

PASTOR GORDON'S
COLUMN.

I. GOD'S GRACIOUS PERMISSION OF TEMPTATION. "He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." He does then suffer us to be tempted up to a certain point, does he? Most certainly. God does not tempt men, but he permits them to be tempted, for their good and for their spiritual growth. The storm and the tempest are just as needful for the development of a tree as the rain and the sunshine are. These toughen the fibre and harden the grain, while the others supply the nutriment.

It is a very significant fact that Christ, our example in all things, as soon as he had been baptized, was led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, indicating that temptation constitutes one stage in our spiritual discipline.

If life is to be a battle, we must be drilled and practiced for it. And this cannot be done in any sham fight with theoretical foes, in any holiday tournament with imaginary enemies. A young man may get a manual of spiritual drill and map of all the battlefields which are likely to be encountered, but unless he is brought face to face with real foes, he is not prepared for the campaign.

Have you not noticed, Christians, how much more prayerful you are when some sudden misstep has made you aware of your weakness? It is a sad thing to stumble and spill your self-confidence, but it is not so bad as it would be to pour out your character like water spilt upon the ground, that cannot be gathered up. And so God permits us to trip in order to put us on our guard against a heavy fall; that so we may learn the meaning of the words, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." "He that stumbleth and falls not, mends his pace," is a proverb verified by Scripture and experience.

Luther even went so far as to thank God for his sins, because they had driven him into a sense of dependence and trust in God which he had never known before. That is doubtless somewhat audacious. Sin is sin, as God is God; and it ought to be hated and shunned, as God ought to be loved and adored. But there is undoubtedly a rebound from sin sometimes, which carries us nearer to God than we were before we fell into it.

The fact is we do not any of us advance towards heaven in a straight line. Would that we might! As it is we make progress largely through rebounds from wrongdoing and reactions from our mistakes and mortifications.

A ship can use an adverse wind to carry it forward towards its desired haven. If the breeze is blowing north, the vessel can employ it for moving south. But it has to be done by many tacks and turns, now going a mile out of the course in order to get half a mile onward

in the course. And so we can make use of temptation and adversity and misfortune to help us on to a better life. But it may be at the expense of a great many tacks and deviations in our Christian course.

We wish when we draw a sketch of our Christian pilgrimage that it was not such a zigzag course; so many detours from the straight path; so many declensions from the even path. But so it is; and the Lord knows that this is a necessary part of our education, and over it all He writes his promise, "I will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear."

Hear that gracious and solemn admonition to Peter: "Simon! Simon! Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Three times the devil shakes him in his sieve, and three times the chaff of his insincerity and falsehood drops out in denials of his Lord. But what then? Peter "went out and wept bitterly." That was pure wheat. That proved that underneath all there was a genuine heart of faith and honesty. His pride failed, his self-assurance failed, but his faith did not fail. The Lord was true to his promise. He allowed him to be tempted up to the point where he was terribly bent, but not up to the point where he was broken.

And we see how much more serviceable Peter was after this trial. The one who had displayed the greatest weakness was chosen to strengthen his fellow disciples, and he who had committed the most grievous fault of all became afterward the most heroic of the twelve.

2. GOD'S CERTAIN DELIVERANCE FROM TEMPTATION. "But with the temptation will make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

The way of escape will not be through cowardly retreat, but through a victorious encounter. Temptation has a definite and providential end for us, and to this conflict we are appointed by the Lord. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." This puts us at war with evil spirits who have access to our hearts; this puts us at war with the manifestations of evil as they show themselves in society; this puts us at war with political powers and forces when they are found upholding wrong and executing unrighteousness. And we are to oppose and resist these things, not retreat from them. Contending against wrong makes us strong and stalwart. The most vigorous and spiritual Christian in any church is the one who has fought the most battles and won the most victories from the enemy. And we must remember that our conflict is with a personal devil, not merely with abstract wrong.

Read how plainly the Scripture puts it: "Your enemy, the devil, goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." You will meet him, Christian. You must resist him. You cannot see him, but you will again and again feel his influence exhaling upon you like deadly nightshade. Yet the Lord is able to deliver you "out of the paw of the lion," and to make you all the stronger for the encounter.

The wounds on the body of our Lord are the scars of his warfare with the enemy. They tell of temptation, of conflict, of glorious victory. "He was tempted in all points like as we, yet without sin." He has gone through the trial, he has endured the peril, he has gained the victory, and standing now upon yonder heights he says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation. Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

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