

## Enduring Temptation and Entering into Temptation

James 1: 2, 12; Matt. 26: 41

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There is manifestly a vast difference between "falling into temptation," or "enduring temptation" (James 1: 2, 12), on the one hand, and "entering into temptation" (Matt. 26: 41), on the other. We do well therefore to have it clear and settled in our souls; for, as the one is blessed, the other is the utmost possible danger for the soul. There is nothing more strengthening than to "endure temptation"; nothing more perilous than to "enter into" it. There seems little difference in the words, and people might easily slur over the difference in their thought. But the difference is complete; for in the one case it is an honour that God puts upon us, and in the other a snare that Satan presents to us.

Which of these two things do we know best? How far do our souls that are here round the table of the Lord Jesus know what it is to fall into divers temptations, or to endure temptation? For blessed are we if we do. Falling into temptation, or enduring it, is that which God delights in. In Gen. 12 we find that Abraham was in a condition in which God could try him; and He loves that we should be in such a condition that He can try us. But this is not so when we are not governed by the sense of the presence of God, as well as happy in Him. It is not so where flesh is not judged. Are we then brought to this point in the ways of God? For it is this that He looks for from every saint of His. Are we then brought into communion with the Father and His Son in our Lord Jesus (1 John 1)? Have we not the same Saviour, and the same salvation of God?

Still, in Christ salvation is not merely an incomparable favour such as God has shown to us in the depths of our need, but it is also assuredly inseparable from the dealing with self in the presence of God; so much so, that where this is not learnt at the beginning it must be more painfully taught in the course. And then what dishonour to God! how grieving to His Spirit! Such failure, to teach us what we are, is *not* enduring temptation, nor is it in the least the same as God's trying us. In such a state the Lord has rather to buffet us for our faults, as those who bear the name of the Lord Jesus after an uncomely sort.

How grievous that those who have in the Saviour such a salvation, based on the utter judgment of the flesh, should so little have used it to deal with self, the most hateful of all things to God; for so one need not hesitate to call it. I admit there is a greater daringness and pride and subtlety in Satan; but it seems to me that for that which is low and base and mean, there is nothing so bad as self; and yet this is the very thing that every one of us carries with us. The question now is, How far has grace acted upon our souls to lead us to judge it out and out in the presence of God? Where this is the case, the Lord can try us; that is, He can put us to the proof by what is not at all a question of evil of any kind, because God does not tempt by evil any more than He is tempted by evil things.

When God then was pleased to ask Abraham to give up his only son, this was in no wise evil, but a most blessed trial. It was proving whether Abraham had such perfect confidence in God that he would give up the object that was dearest to him, in whom were centred all the promises of God. And by grace Abraham could. Of course he did it with the perfect certainty that, if Isaac were then to die, God would raise him up; for Abraham perfectly well knew, before the sacrifice was asked, that Isaac was to be the child of promise; and he knew that it was to be that Isaac and nobody else — not another son — so that he was certain, if Isaac were offered up, God would raise him again from the dead. It

was therefore really the good of God's own heart that was reflected in what He asked of Abraham's heart; and Abraham was brought into greater communion with God in that which was in its measure the counterpart of the gift of His own Son.

Just so it is with the trials that God is pleased to try us by, speaking now not of our bad trials, but of our good ones; not of such sorrows as Lot passed through, but of those like Abraham's. It is a proof of the greatest confidence on God's part if there is in us such a groundwork of walking before God, and in the consciousness of His presence, that He can try us with something that is like Himself — some prize to give up, some suffering to endure in grace — whatever it may be that is according to His own mind. It is in this sense that temptation is spoken of in James 1: 2, 12.

After this (James 1: 13-15) we immediately turn to temptation spoken of in a bad sense, and this connects itself with the verse I read in Matt. 26. I shall not dwell long upon either, though both are words of most salutary character for our souls. The Lord had looked for His disciples to watch with Him. Alas! He had not found it. And the Lord had gone Himself alone, and had prayed to His Father in deepest suffering. Then He comes back to the disciples, and, finding them sleeping, He says to Peter, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" No, they could not watch with Him one hour! The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

Now it would be very unworthy for us to take this as an excuse for our own failure; this would be reading scripture to the positive injury of our souls and the dishonour of God; yet I am afraid there are many who do so. But we must remember there is this difference between our standing now, and that of the disciples. Flesh had not been thoroughly exposed and judged at that time; it was before the cross of Christ, and so before the Holy Ghost was given. There was divine life, but divine life, in itself, always goes in weakness.

It is the Holy Ghost that acts in power; and you never can have power without Him. But we are always responsible for the power of the Holy Ghost, because He is given to the believer, and for ever abides in him. This time was not yet come; but the Lord does say in view of it, as well as of the state in which they then were, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." For remember this, it is not any power conferred by the Spirit of God that keeps, even though He be the Spirit of power — it is not energy in this or that which keeps, but dependence; it is the sense of weakness that watches and prays, and thus has the power of Christ resting on us. His strength made perfect in weakness.

There is nothing that so tends, where it is severed from Christ, to destroy dependence, as a large knowledge of the word of God. And that is where our danger lies. The greater our knowledge of the word of God, where it is separated from the sense of utter weakness, and consequently from the need of watching and praying, the greater the danger. This is a solemn warning for our souls. There is no doubt plenty of knowledge of Scripture, and of what is called intelligence of truth; but do our souls keep up this sense of our need and weakness, and the expression of it to God? "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

What does our Lord mean by "entering into temptation"? The *will* that goes into a scene where nothing but a judged will in one who goes at the bidding of God and leaning on Him can be kept; that is, the will goes in where failure is inevitable, just because it *is* will at work. So Peter himself soon proved. He went where Peter could not stand, unless the Lord had called and kept him by faith. He entered into temptation. *He* did not suffer. There was no such thing as enduring temptation; but he entered into it, and fell.

And let me just say that it is all well in the midst of the saints of God to confess our Lord Jesus Christ; but it is not so easy to confess Him truly and humbly where, instead of saints sympathising with

us, shame and contempt, or death even, may be the consequence, as in Peter's case. He would have endured, had he gone in by grace, obedience, watching and praying, instead of trusting in his own willingness to go to prison or even to die for his Master. When our Lord says, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak," He is looking at nature in man; and nature is incapable of such a trial. None but God can sustain, and therefore it would require God's will expressed in His word to lead us rightly into such a scene of temptation, and His grace sustaining in faith to keep us in it; otherwise it would be but our own will, and we should fall.

It would have been an abomination in Abraham to sacrifice his son, unless God had spoken the word. But faith, where self is judged, strengthens the soul to endure temptation. One enters not into temptation where one abides in dependence and self-judgment. Then when we fall *into* various temptations, we count it all joy; and as we did not enter of our own will, so we do not fall *in* them, but by grace endure.

The Lord give us to watch and pray, so much the more because He has blessed us with such a knowledge of His word and of Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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