

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Christian's Armor: A Final Word: Watch and Pray

Honesty, sings Billy Joel, is hardly ever heard. One reason is because we are uncomfortable with it. Oh, there is a level of honesty that we expect and without which we could not survive as a society. But the kind of honesty I am speaking of is laid out in Ps. 32:2. In fact, honesty is a fitting synonym for what the Bible calls repentance. Honesty is a truth telling about our experience that has given up on strategies of flight, appeasement, or confrontation. "Honesty," writes Paul F. M. Zahl, "means facing up to a tragic situation."¹

This type of honesty is set forth by the Apostle Paul in Phil. 3:4 – 8. If we are seeking to establish our standing before God on the basis of works of righteousness, we will never be honest, either with God or ourselves (cf. I John 1:8). This was David's experience in Ps. 32. "Why should we dwell on the wretched story? Because it teaches us, as no other page in the history of God's church does, how the alchemy of Divine love can extract sweet perfumes of penitence and praise out of the filth of sin; and therefore, though we turn with loathing from David's sin, we have to bless God for the record of it, and for the lessons of hope that come from David's pardon."²

Honesty before God. What a strange statement—does He not know everything there is to know about us? Indeed He does but like prayer, we are not informing God about things He is unaware. Rather we are acknowledging and unmasking ourselves before Him (cf. Heb. 4:13). This honesty is necessary. As A. W. Pink has written, "The inward experience of a believer consists largely of growing discoveries of his own vileness and of God's 'goodness, of his own excuseless failures and of God's infinite forbearance, with a frequent alternation between gloom and joy, confession and thanksgiving."³ Phrases such as "nobody's perfect" and "to err is human" are often used to excuse our moral failures. It is another way of minimizing our sin. David Wells observes, "The disappearance of sin in the modern world is not, of course, an actual disappearance. It is not sin that has vanished.. What has been lost is our capacity to understand our life as being sinful. So, what has happened? We should begin by noting that this is not a problem of recent vintage. 'By 1900,' Andrew Delbanco writes, 'it was impossible to reattach the word 'sin' to its original sense, because the target of the violation—God—was gone.' He had ceased to be a reality to be reckoned with in the culture. Churches nevertheless continued to use the word, but in the windowless world in which the language was heard, it ceased to have meaning. Its use created the same kind of dilemma that a promissory note might today where the financial accounts of the person making the promise are discovered to be empty. The promissory situation has continued down to the present. While we deplore the fracturing of life, its robberies, and rapes, its abuses and cruelties, its assaults and catastrophes, we can no longer measure its darkness in the presence of God. All we do is weep. We cannot make confession. There is no one to whom to confess. We cannot bring our sin before God, because he is gone. In our failures, we are not able to penetrate the real character of our sin, because we cannot take its measure, see its nature, in relation to God. We cannot say, as did David after his adultery, 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment' (Ps. 51:4). All we can do is wipe each other's noses."⁴

I. TEMPTATION AND TESTING

These are two very distinct things. God does put us through testing, but He does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13).

A. God's Testing

1. He tests us to show us what we are, as in the case of Abraham (Gen. 22:1) and the nation of Israel (Deut. 13:3); cf. also II Chron. 32:31.
2. God tests us in the way of preventing grace so that a man shall see that it is God and God alone who keeps him. Until we are so tested, we think we live in our own strength. We can never know the strength of grace until we see the littleness of our own strength (Col. 1:11; I Pet. 1:6, 7).

B. Satan's Temptation

The devil tempts with the aid of our own sinful hearts and the allurements of the World. In general, then, temptation is any thing or state, way or condition that upon any account whatever has the force or power to seduce or draw away the heart and mind from its obedience which God requires unto any sin in any degree whatsoever. What is it to “enter into temptation”? (1) It is not merely to be tempted. Christ was made like us, wrote one of the old puritans, that He might be tempted, and we are tempted that we may be made like unto Christ. (2) It is not the daily conflict every believer has with the World, the flesh and the devil. But prolonged failure in this conflict can lead to this situation. (3) It is not to be conquered on an occasion by a temptation. A believer may, indeed will, experience failure and fall, but will rise and go on without having entered into temptation.

1. It is as expressed in I Tim. 6:9 – “to fall into temptation” as one falls in a pit and is entangled and detained (I Cor. 10:13; II Pet. 2:9).

NOTE: When we suffer a temptation to enter, then we are said to have fallen into it. While temptation knocks at the door we are at liberty, but when any temptation comes in and parleys with the heart, reasons with the mind, entices and allures the affections, be it long or short in duration, whether imperceptibly or otherwise, then we are said to ‘enter into temptation’. Blessed is the one who is prepared for such a season without which there is no escaping.

II. THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEMPTATION

- A. By long solicitations, causing the mind frequently to converse with evil – extenuating the thoughts of it by repeated appeals.
- B. When the same has prevailed on others and the soul is not filled with dislike, abhorrence, pity and prayer for deliverance.
- C. By complicating itself with many considerations that perhaps are not absolutely evil in themselves.
- D. By its restless urgency and arguing and presses with great desire.
- E. When it makes a conjunction of affrightments and allurements. Men are sometimes carried into sin by the love of it, and then are continued in it by fear of what will ensue upon it, as in the case of David’s great sin.

III. THE MEANS OF PREVENTION: WATCH AND PRAY

NOTE: Lk. 8:13 – temporary believers who fall away “in the time of temptation” (Matt. 7:26, 27). Judas follows the Lord for three years and all goes well with him, but he is no sooner entered into temptation, Satan has him, winnows him, and he is gone. Demas will preach the gospel until the love of the world befalls him and he is utterly turned aside. . . . Entrance into temptation is, with this sort of man, an entrance into apostasy more or less, in part or in whole.⁵ The failure of the saints (Abraham, Gen. 12:12, 20:2; David, Ps. 51; Peter, Mk. 14) are of a different sort – they rise up from their fall, but this should make us sober, diligent, watchful, and fearful.

- A. Watch – I Cor. 16:13 (cf. with Rev. 3:2). This exhortation has reference to a number of things:
 1. Consider ourselves, for we are weak. Confidence of any strength in us is one great part of our weakness (note Peter, Matt. 26:34, 35 cf. with Pro. 28:26).
 - a. Beware of the love of honor, whereby we think others opinions of ourselves as a pillar of strength is thereby true.
 - b. Think not that a sense of shame will give you protection from falling into temptation.
 - c. Think not that your sense of conscience will stand you in good stead. Your sense of peace and self-assured security may be false (I Cor. 10:12).

NOTE: Beware of the temptation to rest in your performances and past achievements, remember: (1) Our best efforts have imperfections and weaknesses. (2) Our best efforts are unable to minister comfort and aid in days of trouble. (3) Good works, if rested upon, will certainly bring us as much grief as the sin we seek to avoid.

All of these attempts are temptations to look to ourselves as the source of strength and will utterly fail us in trial.

2. Labor to know something of your own heart – to what are you tempted and how (Ps. 18:23).
3. When you have some knowledge of your own heart, its state and condition, then watch against the ways in which it is inclined.
4. Know for sure that there is power in temptation.
 - a. It will darken the mind, so that a man will not be able to make right judgment.
 - b. It will entangle the affections, so that our desires are in error.
 - c. Temptation will give strength to sin and lust. It will incite, provoke and make them rage beyond measure.
 - d. Let no one pretend to fear sin that does not fear temptation. Sin will not long seem great or heavy unto any to whom temptation seems light or small.

- (1) Times of unusual outward prosperity are often accompanied with the hour of temptation (Pro. 1:32; 30:8, 9; Ps. 30:6, 7). (2) The sloth and neglect of privileges. To whom much is given, much will be required. (3) A season of great spiritual enjoyment (II Cor. 12:7). Note Peter's confession, Matt. 16:17 and this Matt. 16:22, 23.

B. Prayer (Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2)

We are directed to pray that we enter not into temptation (Matt. 6:13). He that would be little in temptation must be much in prayer.

1. The need for private and personal prayer is indispensable.
 - a. This is what inclines the soul for other duties and services.
 - b. The neglect of this duty upbraids the conscience and causes feebleness.
 - c. The promises of God in prayer are meant to be the strongest encouragement to be constantly availing ourselves to this privilege.
 - d. The examples of Christ (Matt. 14:23; Mk. 6:46) and the saints in Scripture testify repeatedly to duty (Ps. 55:16, 17; Dan. 6:10).
 - e. Take heed to this duty, for why would the devil so oppose you in this effort were it not so important?
2. When confronted with temptation, seek relief directly and immediately from the Lord (Heb. 4:16) and know for sure that God does intend to keep you.
 - a. He may send an affliction to give the temptation that confronts you a bitter taste so that it loses its sweet allurements.
 - b. He may open directly some door of Providence by taking the fuel from the fire of your temptation.
 - c. He may, at this time, tread down Satan under your feet, by causing him to flee from you.
 - d. He may give you the good hope of success and strengthen you to endure the trial.
 - e. He may so strengthen you at this time that you are able to flee and escape the temptation.
 - f. He may, by His sovereign grace, utterly remove the temptation so that it troubles you no more.

CONCLUSION: To watch and pray is not merely defensive. Involved is also the positive side of these exhortations. In your watching and private prayer, lay in provisions against temptation. Our hearts are said to be the storehouse of our treasure (Matt. 12:35). Therefore store your heart with Gospel provisions. In this way we are enabled to resist the devil (James 4:7) and keep the heart full of a sense of the love of God in Christ (II Cor. 5:14). Treasure up thoughts of God's eternal design of grace for you. Esteem the privileges you have in Christ, your adoption, justification and access to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Fill the heart with thoughts of the beauty of holiness as it was designed by Christ in His death (Tit. 2:14). Hide the Word of God in your heart (Ps. 119:11). These things will equip you and prepare you in your time of need (Eph. 6:10 – 18).

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Paul F. M. Zahl, *Who Will Deliver Us? The Present Power of the Death of Christ* (Seabury Press, 1983), p. 73.
 - ² Alexander Maclaren, *The Life of David as Reflected in His Psalms* (rpt. Baker, 1955), p. 209.
 - ³ A. W. Pink, *The Life of David II*, (rpt. Reiner Publications, 1974), P. 54.
 - ⁴ D. F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 181.
 - ⁵ *The Works of John Owen VI* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1976), I have adapted this outline from Owen.