

OBEYING GOD AND OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Introduction

When the Bible teaches Christian believers about holy living, it means they are to do two important things.

1. They are to obey God always - at all times, in all places and under all circumstances.
2. They are to overcome every temptation to sin.

It is these two subjects that are the theme of this book. The Bible has a wealth of material to help us understand what it means to obey God and how to overcome temptation.

This is so good, because all genuine followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are conscious of two things. Firstly, they long to obey God and resist temptation firmly. Secondly, they know they are far from perfect, and at times find themselves disobeying God and giving in to temptation. When true believers realise they have failed God, it causes them considerable distress to know they have grieved the Lord who has done so much for them. Therefore, any help we can gain to enable us to obey God more diligently and to resist temptation more strongly is very beneficial. In this study booklet we shall consider some of this help that we find in the Bible.

Derek French

April 1994

PART 1 : OBEYING GOD

1) THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEYING GOD

Holiness and obedience always go together in the Bible. To be holy is to be obedient to God, and to be obedient is to be holy. They are like the two sides of the same coin. The importance God puts on obedience is seen in a number of ways in the Bible.

a) Christians are saved in order to live holy and obedient lives.

To begin with, this is the whole reason why God has chosen to save us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Just before Jesus was born, the angel came to Joseph and said this to him (Matthew 1:21): “... *you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people **from their sins.***” In other words, Jesus saves Christian believers from the guilt, power, and penalty of sin, and in the life to come even from its presence. So his great purpose is to break the power of sin in the believer’s life.

The apostle Paul had something similar to say (Ephesians 1:4): “*For he (that is, God) chose us in him (that is, Christ) before the creation of the world **to be holy and blameless in his sight.***” In other words, it has always been God’s plan and purpose, even from before the beginning of time that Christian believers are to live holy and obedient lives. This is also seen in 2 Timothy 1:9: “... *God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life...*”

The Bible gives a number of illustrations of how holiness and obedience are linked. In 1 Samuel 15 God gave a clear command to King Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites because they had attacked the people of God earlier. Even their animals were to be destroyed, and nothing kept alive. Now Saul won the battle, but he kept their king, Agag, alive and also spared the best of the sheep. When he was challenged about this by the prophet Samuel, Saul made the excuse he was only keeping all this to sacrifice to God. The way Samuel replied to this is very significant. He said to King Saul (1 Samuel 15:22): “... *To obey is better than to sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*” In other words, God wants our exact obedience to what he has commanded. No amount of gifts or sacrifices we may make will ever take the place of holy obedience to God. This passage also teaches us that God wants us to obey him in the way he has told us and not as we think best.

b) Jesus obeyed God and lived a holy life.

Obedience to God was of the greatest importance in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, his own example is the most outstanding instance of this. This is what he said in John 4:34: “*My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*” Obedience to his Father was at the top of his list of priorities. (See also John 12:49; Hebrews 10:7.) This is further seen in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus prayed about his crucifixion (Matthew 26:39): “*Going a little farther, he fell with his*

*face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup pass from me. **Yet not as I will, but as you will.**’*” Jesus always put the will of God first and always obeyed the will of God. This is further endorsed by Paul’s words (Philippians 2:8): “*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself **and became obedient to death** - even death on a cross.*” So for Jesus, obedience to his Father was as essential as food is to sustain our lives. Further, Jesus’ obedience to God was complete, even to the point of death, and death on a cross. And God wants Jesus’ followers to be like him.

c) Christian believers are commanded to live obedient and holy lives.

There are an enormous number of Bible passages that clearly teach this. We shall consider just a few of them.

To begin with we find these words in 1 Peter 1:14-16: “*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, ‘Be holy because I am holy.’*” The Christian family consists of those who obey God and desire to please him.

Then in Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus told his disciples to preach the Gospel that men and women might believe and be saved. Then after that he says in verse 20, “... **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**” As we read through the pages of the New Testament we see that the first converts on the Day of Pentecost did just this. We read in Acts 2:42: “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of*

bread and to prayer.” So these early believers, as soon as they were saved by God’s grace, set about listening to what God had to say through the apostles, and then obeying it. We should do the same.

d) Christians have been chosen by God for obedience.

Just as the nation of Israel was God’s chosen people in Old Testament days, today all Christian believers are also God’s chosen people. That is something very wonderful and it also brings with it the responsibility to live as God wants us to live. Note carefully the words of Peter in 1 Peter 1:2: “... *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood...*”

So it is very clear from the teaching of the Bible that the followers of Jesus consider obedience to God as something very important indeed. The very first command believers obey, and which shows that they are true Christians, is that they repent and believe in Jesus. Holy obedience to God is not an optional extra, but an essential part of true spiritual life. A holy life is an obedient life.

2) THE MEANING OF THE TERM ‘HOLY’

The word ‘holy’ has two aspects to it in the Bible.

a) To be set apart for special use by God.

Here are some Old Testament examples: (i) the 7th day in Genesis 2:3, (ii) Aaron and his garments in Leviticus 8:30, (iii) the vessels in the Tabernacle in Exodus 40:10.

b) To be morally pure.

This is displayed in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah sees a vision of God and the angels around his throne. These angels repeatedly called (Isaiah 6:3), “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*” Such was the purity of God, Isaiah felt his own uncleanness. Indeed, Isaiah said in verse 5, “*Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.*” As Isaiah glimpsed something of God’s awesome purity, he realised he needed to be cleansed because he was so impure. If you read further on in Isaiah 6 you will see that God did cleanse him and take his sin away.

c) Some New Testament examples.

These same two ideas, of being set apart for God’s special use, and being morally pure, are also found in the New Testament.

The idea of being set apart for God’s use is seen in 1 Peter 2:9: “*But you are a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*” As a ‘holy nation’ Christian believers are set apart for God’s special use. The followers of Jesus belong to him and are for his use.

Again we see this in 1 Corinthians 1:2: “*To the Church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who*

call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours...” The followers of Jesus at Corinth were **already** “*those sanctified in Christ Jesus*” or ‘made holy’, for that is what this phrase means. They were already ‘set apart’ by God and for him. Now, the Christians at Corinth were certainly not perfect, as a reading of this letter to them indicates, so how can they be described as ‘*sanctified*’ or ‘made holy’? The answer lies in this. God had declared them holy because their faith was in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross dealt with their sin. Christian believers are ‘*in Christ Jesus.*’ Because of all that Jesus is and had done for his followers in Corinth, God no longer saw them as ungodly sinners, worthy of eternal punishment. Instead he saw them as ‘in Christ’, possessing his righteousness. “*In Christ Jesus*” - is a lovely description of the Christian’s position. So when God looks at believers in Jesus he sees the righteousness of Jesus surrounding them. Therefore, God accepts them as if they were perfect in every way. This is the great blessing of the gospel of Christ, and this is the position in which every true Christian stands.

The idea of being morally pure we find in 1 Thessalonians 4:3&7: “*It is God’s will that you should be sanctified*” (made holy). Then Paul goes on to speak about sexual purity and he writes, “... *For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.*” Going back to 1 Corinthians 1:2, the believers at Corinth were also “... *called to be holy...*” If you like, holy is the believer’s new name. Therefore, believers are to be holy. All the

disciples of Jesus have been changed by God’s grace. They have a new heart. And that new heart begins to display itself in changed behaviour, or in holy and obedient living.

This is brought out well in Ephesians 4:24, where Paul writes, “... *put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*” The word used for ‘*holiness*’ in that verse is moral purity that is seen in right living, thinking and speaking. In a similar way the writer to the Hebrews stressed the importance of holy living when he urged his readers to do all in their power to live every day in a way that was holy, pure and pleasing to God (Hebrews 12:14): “*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord.*”

Therefore, holy and obedient living is something all Christians must pursue every day, wherever they may find themselves, whatever they may be doing, and whatever circumstances they find themselves in.

3) HOLY OBEDIENCE IS A LIFE-LONG PURSUIT

a) We are to progress in holiness.

As we think of living a life that is obedient to God, we need to remember the Bible teaches this is a life-long pursuit for the Christian. It is like a road we are to progress along. And every true Christian knows there will always be the need for improvement, for no one reaches

sinless perfection in this life. We are to aim for perfection, but in this life we shall never attain it.

This is something we need to grasp very clearly; otherwise we shall find ourselves in great confusion. No disciple of Jesus will be perfect in this life, and, therefore, be able to give up the pursuit of holiness. Indeed, the Bible goes further and states that anyone who makes such a claim is a liar! (1 John 1:8f) *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”* To this can be added the aside in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:46): *“When they sin against you - **for there is no-one who does not sin** - and you become angry with them...”* And the book of Proverbs declares (Proverbs 20:9), *“Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin’?”* If these are not sufficient to make this matter clear, James adds (James 3:2), *“We all stumble...”*

b) Five ways the Bible describes sin.

- i. In Romans 3:23 it says, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* The glory of God is Christlikeness, and the Lord Jesus knew no sin. No one except Jesus has yet lived like that.
- ii. (1 John 3:4) *“Everyone who sins, breaks the law.”* The law is summed up by Jesus in the answer he gave to the question, *“Which is the greatest commandment in the law?”* He replied in Matthew 22:37f: *“Love the Lord*

your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Who would dare to say that they had done that 24 hours of every day?

- iii. Sin is also described as not acting in faith (Romans 14:23): *“Everything that does not come from faith is sin.”*
- iv. Sin is omitting what we ought to do (James 4:17): *“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”* Who could ever claim that they always do all the good they ought to do all the time? Honesty compels us again to say, no one except Jesus.
- v. We can sin in thought as well as in action. Jesus says (Matthew 5:28), *“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* In other words, as far as Jesus is concerned, the thought is as guilty as the act. So we do not have to actually, physically do something wrong, just the desire to do so is sin in the eyes of God. Again, this Biblical description of sin is very searching, and leaves no one with any grounds for saying they no longer sin.

c) Examples of believers needing to grow in holiness.

Added to these are the cases given in the Bible when the very best of believers still have to confess their sins. David writes (Psalm 32:5), *“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my*

transgressions to the Lord' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (See also Psalms 51 & 130:3.) Then Isaiah in Isaiah 64:6: *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..."* Or Daniel in Daniel 9:7: *"Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame ... because of our unfaithfulness to you."* And we must remember Jesus taught his followers to pray (Luke 11:4), *"Forgive us our sins..."* Even the great apostle Paul was aware of his own need of improvement. Compare 1 Timothy 1:15 where, at the end of his life, he viewed himself as the "worst" of sinners, with Philippians 3:12ff and his expressed desire for greater holiness of life and his need to press on: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus."* Read also about king Asa. We are told (2 Chronicles 15:17) that, *"Asa's heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life."* And yet God still had to accuse him of sin in 2 Chronicles 16.

d) God's grace gives believers the desire for holiness.

What we need to realise is this: when people become believers in Jesus they are given new natures, new hearts, through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17): *"... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has*

gone, the new has come!" This was prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:26-27): *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."* The result of this is that the true Christian now likes God's law and desires to perform it. (See Hebrews 8:10ff.) God's grace so transforms the followers of Jesus that (Titus 2:12): *"It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age..."* **But** the Bible also teaches that the flesh, or sinful nature, remains and personal holiness is the gradual putting to death of the old nature and the development of the new. So there is a lifelong conflict or warfare in the Christian's life between these two natures. See what Paul wrote in Romans 7:18 & 22-23, and Galatians 5:17. The Christian's life of obeying God consists of two parts: the gradual removal of the old sinful ways of living (Romans 6:6, Galatians 5:24), and the progressive development of the new life which delights to obey God and live for him (Romans 6:4-5; Colossians 2:12 and 3:1-2; Galatians 2:19).

e) Holiness is a lifetime pursuit.

From what has been said so far, it is clear the Bible teaches there is no quick way to holiness, no short cut, no experience that will bring you instant sinless perfection. No Christian is free from sin in this life. But to help and encourage our obedience, God tells us in eternity we shall be like Christ (Romans 8:29): *"For those God foreknew he*

also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (1 John.3:2) “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears (i.e. Jesus), we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he (i.e. Jesus) is pure.” And speaking of Christ’s purpose for the Church, Paul writes (Ephesians 5:27), “... to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” To this Paul adds his own testimony (2 Corinthians 4:16-17): “*Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all...*”

Obeying God is a life-long pursuit, but is one that will end in glory, when we shall see Christ and be like him. What marvellous encouragement to persevere in our obedience to God!

4) HOW WE CAN BE OBEDIENT TO GOD

a) By God’s work and ours

We need to recognise that the Bible teaches there is a difference between what takes place when someone becomes a follower of Jesus, and what takes place afterwards through the rest of that person’s life. Becoming a Christian is the sovereign and gracious work of God in a person’s life. No one is able to save himself from his sins,

God alone can do that through the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can give himself spiritual life, God the Holy Spirit has to do that, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3. Salvation is God’s work alone.

Now, while personal holiness and obedience cannot be achieved by the Christian’s own strength - that is impossible - **BUT**, there is a difference now from what took place when conversion occurred. The Christian is called to work **WITH** the Holy Spirit so that this can be achieved; by dependence on him and by our efforts - both. Consider these words from Philippians 2:12-13: “*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure.*” We are to work out our salvation because God is at work in us. In personal holiness Christians are responsible for doing all that they can to be more and more like Christ. And the great encouragement is that God himself is at work in our hearts and lives to make this possible. This then is not something beyond the Christian’s grasp. Those troublesome sins can be overcome.

God helps believers through the Holy Spirit who lives in their hearts. Paul puts it like this (Galatians 5:16): “*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*” And to the Romans he wrote (Romans 8:13-14): “*For if you live according to the sinful nature,*

you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” So the individual believer is actively to seek to obey God, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the power and motivation to do it. This then is God’s work AND ours.

b) As God has directed in the Bible.

The Christian’s obedience is to be as God directs in the Bible. The Bible is God’s gift to instruct and guide us, strengthen and encourage us, and warn, rebuke and correct us in this great lifelong work of pursuing holiness. The Bible has been given that we may obey its teaching. Consider Deuteronomy 8:3 (quoted by Jesus in Matthew 4:4): “... *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*”

God has given us the Bible, his word, to tell us (i) what he is like, what he has done, is doing and will do, **AND** (ii) what we need to do to please him and enjoy his blessings, warning us to avoid wrongdoing and its stern consequences. The way to enjoy God and to truly live is to trust God and obey him. It is important that we are guided by the Bible and not just simply by what we may feel we ought to do. Sometimes our feelings coincide with the teaching of the Bible, but on other occasions we might feel like doing the opposite to what the Bible teaches. We must always test our feelings by what God has said we must do. For God will never direct us to anything contrary to his word, the Bible. The only safe way to be guided as to what we should do is to look at what God has said in the Bible.

How the Bible directs us:

Among other things, the Bible is a handbook of conduct. If we are to live our lives as children of God, we need to live by the word of God - to put ourselves under its instructions and corrections, and follow its directions. Now when we do this a number of things will take place. The Bible will:

- i. expose our wrong actions and condemn them by its prohibitions;
- ii. determine and approve our right actions by its directives.

Our conduct is to be tested and directed by the teaching of God’s written word, the Bible.

A good example of this is found in Colossians 3:1-14, which gives the things we are to avoid doing, and also the things we are to do. “*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in*

knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Some examples from the Psalms:

The Psalms are also full of helpful instructions to guide us in what we ought to do and what we need to avoid. For example, Psalm 1. It describes the truly blessed person in verses 1 to 3. The godly do not behave as the wicked, who are called sinners and mockers. Rather, they behave as directed by God's word, his law. The godly person delights in what God has said and meditates on it. In other words, God's Word is all-important to him, and to obey God is his greatest priority.

Another Psalm that is full of helpful instruction is Psalm 119. This is the longest Psalm so we shall look at only a small section. But do examine the rest of it as well. In Psalm 119:1-8 God's Word is described by a variety of terms and obedience to it is the delight, desire and determination of the psalmist. David tells us that the blessed people are those whose ways are blameless, who keep God's statutes, walk in his ways, obeying him. This they do with all their heart. Indeed, David tells us he

longed to obey them (v4), longed to be steadfast in this (v5), and was determined to do so (v8): "*I will obey...*" By obeying God from his heart, David expected the following:-

- i. to find God - the implication of v2;
- ii. to be without shame in God's presence (v6);
- iii. to delight in God's praise (v7).

A few verses later in Psalm 119:9, we are told the way for a young man to keep pure is by living as God has directed in his word, the Bible. The Bible helps us discern what is right and good, and to detect what is wrong and sinful. Therefore, purity of life, freedom from moral taint, can only be achieved as we follow God's commands.

Then consider Psalm 119:1: "*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*" It is God's word, the Bible, in our hearts that will keep us from sin, when it governs our lives. It is by obedience to the word of God that we are kept from pride and many other wrong ways.

c) By Prayer.

Prayer is essential in this task of being obedient to God. We are to be dependent on God for all things, and this is especially the case with obedience. This is because our own hearts are weak, and our enemy, Satan, will do all he can to keep us from obeying the Lord. Therefore, the believer needs to pray specifically for God's help. And it is wonderful that every follower of Jesus can come to God

in prayer, because Jesus has opened up the way for us. (See John 14:6 and Hebrews 10:19-22).

The things we need to pray about include the following:

- i. to understand the Bible (Psalm 119:34): *“Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart”*;
- ii. to resist the temptation to disobey the Lord (Mark 14:38): *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”* We shall have more to say about this in part 2 of this study booklet, where we take a more detailed look at overcoming temptation;
- iii. to be enabled to obey God (Psalm 119:133): *“Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.”*

For our encouragement, the Bible tells us God is able to strengthen us for all of this, as these verses indicate:

(Isaiah 40:31) *“... those who hope (that is trust) in the Lord will renew their strength.”*

(James 4:7-8a) *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.”*

(James 5:16) *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

And linked with prayer, of course, is faith.

d) By faith.

Christian believers need to turn constantly to the Lord in confidence and trust for all that they need to obey him. This is why the Bible instructs Christians to fix their

spiritual eyes on Christ (Hebrews 12:1-2): *“Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (the example of the men and women of faith of the previous chapter who had obeyed God), let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith....**”*

Our progress in holiness really does depend on Jesus. We are to depend on Christ for his help. We are to be assured of his presence to work in us by the Holy Spirit. We are to have a close relationship with him. We need to trust him for forgiveness, power, wisdom and guidance. We must constantly look to the Lord to enable us to be more and more like him.

This is brought out for us in two passages written by the apostle Paul. The first one is in Romans 13 where Paul has been speaking about the end of time. He describes the return of the Lord Jesus Christ under the picture of the approaching daytime, when the sun shines brightly. This is in sharp contrast to the spiritual darkness that exists in the world today. Paul then uses that fact to motivate believers for godly living (Romans 13:11-14): *“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. **So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.** Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in*

dissensions and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

Alongside this teaching from Paul is his godly example and testimony. We read in Galatians 2:20: “... *The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*”

So we see that living a holy and obedient life is

- i. God’s work and ours;
- ii. as God has directed in the Bible;
- iii. promoted by prayer;
- iv. linked with faith in Christ.

5) THE BENEFITS OF HOLY OBEDIENCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN

a) Enjoying Christ’s presence.

The first and chief benefit of obeying God is that we enjoy the presence of the Saviour, and maintain our communion with him. And Jesus tells us that obedience to him will stimulate and encourage this (John 15:9-10): “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.*” So we see that our obedience promotes that fellowship with Christ and keeps us in his love.

b) Strengthening our assurance.

The second benefit that an obedient life brings is that it increases our assurance of salvation. Now, Christian assurance depends chiefly on Christ, who he is and what he has done. But our enjoyment of that assurance is enhanced greatly by our desire to live a holy life. This is because holy obedience is an indication Jesus has changed us and that we now belong to the family of God. He described those who belong to the family of believers by saying this, in Mark 3:35: “*Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.*” Therefore, the family likeness indicates we truly are saved. God is holy, and Jesus himself was obedient, so when we begin to live like Jesus did, it is an indication we belong to God. Jesus put it like this, in John 10:27: “*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*” And John develops this in 1 John 2:3-6: “*We know we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*”

c) A proof of salvation.

So our obedience to the Lord is a proof of our salvation. However, those who may claim to be Christians, but who do not obey God, are showing by their disobedience that they are untruthful, liars in fact! Though no true followers of Jesus are perfect, they do desire and strive to do God’s will, and are grieved when they fail him. All this is a mark that they are genuine disciples, whereas those who live

disobedient and careless lives are showing they are not one of the Lord's children.

True faith and obedience always go together. So those who say they truly believe in Christ, but whose behaviour is full of disobedience to God are not true Christians (James 2:17-20): *"... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?"* Likewise, those who claim to be Christians simply by their good works, but who do not trust in Jesus to forgive them their sins, are not true Christians either. (See Ephesians 2:8-9, Matthew 7:26ff - the foolish man.)

Therefore, to live the Christian life properly demands we give our detailed attention to what the Bible says. True Christians do not merely gain a head knowledge, but apply it to their lives in obedience (James 1:22): *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*

Incidentally, this is why Christians do not wait to be convicted about things that God has commanded they should do - Christians do them! One Bible teacher put it like this, *"A holy mind declines whatsoever God forbids, and chooses to practise all he requires, without any exception."*

7) THE ATTITUDE OF THOSE WHO TRULY OBEY

True obedience is not a cold thing. It is not something done in an unwilling, reluctant manner. It can all too easily be like that as the Pharisees show, but that is not the holy obedience God requires from Christians. Rather, it is to stem from a heart that is full of love for God who has been so gracious to us. Because we love God who first loved us and gave his Son to die for our sins (1 John 4:10&19), we want to please him, and gladly and eagerly want to obey him.

True obedience is the willing surrender of our wills to God. It is to recognise gladly and welcome his authority, and eagerly comply with all he demands. Love and obedience go together just as faith and obedience do. Jesus said (John 14:15), *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."* He then added this in John 14:21, *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."* And to this can be added 1 John 5:2-3: *"This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. and his commands are not burdensome."* And again John's words in 2 John 6: *"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands."*

So we can see that true obedience is motivated by love for God, and, therefore, is done willingly and eagerly. This

really is the only fitting response to all the Lord Jesus has done for us. In this respect, his death on the cross is the most powerful incentive for the Christian lovingly to live a life of holy obedience.

Conclusion

God has revealed in the Bible that holy obedience glorifies God as we seek to honour him in our lives, and it brings blessing to our hearts. (See 1 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 1:21; 1 John 3:22; Isaiah 59:2; Jeremiah 5:25; John 14:21; Psalm 19:11.)

PART 2 : OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Introduction

Temptation is something everyone faces throughout their lives. Christian believers and non-Christians all face temptation. Therefore, it is important for the followers of Jesus to recognise that battling with temptation is a part of normal Christian life. It is a part of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ on earth.

1) TEMPTATION AND TESTING

a) The difference between temptation and testing.

Two terms that are very similar, and, therefore, sometimes misunderstood are 'tempting' and 'testing'. Indeed, we may go through a trial, perhaps persecution. And that trial can test our faithfulness to God, but can also tempt us to give up following the Lord. The difference between tempting and testing is that God tests true Christians to

prove the genuineness of their faith and to encourage them to grow spiritually, BUT Satan, or the devil, tempts us to sin and disobey God. Satan is the great enemy of God and man. He opposes God, God's work, and God's people.

It is impossible for God, who is holy, just and good either to be tempted himself or for him to tempt us to do wrong (James 1:13f): "*When tempted, no-one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.*" Habakkuk said about God (Habakkuk 1:13), "*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.*" So the Bible is very clear that God never tempts anyone to sin, neither can anyone ever accuse God of encouraging him or her to sin. No one can blame God for his or her sin, though some have tried to. Rather God tests his people to confirm their faith and strengthen them.

b) Some examples of God testing believers.

One of the best examples of God testing a believer's faith is the case of Abraham and his son, Isaac. God tested Abraham when he commanded him to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice. This was a test of Abraham's faith in God's promises that, through Isaac, God would bless him and he would become a great nation. We read this in Genesis 22:1: "*Some time later God tested Abraham.*" Now Abraham passed this test admirably, as the rest of Genesis 22 makes clear. This is referred to in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:17f): "*By faith Abraham, when*

God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." In actual fact, Genesis 22 tells us that God stopped Abraham killing Isaac just as he was about to plunge the knife into him. Abraham had demonstrated that he really did believe God. God tested his faith to prove its genuineness.

Another example of God testing his people is seen when he tested the Israelites in order to prove their commitment to him (Deuteronomy 8:2): *"Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands."*

Another case is found in the New Testament, in the Christians Peter wrote to in his first letter. They were being tested through trial, and the result was that God was refining and strengthening them (1 Peter 1:6&7): *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

c) Satan is the tempter.

Satan tempts us to sin and disobey God. God tests us in order to make us stand, while Satan tempts us in order to make us fall. Satan is the tempter, for we read that the devil tempted Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4:1): *"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."* And in Matthew 4:3 the devil is simply described as *"the tempter"* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:5).

Paul gave wise instruction to married couples who were followers of Jesus when he wrote (1 Corinthians 7:5): *"Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self control."* Then, referring to the way the devil tempted Eve to disobey God in the garden of Eden, we read (2 Corinthians 11:3): *"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."* (NB. The serpent is the devil - see Revelation 12:9.) So Satan tries to lead us astray from obedience to God. Hence John writes in 1 John 3:8: *"He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning."*

So when we refer to temptation we mean temptation to do wrong, evil, sin.

2) EVERYONE IS TEMPTED

a) Everyone means everyone.

This is very important to grasp. The Bible makes it quite clear that everyone is tempted, and our own experiences verify this. No one is excluded from the temptations of Satan while in this life. Christian believers and non-Christians constantly face temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13a): *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man...”* Temptation is something common to man. Every person from the first man Adam onwards has and will have to face temptation.

We have already seen that even Jesus did not escape the devil’s attacks in this way (see Matthew 4). Not only that, but Jesus was also tempted in every kind of way that we are tempted (Hebrews 4:15): *“... has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.”*

b) Christian believers are more aware of sin and temptation.

When people become true followers of Jesus they are even more aware of sin than ever before they became Christians (Romans 7:21-25): *“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

Now, why do Christian believers feel more aware of their sin after they begin to follow Jesus, than they did before?

The answer lies in this: Christians are people who have been converted. They have been given new hearts that love God and hate sin (Ezekiel 36:26; Jeremiah 24:7; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16). Therefore, a Christian is more conscious of and sensitive to temptation because of this change. Added to this, Christian believers now belong to God. They love God, and have God as their Friend. This means they have become the enemies of Satan, for he is God’s enemy. So now Satan is after the Christian in full attack (1 Peter 5:8): *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* (Ephesians 6:11) *“Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...”*

This is one of the tests of being a true Christian. Before conversion a person doesn’t worry much about temptation at all, but after conversion it is quite different and he is very aware and concerned about it - which are you like?

Therefore, becoming a Christian does not exempt you from temptation. You cannot escape from further attack by Satan by some spiritual blessing or experience or isolation from the rest of the world or anything else. No spiritual progress you may make, or previous victories over temptation, or knowledge of the Bible, or spiritual work engaged in or completed, will mean the devil will now leave you alone.

c) Satan keeps on tempting followers of Jesus.

Remember that even Jesus was tempted by the devil (Hebrews 2:18): *“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”* (Hebrews 4:15) *“... we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.”* Not only that, even when Jesus gained great victory over the devil’s temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4), we read in Luke 4:13: *“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him **until an opportune time.**”* Satan was not going to give up that easily. Now, if the devil tempted the Lord Jesus and kept on attacking him in that way, then we can be sure he will also keep on tempting us.

So we learn an important lesson from this:-

**TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN, NOR IS IT AN
INDICATION OF FAILURE!**

One of the greatest preachers of the gospel that has ever lived was a man named Charles Hadden Spurgeon. Thousands of people were brought to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ through his ministry. Indeed, though he lived and ministered in London for most of his life, people from all around the world were brought into God’s kingdom through this godly man’s ministry. Now, Spurgeon wrote this about temptation: *“Do not suppose it is only the worldly-minded who have dreadful thoughts and blasphemous temptations, for even spiritually minded persons endure the same; and in the holiest position we may suffer the darkest temptation.”*

This quotation is very helpful because it is easy to think that temptation means failure, or that God is displeased with us, or has even deserted us - especially when we find it so hard to resist and so easy to give in to temptation. But that is the devil’s lie!

And this teaches us a further lesson:-

TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN - YIELDING TO IT IS!

d) Satan cannot make us sin.

We need to remember that Satan cannot make us sin. He can only tempt us to sin. Whenever we sin the responsibility is ours! (James 1:14-15) *“... when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”* So not only can we not blame God for our sins, neither can we blame the devil. The fault for our sins is ours alone.

Added to that is the fact that the believer in Jesus will never be tempted above what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13): *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*

Further, the believer was a slave to sin and Satan before conversion (Romans 6:16), but now the believer has Christ as Lord (Romans 6:17-18). This is both encouraging and searching, for it means the Lord gives strength to resist

temptation, but also it makes the Christian doubly guilty when he or she sins.

3) TEMPTATION COMES IN MANY FORMS

Satan is extremely subtle. He is like a chameleon, which is an animal that can change the colour of its skin to disguise itself. The Bible teaches us Satan can come at us like “*a roaring lion*” (1 Peter 5:8) or even appear as “*an angel of light*” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

The different ways in which he will attack us with temptation are almost too many to number. Here are some examples: he will tempt us -

- i. to have hard hearts that do not pay attention to God’s word. And if we ignore the Bible we shall fall into sin (Psalm 95:8);
- ii. to give up serving the Lord, by opposition, persecution, fear of men (Acts 20:19, 1 Peter 1:6-7);
- iii. to yield to immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18-20), and, remember, the desire is the same as the act (Matthew 5:27);
- iv. to fall into sin even when trying to restore someone else who has fallen - especially pride (Gal 6:1; cf. Micah 6:8: “... *walk humbly with your God*” and James 4:10: “*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up*”);
- v. to be snared by the love of material things and money - remember Judas Iscariot! (1 Timothy 6:9f; 2 Corinthians 4:18);

- vi. to distract our minds with worry, fear and uncertainty (Luke 8:14).

This is just a sample from a very long list of ways in which Satan tempts us to do wrong and disobey God. We need to remember the devil is very subtle and crafty and will use almost anything to try and make men sin. (See Ephesians 6:11: “*the devil’s schemes*”.)

4) HOW JESUS OVERCAME TEMPTATION

The fact that everyone including Christians will be tempted to sin, and that even Jesus did not escape from it, does not mean that temptation has to succeed in trying to bring us down. Indeed, the fact that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet remained without sin, is a great encouragement. As we look at the way Jesus handled temptation and gained victory over it, we can see how we can overcome it also.

a) Temptation to turn stones to bread (Matthew 4:2-4, Luke 4:2-5).

For 40 days Jesus had fasted, and now at the end of it Luke tells us he was hungry, and, we must say, intensely hungry. Such is Satan’s craftiness that he often involves natural appetites which are not bad in themselves. What he does is to exploit, misdirect and degrade desires which are proper and legitimate. Indeed, he has done this with almost every good desire and has twisted and distorted it. So here he

uses bread which satisfies hunger, as a means of enticement.

Notice also that the devil often attacks us when we are vulnerable. Jesus was hungry, so Satan exploited that hunger for his own evil purposes. We shall now consider this temptation in detail.

The devil began with these words (Matthew 4:3): *“If you are the Son of God”*. Jesus had recently heard these words from his Father in heaven when he was baptised (Matthew 3:17): *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* And Satan was not casting doubt on this fact, but tempting him to use his majestic dignity and power to satisfy his hunger and tempting him to use his supernatural powers for his own ends. It is as if he said, “You’re the Son of God are you? Prove it by turning these stones into bread.” Satan was also tempting him to doubt the Father’s will and power to sustain him, and take matters into his own hands. Satan was in effect saying to Jesus, “Why undergo such privation?”

Jesus victoriously answered this temptation by quoting a verse from the Bible (Deuteronomy 8:3) in Matthew 4:4: *“It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

Jesus could well have turned the stones into bread, because later in his ministry he fed 5000 from a few loaves and fish. Jesus also knew his Father loved him and cared for

him. He knew he was the Son of God. He knew the word of God, the Bible, was true. He did not have to change these stones into bread to prove all this. So he used the teaching God has given in the Bible as his guide and answered Satan very firmly and directly.

Clearly, Jesus had studied the Bible, understood the Bible, and hidden this passage in his heart, so was able to use it like a mighty sword to defeat the enemy of souls. Jesus saw the written word of God, the Bible, as the wonderful provision of God to govern our lives and lead them in true liberty, safety and wellbeing. Therefore, to disobey the Bible would be suicide. His Father would not cease to care for him nor fail him in this need. And though Jesus was intensely hungry, and in the desert completely without food, he put obedience to God as of first importance, not satisfying his own needs, but putting submission to the Father’s will first.

b) The temptation to presumption (Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12)

Satan is well aware that the good desire to work hard and succeed can all too easily be turned into pride, selfish ambition and presumption. The human weakness of the love of anything sensational, to be noticed by others, can appear very attractive to the human heart at times. We have wise instructions about these dangers in 1 John 2:15-17: *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man,*

the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever.” So Satan attempted to lead Jesus astray into these areas.

He took him to the highest point of the temple and urged him to jump off, tempting him to test God’s faithfulness to care for him, and to attract public attention dramatically by a sensational display. And note this carefully; Satan actually quoted from the Bible (Psalm 91:11-12), about God’s promised protection. Not every time a verse of the Bible comes into our minds is this necessarily from God! Satan can do the same! But he usually takes a verse or passage right out of its context, or uses it in a way that it was never intended to be used.

We learn another important lesson about the devil’s ways here. If he cannot get us to fail when we are in weakness (i.e. hunger in Jesus’ case), then he is not averse to attacking us in our strengths. Jesus had just stated his confidence in his Father’s care of him in the previous temptation, so Satan said “Prove it, jump off and show us he cares for you.”

However, Psalm 91:11-12 does not instruct us to be presumptuous, nor to put ourselves deliberately in danger and then expect God to bail us out. So, again, Jesus answered the temptation with the teaching of the Bible. Quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 he clearly dismissed Satan’s subtle ploy by the clear explicit instruction (Matthew 4:7):

“It is also written, Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” The context of Deuteronomy 6:16 refers to the time Israel demanded water from God, insisting that God miraculously and sensationally provided for them. God did provide for them, but he was not at all pleased with their grumbling. So when Jesus used this verse to answer Satan, he was saying he did not need to test God to prove that he and his word are reliable.

We are not to be foolhardy but responsible with our lives, and follow all that God has instructed us. Further, we don’t need to put God to the test, for we know he is thoroughly reliable. Presumption is never to be substituted for faith and submission to God’s guidance. No Christian is ever to put himself into the place of temptation but to strongly avoid it. Jesus did not waver in his trust in God and was not going to put him to the test, for he knew his Father was trustworthy.

c) The temptation to take the easy way out (Matthew 4:8-10, Luke 4:5-8).

The devil knows only too well that it can look so attractive to us to take a short cut, the easier or less costly way out. Jesus had come to do the Father’s will. He had been assured he would save a numerous company of people from all over the world. This was to be achieved, and could only be achieved, by his death on the cross in the sinner’s place. By that way he would indeed be the Saviour of the world. Without that terrible death he would save no one.

So Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and told him they would all be his by one easy step - just bow and worship me! What audacity! These kingdoms were not the devil's to give! Psalm 24:1 makes that very clear: *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."* But that did not deter Satan. Remember he is the father of lies (John 8:44)!

Satan was tempting Jesus to take the easy way out. He wanted him to avoid the cross. So he told Jesus to obey him, not his Father. Just make that easy bow. But again Jesus was resolute. The Bible was his rule, as he quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 (Matthew 4:10): *"Jesus said to him, 'Away from me Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"* Worship is to be given to God alone, and true worship comes from a heart that loves God. And those who love God will obey God, however costly it may be at times.

The great lesson of these verses in Matthew 4 is that Jesus, by his total submission to the word of God, defeated the devil, and victory over temptation was gained. We are to be governed by the same rule, the written word of God, the Bible. And as we carefully, prayerfully and submissively study its teaching we shall be equipping ourselves to fight temptation. The Bible is described by Paul in Ephesians 6:17: *"... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."* It is a mighty weapon that even Satan cannot overcome. Therefore all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ must rely on God's word, and use it wisely.

d) Jesus was tempted by a Christian believer.

This may come as quite a surprise, or even shock to us. It is possible for a true disciple of Jesus to become a means of tempting others to do wrong!

This event in Jesus' life is recorded in Matthew 16. Jesus had been asking his disciples what other people thought about him. Then he asked his disciples to tell him what they thought about him (v15). It was Peter who replied to Jesus' question (Matthew 16:16): *"Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* This marvellous statement from Peter had its source in God. God had revealed this to Peter and he had understood the truth about Jesus.

But, astonishingly, a few verses later, Jesus had to say to Peter (Matthew 16:23): *"Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."* What led up to these words was simply this: Jesus began to tell his disciples that he would soon suffer at the hands of the leaders in Jerusalem, be killed and then rise from the dead. When Peter heard these words he was horrified, and immediately said, *"Never Lord! ... This shall not happen to you!"* The result was Jesus' firm rebuke.

Clearly, Peter had not understood God's plan of salvation, so had to be rebuked and corrected.

The lessons of this event are these: firstly, it is possible for true followers of Jesus, spiritual friends, to tempt us when their advice is not biblical. And secondly, because Peter had been given this spiritual insight about Jesus being the Christ, this led him to be carried away by pride into thinking his impulses and opinions were always of value. He should have checked his thoughts with the teaching God has given in the Bible. God never contradicts what he has revealed in the Bible. If our thoughts, however strong, and however convincing they may seem to us, differ from the plain teaching of God's word, then they are wrong. So we need to be on guard, clearly, not only from temptations coming from without, from Satan, but also from within our own hearts, when we can so easily become Satan's agent as was Peter here. Like Jesus, we are always to be governed in our thinking, speaking and acting by the Bible.

5) MORE HELPFUL INSTRUCTION FOR OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

a) The promise of God.

Another means provided for the followers of Jesus to overcome temptation is this wonderful promise from God (1 Corinthians 10:13): *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. **But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**"*

While this verse tells us everyone is tempted, it also tells us that there is always a way out so that we don't have to sin. This again places the responsibility for sin with us! But if God always provides the follower of Jesus with a way out in every temptation, then we must look for it. Indeed, we must go further and ask to be shown it if we are uncertain how to get out of a difficult tempting situation. Then when God shows it to us we must use it. Sometimes the way of escape is simply that we have to say 'no' when tempted.

b) Watch and pray.

(Matthew 26:41) *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."* We have the lovely biblical balance here of human responsibility and Divine grace.

'Watch' - endeavour to recognise or discern temptation when it comes. Be vigilant and alert (1 Thessalonians 5:6): *"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled..."*

'Pray' - constantly depend on the Lord (Isaiah 40:28-31): *"The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; **but those who hope in** (i.e. trust in or look expectantly to) **the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings***

like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.” Without fervent prayer we shall fall.

c) Faith.

Our faith in Christ is a vital ingredient for fighting temptation successfully. Without faith our prayers will be ineffective (1 John 5:4): *“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”*

We must have absolute faith in the nature and character of God and complete confidence in his promises to see us through periods of temptation. We must have faith in all God has revealed in the Bible, that it is true, right and good, and that any sin is to sin against God.

d) Use the whole armour of God.

Ephesians 6:10-18 makes it very clear that every Christian is engaged in spiritual warfare with the forces of evil, the devil and his minions. The devil is a strong foe, and someone has said that to face him alone is like going into a nuclear war armed with a peashooter! However, though Satan is mighty, God is almighty! And God has provided armour for Christians to wear so that they can fight this enemy and be victorious. Therefore, we are to use it.

e) Resist the devil and keep close to God.

(James 4:7-8) *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.”* Satan’s power is limited, but

God’s power is unlimited, for he is almighty. How encouraging to know the devil can be made to turn and run! But this can only be done as we rely on the Lord at the same time.

Remember Paul’s testimony (Philippians 4:13): *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

From this we see the importance of cultivating a close walk with the Lord. We do this by our own private fellowship with him in prayer and Bible study. We strengthen this by meeting regularly with the people of God and coming under the sound of good biblical teaching and submitting ourselves to it.

f) Overcome pride by humility.

Pride leads us to many sins, so we need constantly to develop a humble spirit of dependency on the Lord. We do not have any strength ourselves. To encourage us we have these two lovely passages in the Bible (James 4:10): *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”* (Micah 6:8) *“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy **and walk humbly with your God.**”*

We need, therefore, to cultivate a humble spirit. John Hall has shown, helpfully, how this is done in these words: *“We should always remember that as we walk humbly with God, our loving heavenly Father, as our hand is in his, that our God is a God of grace. It’s his free, unmerited love and*

favour and mercy which saves and keeps us. All the good in our lives is God's gift. We haven't earned it, we haven't deserved it and we haven't developed it. So really there is not any room for pride, is there? All that we were was wretched, hell-bound sinners. And then God came and rescued us in Christ. So really the way to be humble is to constantly remind ourselves of why we are Christians, and what we would have been like had God not come and rescued us. So a humble spirit is encouraged by a proper understanding of God's grace and God's gift to us."

g) Fill your mind with good things.

The mind is a real battle area for the Christian, and, therefore, we need to protect our minds from all that is sinful and tempting. The way to do this is to fill our minds with things that are good. Paul puts it like this (Philippians 4:8): *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things."*

Now, for this to happen we must take deliberate steps to feed our minds with things that are wholesome and good. So we shall take care over what we read, what we listen to, and what we watch. If we fill our minds with the sinful ways of the world we shall soon find ourselves being led astray. Paul has laid out this responsibility for us (Romans 12:2): *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing, and perfect will."

h) Learn to cast your cares on God.

How easy it is to worry, to doubt God's nearness and promises, and even feel despairing about our future. All these are especially heightened during days of trial. Satan loves to kick us when we are down, and tries to distract our minds and hearts away from God. That is a real temptation. So how do we overcome this? The Psalmist David and the apostle Peter have given us sound advice. Note the similarity of their words (Psalm 55:22): *"Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall."* (1 Peter 5:7) *"Cast your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*

In other words, we are to bring all these things to God in prayer, and realise that the Lord is with his children all the time, in all places, whatever our circumstances, and he cares for us constantly. We are to set our minds on Christ, our gracious and loving Saviour (Colossians 3:1-4).

Conclusion

The Bible tells us that all the true followers of Jesus are held in his almighty and merciful hands (John 10:27-30): *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."*

This glorious security of the believer is further stressed at the end of the book of Jude. In verse 24 Jude speaks of God as “... *him who is able to keep you from falling and present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...*” Such blessings surely encourage us to turn from temptation and to serve God with all our hearts.

May our prayer always be that of David in Psalm 139:23-24: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*”

This book is supplied by Grace Baptist Mission and other titles are available in e-mail format at the address below:

**Grace Baptist Mission
12 Abbey Close
Abingdon
OXON
OX14 3JD
UK**

e-mail: radio@gbm.org.uk