations of the devil and the world system he has authored. But there is another who is called the Word of God in the Scriptures. The Apostle John began his gospel with the words, *in the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God and the word was God*. A few verses later, John continued, *the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory*. It is obvious that the Apostle John is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Word of God here. Whereas the Bible is the written word of God; the Lord Jesus Christ was the living word of God. Jesus Christ was called *the expressed image of the invisible God* in the Bible. It shouldn't surprise us at all that this living Word of God is our defense against temptations from within for the written word of God is our defense from temptations from without.

Now just how does this work? How is the Lord Jesus Christ our defense against temptations that come from our inner fleshly desires?

Romans 13:12-14 reads:

*So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.* <sup>13</sup> *Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.* <sup>14</sup> *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Obviously, in the context, *the armor of light* that we are to put on is a term referring to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In case we would have a question about this, the Apostle Paul says clearly in verse 14, *rather, clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ*. Now the obvious question that comes to our minds is how do we do this? How can a person be clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, I'm just going to speak of this in the most general terms this morning. We plan to spend the last 2 Sundays of this series looking in much more detail about how we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. But in a

summary statement let me just say that we clothe ourself with the Lord Jesus Christ by putting on the armor of God that has been provided for us in order to do battle with the enemy. Ephesians 6 gives us the details of this process. In this wonderful passage, the Apostle Paul writes:

*<sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

The Apostle Paul then goes on to delineate 6 specific pieces of armor that God has provided for us:

- \*belt of truth
- \*breastplate of righteousness
- \*feet shod with the gospel of peace
- \*shield of faith
- \*helmet of salvation
- \*sword of the spirit which is the Word of God

Every single one of these pieces of armor is a designation of the Lord Jesus Christ that is specified someplace in the Bible. We are going to see this clearly as we conclude our study. When the Apostle Peter wrote that no Scripture is of private interpretation, this is what he was speaking of. The Lord Jesus Christ is our truth, our righteousness, our peace, our faith, our salvation and the living Word of God. So as we clothe ourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are putting on the armor of God that we might be equipped for the battle of temptation. This is the defense that God has provided for our inner battle, the temptations of our fleshly desires.

Now realizing that the Living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is our defense in this inner battle, how do we avail ourself of this powerful weapon? Last week, saw how Jesus Christ used the Scriptures, the written Word of God, as a powerful sword against the devil. Now how do we clothe ourself with the Lord Jesus Christ is the inner battle against our sinful desires.

1. First of all, and most basic, we must be born again into the family of God. We must have received the Lord Jesus Christ personally as our savior. We must be trusting in Him alone for our eternal destiny. We must have received the cleansing and forgiveness of sin that only the Lord Jesus Christ can provide through his atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.

Listen to these words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia:

*GAL 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

We become a son of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As children of God we are baptized into Christ – that is we are placed into the invisible body of Christ by the Holy Spirit – and we are clothed with Christ.

Now it is important for us to realize this because we don't see or feel it happen. These are blessings that we are given positionally as children of God.

When a child is born into an earthly family, there are certain blessings that are given to that child that the child knows nothing about. Young Ethan is lying in the hospital right now as we are meeting. He doesn't realize the name that he has been given. He doesn't realize the home that awaits him when he is released from the hospital. He doesn't realize many other blessings that he has in life. But that doesn't mean that he doesn't have them. They are his whether he realizes it or not.

So it is with the Christian who is born again into the family of God. We are born like spiritual babies. We have many spiritual blessings that have been given to us by God our Father. Among them is the fact that we have been placed into the body of Christ, the church, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, we have been cleansed from all of our sin, we have the very righteousness of the Son of God himself imputed to us, that we actually participated in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as he died as our representative, and many, many other blessings, including the fact that we have been clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in Christ. The Holy Spirit is in us and we are in Christ Jesus.

Until we are personally born again into the family of God, we don't have a defense against temptation. But when we become a member of God's family through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we then have all the defense that we need whether we even realize it or not. We then need only to appropriate the weapons that God has made available to us. As we grow in our faith and learn more and more about the position that God has given to us, we should become more and more successful in our battles with temptation.

2. Now as we learn more about the position that we have in the family of God, we are then able to exercise the blessings of that position that has been granted to us. Listen to what Paul writes in this regard to the church at Colossae: READ Col. 3:1-10:

*COL 3:1* Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

*COL 3:5* Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander,

*and filthy language from your lips.* <sup>9</sup> *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices*  
<sup>10</sup> *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Now Paul begins by instructing these believers that they died and were raised with Christ. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave in power and victory over sin, he died and rose as our representative. Therefore, we died and rose in Him. So Paul can write, *for you died (vs. 3) and since then you have been raised with Christ (vs. 1)*. This is the position that every believer has because of his or her being a member of God's family. Now this position gives every believer the abilities needed to be victorious over temptations from within. So we need only act in light of our position. We need only put that position that we have in Christ into practice in our lives. This is what Paul writes: *COL 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: . . .* <sup>7</sup> *You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.* <sup>8</sup> *But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: . . . and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Now again, we are going to see more about utilizing the specific pieces of armor in a couple of weeks. But it is critically important that we understand the position that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ and that we clothe ourself with Christ as our defense against temptations that come from within, from our sinful, fleshly desires.

So let me now summarize what we have studied so far about temptation as we conclude this morning.

1. We have to be prepared for temptations because it is inevitable that we are going to face them. We prepare ourselves for temptation by being watchful and prayerful, by not making provision for the flesh and not giving a place in our lives to the enemy.

2. When temptation comes, and it will, we determine its source for the source will dictate what weapon we use in defending ourselves against it.

3. If a temptation is from without, if it is from the devil or the world system that is opposed to God, then our defense is the written Word of God. We use a passage of Scripture that directly speaks to the issue that we are facing. The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God is a weapon that God's enemy cannot stand against. For in facing it, he is facing the almighty power of God himself.

4. If a temptation is from within, if it is from our own, inner, fleshly desires, then we clothe ourself with the Lord Jesus Christ. The living Word of God is our defense against inner temptations. We recognize the position that we have in Christ, having died and been raised with him, and we choose in his strength and power to put off the old man and not to live in our former way of life, but rather to put on the new man and to live in the newness of life that he has provided for us.