

Is It a Sin to be Tempted?

No growing Christian in the world can be unconcerned about the traumatic problem of temptation. There is no age level when moral choices and struggles of the spirit do not confront us. Temptation may attack at different points on different issues, but it will always be with us as long as we are in the flesh.

When I was a boy back in North Carolina, we could always tell when the fruit was ripe out in the orchards. A certain gang of neighbourhood boys would head in that direction, and everyone would say, "It must be that time again." Now, devils are smarter than teenage boys, and as long as the fruit of your life is sour and immature, they may leave you strictly alone. But when that fruit is ripe, all the demons may suddenly appear to try to steal it away from you.

This means that the most spiritual people are the most likely to face the most severe temptations. They have something that Satan would like to spoil or destroy.

Does this mean that it is an honour to be especially tempted by the devil? Perhaps so. In a way it is a compliment to have thieves try to break into your house. It shows that you at least have the reputation for having money. And when the demons come around, even though it's a battle,

you may know that the Lord is still working in your life.

Now we are prepared to look at one of the most astounding texts in the entire Bible. “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2). Apparently, the Bible writers were also convinced that temptation can be a good thing. Yet, the thought is in total conflict with all the painful human experiences we have suffered in meeting temptation. Most people consider it to be a necessary evil, downright destructive in its influence.

We certainly need to understand that there are some redeeming features about temptation. First of all, it proves that we have moral insight. No one can be tempted unless there are meaningful choices to be made. Issues of right and wrong must be clearly distinguished. People who see everything in the moral realm as a kind of dull gray cannot pass through any great battles of the mind.

One must have a special consciousness of good and evil in order to be tempted. Many modern religionists seem to have only small, average consciences, which may account for the lack of spiritual conflict. What a contrast to the great characters of the past who seem to have had dramatic hand-to-hand combat with the devil. Martin Luther’s confrontation with Satan was so

real that he is reported to have thrown an inkwell at his tormentor.

You are to be congratulated, then, if you find yourself tempted. It certainly implies that you are seeing the issues correctly. But now comes the most crucial question: After we recognize the true situation before us, how do we find the power to choose the good over the evil? Paul sensed the urgency of this question when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthian church. No one could have been faced with more obvious choices than those few Christian citizens of Corinth. The pagan world of the flesh stood out in vivid contrast to the self-denying lifestyle of their newfound faith. There was no question with them about right and wrong, and Paul wrote: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

This verse contains a wealth of inspired encouragement for anyone who is struggling against a recognized evil. The apostle warned against making an exception of ourselves. It is so easy for us to feel that no one else has ever had to face the enemy in the same way that we have to. Our burden appears heavier and our battle seems more severe than any which others have experienced. Paul said that this is simply not true,

and we must not allow ourselves to think it for a moment. This is old stuff. No matter what we suffer, the very same temptation has come upon a million others long before we were born.

How very much we like to consider our situation different from all others! This provides a very clever rationalization just in case we lose the battle and yield to the temptation. If our case is so different, God cannot judge us as strictly as others who have a much easier test. The businessman consoles himself that cheating on taxes is not usually the right thing to do, but he has suffered more shoplifting losses than anyone else. And besides that, he has been more discriminated against by government bureaucrats.

The philandering husband argues, “My problem is unique. My wife is cold and unresponsive, and no one understands the pressures I am under.”

Mark it down: Almost every sin will be prefaced by these words — “I’m an exception.” We must constantly remind ourselves that this has been the psychology of Satan for six thousand years. All he tried to do in the wilderness of temptation was to convince Jesus that He was different. Every one of the three approaches Satan used was based on the idea that as the Son of God, He could do things that no one else could do — turn stones into bread or jump off the pinnacle without being hurt.

The Purpose of Temptation

Now Paul hastens to assure us that “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.” That is reassuring and comforting! But why should He allow any agonizing conflicts to engulf His people? Why not simply remove all temptation? The answer is found in James 1:2–4. “My brethren, 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.”

A new, satisfying picture begins to emerge in these verses. Temptation provides opportunity for spiritual conquest and growth. It is not a disgrace to be tempted. If there are no battles, there can be no victories through strong decision. Neither can there be any nobility of character. Virtue is tried innocence. Untried goodness may be no goodness at all. I could possibly sequester myself in a solitary cave somewhere and not commit an outward sin for a whole week simply because I would have no contact with any other person. Would that week prove me to be a virtuous individual? Not at all. Christianity is not merely the absence of wrong behaviour in the life; it has to do with an aggressive practice of

positive virtues as well. My life in the cave might prove more than I would like it to prove. I would be good, but good for nothing! The person who avoids all temptation by avoiding contact with all people may do no harm, but neither does he do any good. He is morally anaemic.

Now we are brought to Paul's assertion that God will "make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it." Does this mean there will always be an easy road out of every temptation experience? No. It just means that in every moral trial God will provide us an alternative. There will always be two paths leading out of each temptation — one, the alluring path of evil; the other, an appealing path of good. Paul is saying that we are being drawn in two directions every time we are tempted. At the same time we are tempted to anger, the Holy Spirit draws us to self-control. When we are tempted to be dishonest, the Holy Spirit draws us to use integrity.

A little boy was standing in a store with his hand in the apple barrel, caressing the attractive fruit. Finally, the storekeeper approached the lad and asked, "Sonny, are you trying to steal my apples?" Quickly the boy answered, "No, sir. I'm trying not to." We can easily understand what he meant by that honest rejoinder. All of us

have struggled with those two voices and those two choices.

Now, let's look toward the end of these dual tracks which lead out of each temptation experience. The temptation that makes one character noble by non-consent will make another character mean and ignoble by giving way to it. This law of human nature decrees that we can never be the same after facing temptation. We will get the victory and be stronger for the next one down the road, or we will yield and be weaker for the next one we face. Our character is built up or torn down depending on the choice we make.

Should We Seek Temptation?

Doesn't this provide a powerful argument to prove that temptation can be a good thing? Indeed, it does. But it also can be abused if we are not careful. Because victory can do so much good for us, should we go searching for an opportunity to engage the enemy? If temptation can be such a glorious opportunity to develop character, why not pray "Lead us into temptation" instead of "Lead us not into temptation"? Some might reason that they need an injection of new strength and begin looking

for a nice, juicy temptation so that they can gain a victory and build their character.

What is wrong with that reasoning? Is there a convincing answer to it? Those of us who possess this freedom of choice should pray that we will not misuse it by placing ourselves in the clutch of circumstances that might test us beyond our strength. Fire controlled in the stove is great, but it is not very good out of control on the roof. It is better to shun the bait than to struggle in the trap after it has sprung.

The fact is that we misjudge our own powers. We do not understand our own strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, no one is justified in deliberately seeking for a testing situation. We have no promise of deliverance under those circumstances. The Bible says, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter 2:9). Again, God promises, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation” (Revelation 3:10). He is the only one who is qualified to arrange the circumstances of our test. He will permit to develop around us only that which He sees we are in need of and have the strength to endure.

Every one of us has particularly vulnerable points of weakness in character. It is also sadly true that there are special moments of time in

which we are most liable to be overcome by the enemy. Satan is well acquainted with that very moment when our resistance will be the lowest, and he also understands our individual weakness. We can be sure of one thing — his strongest attack against us will come in our weakest moment and at the weakest point in our character.

What a solemn thought! With such an enemy we can never feel secure in our own strength. We are only as strong as we are in the weakest moment of our life. Our character is only as strong as its weakest link. These facts forever preclude the possibility that we can deliberately and safely expose ourselves to tests in order to build character.

Sin Begins in the Mind

Another interesting fact about temptation is that it always assails the mind first. Every sin has its origin in the thoughts long before it appears as an act of the body. Jesus said, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness”

(Mark 7:21, 22). Almost every category of evil is included in this long list of sins which come forth from the heart. Paul described lust as “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Ephesians 2:3). The Greek text more accurately says “desires of the thoughts.”

Right at this point we must make some careful distinctions. It is very important to understand that desire, in itself, is not wrong. God has actually placed certain powerful appetites and propensities within our human nature. There is nothing wrong with these drives as long as they are properly controlled and directed. This includes ambition, temper, sex, and every other basic disposition. Wrong comes in only one way. When desire oversteps the bounds and seeks gratification outside the will of God, it turns into lust.

Every day we are confronted with pictures, books, words, etc., which are exciting and appealing to the mind. It is through these emotional stimuli that the mind is often presented with unholy desires. The temptation to lust is present, but this is not sin. As long as those desires are not gratified or fulfilled they are not wrong. It is only when the mind responds to the desire by receiving it and holding it that the temptation turns into sin.

James describes it this way. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14, 15). Here the act of sin is compared to the process of conception and reproduction. Just as a bee carries pollen from one open blossom to another to fertilize the flower, so the heart of each individual is open to the introduction of unholy thoughts and desires. If those seeds are allowed to mingle with the carnal nature, they produce an inevitable harvest of sin, and finally, death. Our only protection is to set a guard before all the avenues of the soul to test every entering thought. By the grace and strength of Christ, every evil desire can be recognized and sifted out so that it has no opportunity to linger in the mind as a catalyst of lust and sin.

This touches an issue that often becomes exceedingly sensitive. How easy it is to say that we can monitor the mind and weed out the clamouring thoughts of sin. But can human beings, even in concert with Christ, actually conquer the temptation to harbor impure thoughts? The Bible says yes. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that

exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5).

How is such total victory possible? Is it accomplished through prayer, faith, or personal effort? Basically, we must agree that this kind of deliverance comes only through the enabling, indwelling Spirit of God. There is not enough strength in the flesh to overcome one evil desire. Nevertheless, the victory is not obtained without our strong cooperation and action. God does not work miracles to deliver those who do not use their own God-given power to avoid evil.

Guard the Avenues of the Mind

Again, we are brought back to the question of inviting temptation. How far should we go in protecting ourselves from the vulnerability to sin? Jesus laid down a very clear principle in the Sermon on the Mount. “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Mt 5:29, 30).

Obviously, Jesus was not talking about the literal eye or the literal hand. One could violently decimate his body and still be as wicked as ever. Christ was talking about the occupation of the hand and what the eye focuses on. If we find ourselves in a job or any physical situation which opens a door to temptation, the counsel is to “cut it off.” In other words, get away from any vocation which involves an enticement that is liable to lead into sin. The Master indicated that any radical means should be used to avoid situations which might overwhelm with soul-destroying sin. Even an employment position should be abandoned rather than risk the spiritual loss of eternal life.

If we find ourselves looking at some scene which is likely to introduce sinful thoughts or actions, Jesus commands us to shut that view away from our sight by any possible means. The term “pluck it out” conveys the idea of precipitous action if necessary.

What a persuasive argument against the corrupt communication media of today! The alluring appeal of television is probably the most powerful incitement to sin in the twentieth century. The words of Christ have a most explicit application to those who have difficulty controlling the television set. Our Lord’s counsel to “pluck it out” would seem to translate into

“throw it out” if the eye continues to be offended by provocative pictures on the tube. Much better, Jesus said, to lose the advantage of the educational material than to lose the soul by looking at degrading programs. If it can't be totally controlled, don't take the chance! Pluck it out!

Would Jesus ask us to deny ourselves some good thing just because a small amount of mind pollution might be involved? Yes. It is much better to lead what the world calls a narrow-minded existence — a one-eyed life — than to lead a so-called full life and lose your soul. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Saying no to desirable, fleshly things is a basic requirement of a Christian's discipleship if those things present temptations which are likely to lead into sin.

What I am really saying is that even with a spiritual mind, we need to follow the great basic principles of victory over temptation. There are places to be avoided if we want to have total victory. There are devotional requirements if we would be wholly in harmony with Christ. The avenues of the mind must be guarded if we would defeat sin in its inception.

What a tremendous difference it would make if all could clearly understand the priority

placed upon a pure mind. Satan has created a deceptive, artificial world of the flesh which makes a powerful appeal to the mind of every man, woman, and child. Only by recognizing the snares and appropriating all the weapons of Christ's warfare will we be successful in resisting temptation.

No Confidence in the Flesh

Although some people seem able to resist anything except temptation, others appear to be almost complacent about the problem. Is it possible to have a misplaced confidence in the flesh and its ability to cope with temptation? Paul wrote, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Have you noticed how some of the most unlikely individuals fall prey to the most unlikely sins? It is often the case that a person is overcome in the area where he feels the strongest. How does it happen? Do we become careless on the point of our supposed strength? It appears so. No inspired explanation is given as to how Moses could succumb to impatience or anger. The Bible presents him as the meekest man who ever lived. Such a person might yield to many other temptations but surely not to passion. Yet, that is exactly the sin that shut

Moses out of the Promised Land. He smote the rock in anger instead of speaking to it as God commanded (Numbers 20).

Elijah's great strength was courage. He withstood single-handedly all the entrenched forces of Baal on Mt. Carmel. With incredible boldness he challenged anyone who deviated from a path of full obedience to God. Yet, immediately after his successful contest with the prophets of Baal, he fled like a coward from the threats of Queen Jezebel. It was so out of character for the fearless Tishbite! Did he drop his guard in the area of his fabled strength?

Abraham was distinguished by his total trust in God. He is called the father of the faithful. Yet he lied to the King of Egypt out of fear that his wife would be taken from him. Do these great Bible characters not demonstrate dramatically how Satan attacks the place in our lives where there is a lack of alertness? No one should think he is immune to Satan's attacks because of some demonstrable virtues.

It is also very interesting to note that no one really anticipates the result of yielding to temptation, since it usually approaches along the line of least resistance. Gehazi saw the flashing colours of the Syrian garments — not the leprous scars which would follow him to the grave. Achan saw the coveted wedge of Babylonian

gold — not the anger of a nation which would rise up to stone him. Judas could not see past the glittering silver coins to his fearful remorse and suicide.

Another great truth about temptation, which should bring courage to all of us, is that many temptations will cease to trouble us as we make good choice a habit. Just as our brain is programmed to do wrong by constant yielding to compromise and defeat, so it may be programmed for victory through strong decision and right choices. Most of the terrible struggle will disappear from the experience as our nature adjusts to a program of habitual victory.

Someone wrote an article entitled “Don’t Decide to Go to Church,” which stirred considerable controversy. But the basic premise of the article was simply that we should not have to debate over the decision to attend church. Just as we don’t struggle three times a day with the decision to eat food, so we should not have to make some heavy decisions about going to church each Sabbath morning. Repetition of a practice finally turns it into an automatic response, and the temptation to stay away from church no longer exists. So it can be with many other forms of temptation as we use our wills to establish victorious patterns of thought and action.

Are you sometimes tempted not to pray or read your Bible in the morning? Probably every Christian has faced that temptation at least once. Is it possible to take the strength out of that particular temptation? Yes, it is. Thousands of people have established such a pattern of daily devotion that they don't even consider not taking the time to do it. The temptation no longer really exists for them. They have followed the counsel of Paul, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

Thus far we have uncovered some of the psychological tricks that Satan uses for trapping people into sin. We have also concluded that sin originates in the mind, which means that some very special attention must be given to protecting that vulnerable target of the enemy's attack. We have suggested placing specific guards before the avenues of the mind to shut out suspicious thoughts and desires. We have strongly recommended using the will to say no to the urges of the flesh. All of this counsel is good, but it is also useless if one truth is not recognized. Now we move into the very heart of the temptation/sin problem.

The Power of a Positive “No”

All the processes of choice, free will, and decision are centred in the mysterious gray matter of the brain. Here is where Satan made his first attack on Eve. In order to make her sin, Satan had to influence her to open her mind to someone besides God. And the only way to reach her mind was through the emotional avenue of the senses. Thus, the Bible says that she “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6).

Please notice that the serpent was only able to corrupt her mind through the things she looked at and listened to. It was the appealing beauty of the fruit, plus the hypnotizing sound of the flattering voice, which finally led to Eve’s downfall.

Mark it down: It is only by utilizing the paths which are under our conscious control that Satan is able to defile the mind. In other words, we must give our consent before an act of sin can be committed. No one compelled Eve to leave her husband, walk to the tree, listen to the serpent, or eat the fruit. Every step was a volitional act in response to some sensory appeal. God had placed within Eve a holy will and a perfect, sinless mind. Through these

sanctified powers a total separation from sin was always possible for her. Yet she chose to disobey God.

Our case is not quite so clear-cut and simple. We do not possess by nature the kind of pure and unpolluted mind that Eve had. We have all inherited the weak and compromised bodies and minds which disobedience produced in Adam and Eve. By yielding to Satan and choosing to obey him instead of God, Eve instantly lost her power to resist temptation. Her will became weakened, and the law of sin began to operate in her body to produce death. By that one deliberate act, she forever doomed herself and her offspring to a life of unremitting struggle and defeat.

Had God not immediately introduced the plan of salvation in Genesis 3:15, all the human race would have followed Eve's course of wilful sin and would have died without hope. The promised seed of the woman offered hope for degenerate men to reverse the effect of Adam's and Eve's sin. Through Christ the death sentence could be lifted and the mind of enmity could be replaced by the mind of Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

It would be useless to deal with the subject of temptation without recognizing that the

ultimate answer to this problem is a spiritual yielding to Christ. All the counsel in the world and all the knowledge of sin's devices will be less than useless if the mind is not surrendered to Christ.

The Second Adam's Temptation

Consider for a moment how Jesus made that way of escape from temptation for everyone who will accept it. He came as the world's second Adam, and faced the enemy exactly like the first Adam had to meet him. And yet, of course, it was not exactly as Adam and Eve were tested. Jesus did not meet the tempter in a lovely garden surrounded by beauty. He struggled with Satan in a wild, desolate wilderness. The first Adam had access to every possible variety of luscious food, but Jesus was emaciated and weak from forty days without food or drink.

The first Adam faced the tempter in the strength of a perfect body, untainted by a single hereditary flaw. Jesus took humanity upon Himself after 4,000 years of sin had weakened the human race. He accepted all the hereditary disadvantages and liabilities which sin had imposed upon the physical descendants of the first Adam.

No one will ever fully understand the

nature of that wilderness contest. Satan had anticipated this confrontation for years, and perhaps for centuries. In those three subtle temptations he had combined all the psychological expertise that his mastermind could provide. In effect, Satan appealed to the same basic human emotions which had destroyed the first Adam — appetite, presumption, and position. But, thank God, the deceiver could not find one thing in Christ to respond to his enticements. The second Adam utterly disarmed and defeated the devil in the very areas which had been so effective against the first Adam.

We need to stretch our minds in an effort to comprehend this truth. Why was the great Creator-God of the universe willing to submit to the indignities of that agonizing experience? Had He not already proven His power over the evil one by casting him out of heaven? Why should He voluntarily place Himself at such terrible disadvantage in the midst of another conflict with Satan?

The answer is simple. The devil had stolen away the masterpiece of God's creation. Mankind, whom God loved, had been kidnapped by the enemy, albeit willingly, and was held in captivity. Two things happened that day when Adam was conquered by Satan. First, he and his

descendants immediately fell under the irrevocable sentence of death which God had pronounced upon transgressors of His law. Second, his entire moral nature became so traumatized and degraded by sin that it would never be possible for Adam or his posterity to refrain from sinning again and again.

Do you see the problem? What could God do to release the creatures He loved from the devastating consequence of their sin? They were doomed to die and they had forfeited the power to obey. Satan exulted. He reasoned that God Himself could not get man back without changing His law or compromising His justice. At last, Satan had found a way to prove the charges he had pressed against God. In the presence of the holy angels he had accused God of being unfair and requiring an impossible obedience.

Now he gloated over God's dilemma, as these charges seemed to have proven true. Man apparently could not obey. Now God would either have to let man die in his sin, or change His law, or accept transgressors in His kingdom — so Satan must have reasoned.

God met the problem with such an incredible strategy that no devil or man could have faintly anticipated it. Satan was overwhelmed by its implications. Briefly, it

involved God taking man's place and accepting the punishment of death for him. Neither the law nor the sentence for breaking it was changed.

In order to die for man's sin, though, God had to take upon Himself a nature that was subject to death. Deity could not die. Jesus accepted the unspeakable conditions of being born into the lost, condemned family of Adam. In the incarnation, God not only provided for His atoning death for sin but for a dramatic rebuttal of Satan's charge that man could not live without sinning. In order to make the demonstration absolutely unanswerable on Satan's part, Jesus submitted Himself to the same human limitations of every child of Adam. He was tempted in all points as we are tempted, yet He completely overcame every one of them by using the same divine power that is accessible to each one of us. He was still God totally and completely, but He was also totally man. In meeting these temptations, He voluntarily restricted Himself to the same spiritual resources available to man today. Thus, He shattered Satan's lie that obedience for humanity is an impossibility.

All Lost Things Restored

With a life of perfect obedience behind Him, Jesus laid down His life to meet the penalty

of the broken law. His death and resurrection gave Him the final authority by which to reverse all the human havoc wrought by Satan's victory over Adam. Now Jesus had in His hand everything man could possibly need to be restored to God's Edenic plan of perfection and holiness. Although it had cost Him an infinite price to obtain, He offered all of it as a free gift to anyone who would receive it.

What did He have to offer? Deliverance from the death sentence through His own assumption of the guilt and penalty, credit for a perfect life of obedience through His imputed righteousness, and victory in the flesh over every temptation Satan can devise.

Many who have joyfully received the first two gifts have been fearful to accept the third. Why should we hesitate to be an exhibit for God? By receiving His power of victory over temptation, we provide a vindication of God's original purpose, and we expose the blasphemous lies of Satan for what they really are.

Right now Satan holds a tenuous position as a temporary ruler of this world. He watches in desperation as Jesus and the Holy Spirit break through the barriers of sin to release multitudes of his captives. The power of the flesh is broken every time self surrenders to Christ.

Temptation loses its power when He enters the life. By one decision right now, victory is assured. The second Adam was to deliver you from the old sinful nature of the first Adam. He wants you to change families. There is no hope for us to overcome temptation unless we get out of the defeated, dying family of the first Adam.

Jesus offers each one of us the victory which He won over Satan in the flesh. We might be suspicious of this gift had He not overcome in the same human nature we possess. Now He wants to enter your life and live out the same victory in you day after day.

One of my favourite stories has to do with Augustine, whose youth was marked by gross licentiousness and immorality. As a young man he was swept by mighty currents of emotion for two women in his life. Like a chip on the tide, Augustine would be drawn toward his godly mother, Monica; and then, toward a dissolute woman who seemed to hold him under an evil spell. In spite of his mother's prayers for him, Augustine continued a course of miserable compromise. Sometimes he would be attracted to the righteous instruction of Monica, but then, the evil influence of the other woman would draw him back. The battle was long and terrible.

But then came that glorious day when in his garden Augustine was converted through a

mysterious voice directing him to Rom 13:13, 14. When he read this text, the scales fell off his eyes, and he rushed to convey the good news to his mother. She was delighted at the dramatic change in her son.

While walking down the streets of Carthage the next day after his conversion, Augustine saw the woman who had been his companion in sin. She was coming directly toward him and there was no way to avoid the encounter. Without even acknowledging her presence, Augustine brushed past her without a word. She stopped, unbelieving, and then ran after him in a state of outrage. Grabbing his arm she cried, “Augustine! Augustine! It is I!” He stopped in his tracks, looked at her, and said, “Yes, but it is not I.” Then he walked on down the street and out of her life forever.

Augustine told the truth that day because he was indeed a new person. It is only in the strength of the second Adam that we will be able to turn from temptation. Sin loses its appeal for those who are in love with Christ and have made their decision to serve Him instead of self.

Satan will have no problem overcoming the children of the first Adam. He defeated the father and he can handle the children as well. On the other hand, he will find no way to conquer

those who draw upon the strength of the second Adam.

This is the way of escape that is promised to those who will receive it. Jesus simply passes on to His spiritual children the total victory which He won over the devil while living here in human flesh.

This is the heart of the matter. Under this power the Christian uses his surrendered will to choose the lifestyle which avoids the hidden snares of temptation. Both factors are very important in winning the victory — having Christ in the heart and avoiding presumptuous situations of temptation. May God lead us in applying these spiritual principles to our own experience.

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