

WHY DOES GOD PERMIT TEMPTATION?

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Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "ssssopp!" Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie—still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore—he just sits and stares."

It's hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . That's enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart.

"Why does God allow things to happen and people to act in such a way as to irritate me, and cause me to be impatient and ill-natured, when I should otherwise be quiet and peaceful?"

That is a question that troubles very many, and is simply another form of the old question, "Why does God permit evil?"

In the first place we should bear in mind that temptation does not make sin. Tantalizing words or actions do not make us impatient, but simply reveal the impatience that is in us. For example, here is a glass of water, which looks very clear; I take a glass rod, and stir it up, and behold, it is muddy; but nobody will suppose that the glass rod put the mud into the water. You would say at once that the impurity was there all the time, and that the agitation only served to make it apparent. Even so it is with temptation and sin.

Here are the words of the Scripture: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." James 1:13, 14. And again: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect, and entire, wanting nothing." James 1:2-4.

From this we see that temptations never make a person worse than he was before. The opportunity to sin does not make the sin. There are thousands of seemingly virtuous people, very complacent in their self-righteousness, who might be promiscuous if circumstances were different. It is not that circumstances determine one's character, but that they reveal it. Man looks only on the outward act, but God looks at the heart; and in His eyes the man whose heart is impure is equally guilty with the one who commits the open sin.

The temptation to sin, even though it result in a person's fall into it, may be a blessing, in that it shows him just what he is, and where he needs to be on his guard. Self-confidence must be broken, in order that we may trust in God.

Nobody can account for the origin of evil. It is a strange thing, a monstrosity, having no reason for its existence. It first appeared in the heart of Lucifer, while he was yet in heaven, in the immediate presence of God, and occupying the highest position of authority and trust possible to any created being. What temptation could there have been for him to sin? Every circumstance was as favorable to righteousness as it could possibly be, or as it ever will be for the redeemed saints. No; the temptation sprang up in his own heart. He was led away of his own lust, and enticed, and God had no responsibility in the matter.

You ask what assurance there is then that the redeemed saints in heaven may not at some time fall again, even as Satan did. We have this positive assurance, that they will have been so thoroughly tested on every point; and proved true, that nothing can shake them. The trial that is now taking place, and the judgment day, which is to follow, will so set forth the absolute justice and the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable love of God, that there can never again be room for any doubt. But bear in mind that all the saved will be those who have overcome every temptation, and who have trusted God implicitly before they could see that which the judgment will reveal.

Do not imagine that it is by taking His people beyond the reach of temptation, that God will keep them sinless throughout eternity. He has something far better for us than that. He arms us so thoroughly that He can trust us in the midst of temptation, and we shall be safe. God will never arbitrarily remove temptation from mankind. Christ said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." John 14:30. That will be the reason why when the righteous have been taken to dwell with God there will never again throughout eternity be any sin: they will have been so completely cleansed that nothing can ever stir up evil in their hearts. But, believe me, so long as there is anything in our hearts that can respond to temptation, and we can be led into sin by any person or thing, we should not be free from sin even if we were in heaven itself. If we are stirred up to evil deeds here, we should in time find that something even in heaven would irritate us.

When temptations reveal to us what is in our hearts, do not lose courage, and settle down in despair, but rejoice in the thought that in being tempted we are being made partakers of Christ's suffering, and that the temptation itself brings the way of escape, that we may be able to bear it. God's grace is sufficient for us, for His strength is made perfect in weakness. We are to be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37); but we should not be conquerors at all, if we were saved from sin merely by the removal of temptation. God provides us with power to live even in sinful flesh as free from sin as He Himself, and then when He takes us to Himself, giving us spiritual bodies, in keeping with our nature, our joy will be beyond all expression.

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered up anyway, it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey. So he invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would

shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed, as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up! Shake it off and take a step up! Don't waste the opportunities God gives you to prove Himself.

To His disciples on one occasion Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33.

Why should this fact cause us to be of good cheer? Why should we rejoice because some one else has overcome the world, when it must also be overcome by ourselves? The grand truth which answers this question is, that we are not overcomers in the ourselves, but overcomers in Christ.

To the Corinthians the apostle writes, "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place." 2 Cor. 2:14. How is it that we are always caused to triumph in Christ? It is simply because Christ has triumphed over everything, and in Him victory is ours.

Christ was tempted in all points like as we are, yet was without sin. He has met and overcome every obstacle that can possibly be brought against humanity in the struggle for the life to come. And whenever any of these things, "the world, the flesh, and the devil," meet Him, they meet their Conqueror. The victory has been already won. And therefore in Christ we have the victory; for when we are in Him, the temptations assail Him, and not ourselves. When we hide our weakness in His strength, there is only His strength to fight the battle. He has gained the victory, and the beaten foe can never recover from his defeat so as to hope for victory over Him.

What, then, must we do to overcome? And why is it that we are so often overcome? The obvious answer is that we cannot overcome outside of Christ. What we have to do is to *take the victory that has been already won*, the victory that has been gained by Him. He overcame for us, that He might bestow His triumph upon us. And we take the victory by faith, for it is by faith that Christ comes into our hearts.

This is what is meant by the apostle John, when he says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4. By faith we bring Christ into our hearts and lives. Eph. 3:17. And Christ

being there, He is there as the Conqueror of all that is to be met and overcome in the Christian warfare.

The glorious truth is thus made manifest, that the victory over every temptation and difficulty is *already ours*, in Christ. We need not, therefore, come up to the conflict with a faint heart, but with all confidence, knowing that defeat cannot possibly be the outcome, no matter how formidable the foe may make himself appear. The battle is already fought, and Jesus Christ holds out to us the victory. We have simply to take it, and say, "Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15:57.

The Lord tells us that where sin abounds grace does much more abound; and then the question arises, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Rom. 6:1. In other words, "Shall we do evil, that good may come?" Not by any means. The grace abounds only in order that we may be saved from the sin in which we find ourselves; to go on deliberately committing the sin after the grace of God had shown it to us, would be to tempt God, instead of to trust Him. It would be trying to get Him to deny Himself by giving His grace to condone sin, and to multiply it, instead of to pardon and cleanse from it.

We once knew of a mother who, in her mistaken idea of love for her boy, allowed him to have his own way in everything, never correcting him for any fault. The result was that as he grew older he manifested no regard for her or her wishes, but made himself intolerable, not only to strangers, but even to his own mother, who had fancied that she loved him. Too late she began to be interested in his salvation, and called in a minister to try to make up for her neglect; but as might be expected, the youth would not listen to a word of counsel or reproof. And then the mother with that spirit of weakness which many mistake for pious resignation, said, "Well, I can do nothing but trust in the promises of God."

But there was no promise in which she could trust. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6), she had ignored. The only word that fit the case, was one in which there was no comfort, namely, "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." Prov. 29:15. So her supposed trust was nothing but presumption.

Many people to whom a plain duty is made known by the commandments of God refuse to obey, and yet they imagine that they are trusting the Lord, whereas they are only tempting Him. When

they ask Him to protect and save them, while refusing to listen to His work, they are asking Him to break His word. But it is written, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

When people go to places where they ought not, merely to gratify morbid curiosity, and not to seek and save the lost, they are yielding to the temptation of Satan, which Christ resisted. When they are in the path of duty they may safely trust the Lord, no matter where they are, or what the circumstances; but to go needlessly on the devil's ground is to tempt God, and to court destruction.

The story is told of William III, that in one of his battles he was in a very exposed position, and an officer who had brought a message to him, tarried with him after his business was done. The king told the officer that he was in danger, whereupon the man rejoined, "but Your Majesty is in danger also." "I am safe," replied the king, "because duty calls me here; duty does not demand your presence, and you are not safe." In a few moments the man was killed by a cannon ball, while the king was uninjured. The only place of safety for any man is the place of duty. While he is in the way of duty, he may "trust and not be afraid."

It is often the case that supposed work for the Lord is done for other motives. Mosheim says, "What is man! The very best often serve God and themselves when they fancy they are serving God alone." Much that is supposed to be defense of the faith, is undertaken at the instigation of the enemy of truth, rather than at the command of the Lord. The professed followers of Christ often allow themselves to be drawn into discussions and contest by unchristian taunts. When professed Christians engage in controversy because they fear that some will accuse them of cowardice if they do not, they are not following the example of Christ. He would not do anything for the mere purpose of proving that He was the Son of God.

We hear much about the necessity of speaking for God, but very little about the importance of keeping silent for Him. Jesus often held His peace when the scribes and Pharisees tried to provoke Him to speak in order that they might catch up something from His mouth. So we may often show our trust in God, and our confidence in His truth, by keeping silent. Here is an example:—

"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace even from good." Ps. 39:1, 2.

There is such a thing as casting the pearls of truth before swine, which is forbidden. Who can know when to speak and when to keep silence? Who can know what is exactly the right thing to do on every occasion! Christ alone never made a mistake, and only those in whom He dwells can be kept from stumbling. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:26); but the Lord has promised that those who receive His words and cling to them alone, shall "understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path." Prov. 2:9. Then, "trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding." Prov. 3:5.

There is no time when one would naturally feel less that the Lord is with him than when being sorely tempted. But that is the very time when we must know it and confess it.

The tempted one says, I am bad; is the Lord in me now? I believe He was there in that good meeting, when every one was happy. But here I am alone, and feeling depressed, and everything goes wrong, and the enemy is tempting me, and I feel as though the Lord had left me. By and by when this temptation passes, and I feel better, and as though the Lord is with me, I will confess it then.

But it is in the trial that we need Him with us. It was in the trial that the Saviour confessed the Father. "The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth Me; who will contend with Me? . . . Behold, the Lord God will help Me; who is he that shall condemn Me?" Isa. 50:5-9.

When Jesus was in the Judgment Hall, and every one of His disciples had forsaken Him, and the soldiers were mocking Him and heaping upon Him the refinement of insult, who saw in Him the Son of God? Not even His own disciples. There was no outward evidence. The priests and soldiers saw no sign that He was the Son of God. "If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 1 Cor. 2:8. What evidence had He Himself? What fruit of all His labors was there? He had chosen twelve disciples, and one of them had betrayed Him, one had denied Him with cursing, and all had fled. Of course His enemies would throw this in His face. They doubtless said, "You came making great professions; but where are your followers?" We know that they did mock at His claim to be the Son of

God. See Matt. 16:68; 27:39-44. Even the face of God was hidden from Him.

What evidence did the Saviour have?—The word of God. “I know I shall not be ashamed. He is near.” It was the same in the temptation in the wilderness. Weakened by fasting, His visage “marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men,” a wanderer in the desert, the devil comes to Him and says, “You do not look much like the Son of God.” Himself coming as an angel of light, he tries to make out that Christ is an imposter. He says, If you are the Son of God, you created all things. Why don’t you take the stones and satisfy your hunger?

And Christ knew that He could have done it. He knew that He was the Son of God in the wilderness, just as well as when at the supper, He washed the feet of the disciples as an humble One, He knew “that He was coming from God, and went to God.” He held to the word of God all through His temptation. He confessed, and declared the name of the Lord, witnessing a good confession.

That is what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. It does not mean simply on certain occasions when there seems to be a wave of glory sweeping over the congregation, and we are moved in spite of ourselves. It is so just as much when we are physically helpless. It is just as true when the enemy is pressing us with temptations. It is as much so when afflictions are pressing about us, as when all is pleasant and clear. To confess is to hold the word of God as true continually. And the value of confession is confessing it in the heart. “Believe in thine heart.” “This word shall be in thine heart.” Let not the enemy snatch it away.

It is only by the fixed knowledge, through His word, that God is with us, that we can ever resist any temptation. So when the enemy comes in like a flood, let the Spirit of the Lord lift up the standard against him in your heart. “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Gal. 2:20. Keep “the faith of Jesus,” and victory is yours.

In a time of business recession a fellow lost his job, a sizable fortune, and his beautiful home. To add to his sorrow, his precious wife died; yet he tenaciously held to his faith—the only thing he had left. One day when he was out walking in search of employment, he stopped to watch some men who were doing stonework on a large

church. One of them was chiseling a triangular piece of rock. "Where are you going to put that?" he asked. The workman said, "Do you see that little opening up there near the spire? Well, I'm shaping this stone down here so that it will fit in up there." Tears filled his eyes as he walked away, for the Lord had spoken to him through that laborer whose words gave new meaning to his troubled situation.