

TEMPTATIONS & TRIALS

How many of God's people have endured unthinkable terrors? We live in peaceful times while many brethren in times past suffered terrible torments that led to many deaths. Even the recent COVID-19, while a hardship for some, is not generally a threat to life. The prophets, apostles, and disciples of Christ all suffered adversities and privations but many of them were also tortured and killed for obeying God rather than men. This has also been the case for many of God's people since beginnings of the New Testament era. Recall the history of Albigenses, Waldensians, and the murder of thousands of so-called heretics by the Catholic Church. Persecution of God's people, especially in Europe, continued even after the discovery of the Americas, which became a place of refuge for God's people.

Who among us can imagine being a Christian during those times? The well-known *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* is a history of many terrible deaths at the hands of opponents to Christianity. Remember William Tyndale? He was among many that were burned at the stake for believing God's Word. The Bible also mentions a few of the horrors that the servants of God endured:

HEBREWS 11:36-37 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

No one can imagine horrors such as these. Paul lists some of the trials they endured, including temptations. What is the difference between trials and temptations? Trials are afflictions of fear, pain, suffering, loss, neediness, weakness, aloneness, rejection, betrayal, and doubt. Temptations, however, are tests of character and obedience. They require us to make a choice whether or not to put God first, even if it is hurtful to us. *Temptation* can also be rendered *testing*. The primary distinction is:

DEFINITION: A *trial* is an affliction while a *temptation* is a test; that is, a situation wherein we have a choice.

Temptations and tests expose what is in our hearts and is a measure of our faith. When a temptation or test comes upon us, we must make a choice: we can turn to God or away from God.

Abraham was tested (not tried) when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. When Abraham chose to obey it was then that God said, "And He [*God*] said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for **now I know that you fear God**, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me." (Genesis 22:12). Tests also show us what is in our hearts. For instance, courage can only be demonstrated under conditions that produce fear; likewise, obedience to God is manifested when we are tested or tempted to turn away from Him.

JAMES 1:12-15 **Blessed is the man who endures temptation**; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But **each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed**. 15 Then, **when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin**; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

God never tempts us with evil. God always tests our obedience. It is Satan that tempts us by appealing to our lusts, which is why he is called the Tempter. Notice the distinction: God tests us and Satan tempts us. The word used for both is the same and so the proper rendering is determined by the context.

1 THESSALONIANS 3:5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means **the Tempter [Satan] had tempted you**, and our labor might be in vain.

Let us be clear: tests from God are not evil against us but to prove our obedience as in the case with Abraham, whereas temptations are of Satan. **Lust is the desire for that which God has defined as sin**. If there is no lust in us then we cannot be tempted with evil. If we succumb to temptations then it becomes sin. This is why Jesus is our perfect High Priest: He overcame all the evil temptations of Satan. Jesus Christ was tested when He willingly suffered as our Passover. All of us are tested by God and all of us are tempted by Satan.

Certainly, we should always pray when tests come upon us as they are our only protection against temptation:

MATTHEW 26:41 “Watch and **pray, lest you enter into temptation**. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”

Jesus overcame temptation by spending *much* time in prayer to God. Likewise, if God is not first in our lives, we cannot resist Satan's temptations (James 4: 7). In the parable of the sower, it is **temptation** causes some to fall away:

LUKE 8:13 “But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and **in time of temptation fall away**.

Temptation can also come in the form of judging others for their weaknesses. If we do, we may find ourselves likewise tempted; instead, we must love others by helping them:

GALATIANS 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual **restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted**.

It is through choosing obedience to God that we are able to bear the temptations and tests in this life. Unlike trials, God promises a way to escape temptations that become unbearable.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-14 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 **No temptation has overtaken you** except such as is common to man; but **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape [lit., an exit]**, that you may be able to bear *it*. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Many have applied this verse to trials of testing but it is specific to temptations that come upon us because they are “common to man.” Notice that Paul does not say that we will be entirely freed from a temptation but rather that God will deliver us from that which becomes unbearable. This usually comes *after* we make the decision to turn to God and resist Satan. This is the importance of verse 14, which says to “flee from idolatry”. The last sentence starts with “therefore”, which implies God's help is conditional. We have two choices: flee from idolatry or run after it. If we resist Satan, then God will help us bear the temptation. In other words, God limits the evil Satan intends to do to us.

So why do James and Peter tell us to count it joy when we are tested? Because we are choosing God and denying Satan. We know that we are truly the children of God if He tests us or allows Satan to tempt us because God wants to prove all His children. Satan, on the other hand, hates those who are God's.

1 PETER 1:6-7 In this **you greatly rejoice [be FULL of joy], though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials [tests]**, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

All temptations and tests prove whether or not we are found worthy of eternity with God. What greater hope is there? Therefore, if we choose obedience to God when tested and flee temptations we are actually praising, honoring, and glorifying *God*. For us, temptations and tests produce patience as we wait upon God in faith for deliverance:

JAMES 1:2-3 2 My brethren, **count it all joy when you fall into various trials**, 3 knowing that the testing [*test for genuineness as with a gold or silver coin*] of your faith produces patience [*patient endurance, constancy*].

Finally, God promises to keep us from the temptations that are to come upon the whole world if we obey and patiently endure:

REVELATION 3:10 “Because you have kept My [*Jesus Christ's*] [the word of my patience], **I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world**, to test those who dwell on the earth.

God tests all His children to see if we are truly seeking to please Him. He allows Satan to tempt us so that the obedience of our hearts is manifested under duress. These things tell us much about ourselves and increase our faith or show us weaknesses that must be overcome:

1 THESSALONIANS 5: 17-19, 21-24 **pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 **Do not quench the Spirit**. ... 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it* [*preserve blameless the saints*].

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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