

OF TEMPTATION

JOHN OWEN



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ABOUT THIS BOOK



A searching **practical treatise** on the danger of "entering into temptation," expounding Christ's command to **watch and pray**. Owen probes the nature of temptation, its seasons and stages, the treachery of the human heart, and the subtle power Satan wields through lust, circumstance, and public corruption. With surgical precision, he identifies how temptation grows to its decisive "hour" and **prescribes practical watchfulness**: knowing one's own heart, avoiding provocative occasions, storing gospel provisions, and above all **keeping the word of Christ's patience** — the one condition Christ promises will preserve the soul from temptation's hour.



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TO THE READER



Christian Reader,

If you are paying any attention to the times we live in, and have noticed the many, great, and varied temptations that beset all kinds of people who know the Lord and profess His name — temptations to which they are continually exposed — and if you have seen how successfully those temptations have prevailed, to the unspeakable dishonor of the Gospel and the wounding and ruin of countless souls, then I trust you will need no further explanation for why these warnings and directions are being published. They are suited to the times passing over us and to your own stake in them. I will only say this to those who still want a fuller explanation: though my first motivation for putting these meditations before the public came from the wishes of some whose personal holiness and constant devotion to everything precious in its relation to Christ have given them a claim on my service, I cannot lay the whole of it on that account — as if I myself did not judge it timely and necessary, given the general state of things described above. The variety of outward providences and circumstances through which I have been exercised in this world, together with the inward trials that accompanied them — added to the observations I have had opportunity to make of the ways and

walks of others, their beginnings and progress, their endings and falls in faith and conduct, in darkness and in light — have left such a constant sense and impression of the power and danger of temptations on my mind and spirit that, without needing any other justification, I cannot but acknowledge a serious call to sound a warning, and to expose some of the most prominent ways and means by which present temptations prevail. But if you, reader, are among those who take no notice of these things or care nothing for them — who have no sense of the power and danger of temptations in your own walk and profession, nor have observed their power on others; who do not see the many advantages temptations have gained in these days when all things are being shaken, nor have been troubled by the sad successes they have had among professing Christians — who suppose that all is well within and without, and would be better still if only you could more fully satisfy your lusts for the world's pleasures or profits — know this: I am not writing for you. I do not consider you a fit reader or judge of what is written here. While all the outcomes of God's providential dealings with these nations remain entangled and confused, His footsteps lying in the deep where His paths are not known; while unparalleled distresses and strange prosperities are measured out to men — yes, to professing believers; while a spirit of error, instability, and delusion goes forth with such strength and power that it seems commissioned to go and succeed; while there are divisions, strife, and jealousies attended by evil suspicions, wrath, and revenge among brothers; while the desperate results of men's temptations appear daily in partial and total apostasy, in decaying love, in overthrown faith — our days being filled with fearful examples of backsliding such as former ages never knew; while a visible de-

cline from reformation is seizing the professing body of these nations, both in personal holiness and in zeal for Christ's cause — whoever does not understand that an hour of temptation has come upon the world to try those who dwell on the earth is either himself captive under the power of some dreadful lust, corruption, or temptation — or he is simply spiritually blind and does not know at all what it means to serve God amid temptations. With such persons I have nothing to do at present. This warning is intended for those who have a general sense of these things and who, being able to some degree to see that the plague has begun, may be further awakened to look about them — lest the infection has crept closer to them by secret and imperceptible ways than they realized, or lest they be suddenly caught off guard by some of those temptations that in these days either strike openly at noon or creep in the darkness. It is also intended for those who mourn in secret over all the shameful things found among and upon those who profess the Gospel, and who under the leadership of the Captain of their salvation are fighting and resisting the power of temptations — from whatever source they arise within themselves. To these, the following directions are offered for consideration. That our faithful and merciful High Priest — who both suffered and was tempted, and is therefore touched with the feeling of our weaknesses — would accompany this small work with timely supplies of His Spirit and fitting mercy to all who consider it, so that it may be useful to His servants for the purposes for which it is designed: this is the prayer of him who received this handful of seed from His storehouse and treasury,

John Owen

CHAPTER I. THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION AND ENTERING INTO IT



Matthew 26:41 — Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation.

These words of our Savior are repeated with very little change in three Gospels. Matthew and Mark record them as written above, while Luke reports them this way: "Rise and pray, that you do not enter into temptation." The full force of His caution, then, seems to have been: rise, watch, and pray that you do not enter into temptation.

Solomon speaks of some who lie down on the top of a mast in the middle of the sea (Proverbs 23:34) — men overwhelmed by carelessness at the very mouth of destruction. If ever poor souls lay down on top of a mast in the middle of the sea, these disciples with our Savior in the garden did so. Their Master, at a little distance from them, was offering up prayers and supplications with strong cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7), taking into His hand and beginning to taste the cup filled with the curse and wrath due to their sins. The Jews armed for His destruction — and theirs — were only a little farther away on the other side. Our Savior had told them

shortly before that that night He would be betrayed and handed over to be killed. They could see that He was sorrowful and deeply distressed (verse 37). He told them plainly that His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow, even to the point of death (verse 38), and so He asked them to stay and watch with Him — now while He was dying, and dying for them. In this condition, leaving them for a short while, they fell sound asleep, like men who had forgotten all love for Him and all care for themselves. Even the best of saints, left to themselves, will quickly show themselves to be less than men — to be nothing. All our own strength is weakness, and all our wisdom is folly. Since Peter was one of them — the very one who had just moments before boldly declared that though all others forsook Him he never would — our Savior singled him out for a direct word (verse 40). He said to Peter: "Could you not watch with me one hour?" — as if to say: Are you the one, Peter, who just boasted he would never forsake me? Does it seem likely you will hold to that if you cannot even watch with me one hour? Is this your dying for me — to be asleep in carelessness while I am dying for you? It would be astonishing to consider how Peter could make such a high promise and immediately be so careless in following through on it — were it not that we find the root of that same treachery working in our own hearts every day, producing its fruit. The most noble commitments to obedience quickly end in shameful negligence (Romans 7:18).

In this state, our Savior warned them about their condition, their weakness, their danger, and stirred them to prevent the ruin that was right at the door. He said: Rise, watch, and pray.

I will not dwell on the specific situation our Savior had in mind when He gave this caution to those present with Him — the great temptation coming upon them from the scandal of the cross was no doubt in His view. Instead, I will treat these words as containing a general direction for all of Christ's disciples in following Him throughout every generation.

There are three things in these words:

1. The evil to be avoided: temptation.
2. The means by which it gains power: our entering into it.
3. The way to prevent it: watch and pray.

It is not my intention to treat the whole subject of temptations, but only the danger of them in general, along with the means of preventing that danger. Yet so that we may know what we are talking about, it will help to begin with some observations about the general nature of temptation.

In its most basic sense, temptation is a morally neutral concept — to try, to test, to examine, to probe a vessel so that what is inside may be known. That is all the word means at its root.

This is why God is sometimes said to tempt, and why we are commanded as a duty to test or examine ourselves — to know what is in us — and to pray that God would do the same. Temptation, then, is like a knife: it may either cut the meat or cut a man's throat. It may be his nourishment or his poison, his exercise or his destruction.

Temptation in its more specific sense — as denoting something evil — is understood in two ways: either actively, as something that leads to evil, or passively, as something evil and painful that is suf-

ferred. In the passive sense, temptation is used to mean affliction (James 1:2). In that sense we are to count it all joy when we fall into temptations; in the active sense, we are to pray that we do not enter into them.

Taken in the active sense, temptation refers either to a tempter whose design is to bring about the specific end of temptation — namely, leading someone into evil. In that sense it is said that God tempts no one (James 1:13) with a design toward sin as such. Or it refers to the general nature and end of temptation, which is trial — in which sense God tempted Abraham (Genesis 22:1), and He also tests through false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:3).

Regarding God's tempting of any person, two things must be considered.

1. The purpose for which He does it.
2. The means by which He does it.

As for the first, His general purposes are two.

1. He does it to show a man what is in him — to reveal the man to himself — whether regarding his grace or his corruption. (I am not speaking here of this in its role in hardening the heart as a judicial act.) Grace and corruption both lie deep in the heart. People often deceive themselves when searching for one or the other. When we open the soul to test what grace is there, corruption comes out; when we look for corruption, grace appears. The soul is left uncertain; our self-tests fail. God comes with a gauge that reaches the bottom. He sends His instruments of trial deep into the soul and lets a man see what is truly in him — what he is really made of.

He did this when He tempted Abraham — to reveal Abraham's faith to him. Abraham did not know what faith he had — I mean, what power and vitality was in his faith — until God drew it out through that great trial. When God said He now knew it, He was making Abraham know it too (Genesis 22:12).

He tried Hezekiah in the same way, to expose his pride. God left him so that He might see what was in his heart (2 Chronicles 32:31). Hezekiah did not know he had such a proud heart — so prone to be lifted up — until God tested him, and his corruption poured out before his face. I will not here treat the good fruit that such discoveries produce in the saints — thankfulness, humility, and the storing up of experience.

2. God also tempts to reveal Himself to man, and He does this in two ways.

1. By preventing grace — so that a man may see it is God alone who keeps him from all sin. Until we are tempted, we think we live on our own strength. Though all others may do this or that, we insist we will not. When the trial comes, we quickly discover where our preservation truly comes from — whether we stand or fall. So it was in the case of Abimelech (Genesis 20:6): "I withheld you."

2. By renewing grace. God allowed Paul's temptation to continue so that He could reveal Himself through the sufficiency of His renewing grace (2 Corinthians 12:9). We do not know the power that God exerts on our behalf, nor how sufficient His grace truly is, until we compare the temptation with our own weakness and see it clearly. The power of an antidote is proven when poison has been taken, and the value of medicine is made known through

disease. We will never know the strength that is in grace until we know the strength that is in temptation. We must be tested in order to become aware that we are being preserved.

God has many other good and gracious purposes He accomplishes toward His saints through trials and temptations — these I need not go into here.

2. As for the means by which God carries out His testing, here are some of them.

1. He places men in great duties — duties beyond any strength they imagine themselves to have, and which indeed they do not have. He tested Abraham this way, by calling him to the duty of sacrificing his son — something absurd to reason, bitter to nature, and painful to Abraham in every way imaginable. Many men do not know what is in them — or rather, what is ready for them in Christ — until they are placed under a burden that seems utterly beyond their strength, and in fact is beyond it. The duties God ordinarily requires of us are not proportioned to the strength we have in ourselves, but to the help and support laid up for us in Christ. We are to come to even the greatest tasks with a settled conviction that we have no ability for the smallest one. This is the rule of grace. Yet when an extraordinary duty is required, that is often a signal mark built into the yoke of Christ — it is a trial, a temptation.

2. By placing men in great sufferings. How many have unexpectedly found strength to die at the stake, to endure torture for Christ! Yet their calling to it was a trial. Peter tells us this is one

way we are brought into searching temptations (1 Peter 1:6-7). Our temptations arise from the fiery trial, yet the end of it is simply the testing of our faith.

3. By His providential ordering of events so that occasions to sin are brought before men — which is the case described in Deuteronomy 13:3, and to which countless other examples could be added.

These are not properly the temptations of God as coming from Him with His own purposes behind them — and so I will set these aside from our present discussion. What I intend to focus on is temptation in its specific sense as an active drive toward sinning — managed for evil, toward evil.

In this sense, temptation may proceed from Satan alone, or from the world, or from other people, or from ourselves — or from all of them together, or from some combination of them.

Satan sometimes acts alone, without taking advantage of the world, its circumstances or people, or our own inner state. He does this when he injects evil and blasphemous thoughts about God into the hearts of believers — that is his own work, without any assistance from the world or from our own hearts. For human nature contributes nothing to such thoughts, nor does anything in the world, nor any person in it — since no one can conceive of God and at the same time naturally produce evil thoughts about Him.

In this, Satan is alone in the sin and will be alone in the punishment. These fiery darts are forged in the furnace of his own malice, and together with all their venom and poison they will be turned back into his own heart forever.

2. Sometimes he makes use of the world and joins forces against us, without any help from within us. He did this when he tempted our Savior by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (Matthew 4:8). The countless resources he draws from the world — its people and its things — along with the weapons he takes from it in every variety and at every season, are beyond description.

3. Sometimes he also draws in help from within us. We are not as Christ was — when Satan came to tempt Him, Christ declared that Satan had no part in Him (John 14:30). It is otherwise with us. For most of his purposes, Satan has a willing party inside our own hearts (James 1:14-15). So he tempted Judas: he was at work himself — he put it into Judas's heart to betray Christ (Luke 22:3). He entered into him for that purpose. Then he set the world to work — its material resources, providing thirty pieces of silver (verse 5), the priests covenanting to pay him money. Then the people of the world — the very chief priests and Pharisees. And he enlisted the help of Judas's own corruption: Judas was covetous, a thief, and held the money bag.

I could also show how the world and our own corruptions act alone by themselves and jointly together with Satan and with each other in this work of temptation.

But the truth is that the sources, methods, and means of temptations — their kinds, degrees, power, and causes — are so vast and varied, and the circumstances surrounding them from providence, from our natures, from our spiritual and natural conditions, along with the particular cases arising from all these, are so countless that any attempt to give a full account of them would be endless. I

will content myself with describing the general nature of what we are to watch against — which will clear the way for what I am aiming at.

Temptation, then, in general: it is anything — any state, way, or condition — that has any kind of force or power to seduce and draw the mind and heart of a person away from the obedience God requires, toward sin in any degree whatsoever.

More specifically: anything is a temptation to a particular person that causes or occasions him to sin or to fall short of his duty in any way — whether by bringing evil into his heart, or drawing out the evil already there, or by any other means diverting him from communion with God and from that constant, consistent, whole-hearted obedience in both substance and manner that God requires of him.

To clarify this description, I simply note that while temptation may seem in its most active sense to refer only to the power that seduces us toward sin itself, in Scripture it is commonly used in a more neutral sense to describe the material or occasion of the temptation — the thing by which we are tempted.

This is the basis of the description I have given. Whatever it may be — anything within us or outside us that has the capacity to hinder duty, to provoke sin, or in any way to occasion it — that is a temptation, and is to be treated as such. Whether it is business, employment, a way of life, company, affections, temperament, corrupt desire, money, relationships, pleasures, reputation, esteem, abilities, bodily or mental gifts, position, status, skill — insofar as any of these furthers or occasions the ends described above, each is just as truly a temptation as the most violent attacks of Satan or

the most alluring enticements of the world. The soul that does not see this stands at the edge of ruin — and this will become clearer as we proceed.

CHAPTER II. WHAT IT MEANS TO ENTER INTO TEMPTATION



Having shown what temptation is, I come next to explain what it means to enter into temptation.

1. It is not simply being tempted. We cannot be so free from temptation that we are never tempted at all. As long as Satan remains in his power and malice, and as long as the world and sinful desire exist, we will be tempted. As one writer puts it: Christ was made like us so that He might be tempted, and we are tempted so that we might be made like Christ. Temptation in general encompasses our entire spiritual warfare — just as our Savior called the whole time of His earthly ministry the time of His temptations (Luke 22:28). We have no promise that we will never be tempted at all, nor should we pray for an absolute freedom from temptation, since no such promise exists to ground that prayer.

The direction we have for prayer is "lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:9). It is entering into temptation that we pray against. We may be tempted, and yet not enter into temptation — and so:

2. This phrase means something more than the ordinary daily work of Satan and our own sinful desires, which are sure to tempt us every day. There is something distinctive about this entering into temptation — it is not the believer's everyday experience. It is something that comes upon them in a peculiar way with respect to being drawn toward sin, whether through allurements or through fear.

3. It is not the same as being conquered by a temptation, or falling under it — committing the sin we are tempted toward, or omitting the duties that are being opposed. A person may enter into temptation and still not fall under it. God can make a way of escape even when a person is already in it; He can break the snare, tread down Satan, and make the soul more than a conqueror — even after it has entered into temptation. Christ entered into it but was not in the slightest overcome by it.

4. Rather, entering into temptation is what the apostle describes in 1 Timothy 6:9 as falling into temptation — like a man falling into a pit or deep place where there are traps and snares that tangle around him. The man is not immediately killed or destroyed, but he is caught and held. He cannot find a way to get free. The same idea appears again in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you." To be overtaken by a temptation is to be caught by it, entangled in it, held in its grip, with no way of escape immediately at hand. This is why Peter says in 2 Peter 2:9 that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations — they are entangled in them, and God knows how to bring them out. When we allow a temptation to enter into us, we enter into temptation. While it knocks at the door, we are free. But when a temptation comes inside and parleys with the heart, reasons with the

mind, entices and draws the affections — whether for a long time or a short time, whether imperceptibly or whether the soul clearly feels it — we have entered into temptation.

So then, for entering into temptation to occur, two things are required:

1. That by some advantage or occasion, Satan becomes more urgent than usual in his attacks on us toward sin — through fear or allurements, through persecution or seduction, by himself or through others. Or that some lust or corruption, stirred up by his instigation and by outward circumstances — whether the excitement of prosperity or the pressure of trouble — rises and rages beyond its ordinary level within us. A special intensification on the part of the author and source of temptation is required.

2. That the heart becomes so entangled that it is thrown into internal argument and dispute in its own defense, yet is unable to fully expel the poison and corruption that has been injected. The soul is caught off guard — even a brief lapse of watchfulness is enough to trap it in an entanglement that is not easily escaped. It may cry and pray and cry again, yet find no deliverance — just as Paul sought the Lord three times for his temptation to depart, and did not prevail. The entanglement remained. This usually occurs in one of two seasons.

1. When Satan, by God's permission for purposes known to Himself, has obtained some particular advantage over the soul. As in Peter's case: Satan sought to sift him — and prevailed.

2. When a person's own lusts and corruptions encounter particularly provocative objects and circumstances through the condition of life he is in. As it was with David — of both cases more later.

In this state, a person has entered into temptation. This is what is called the hour of temptation (Revelation 3:10). The hour of temptation is the season in which it comes to a head — understanding this will shed further light on our present inquiry into what it means to enter into temptation, for when that hour has come upon us, we have entered into it.

Every great and pressing temptation has its hour — a season in which it reaches its peak and is most vigorous, active, and effective. It may be slow to rise, and may press more or less for a long time. But it has a season in which, from the coming together of other circumstances — outward or inward, of the kind already mentioned — it reaches its most dangerous hour. And in that hour, most people enter into it.

That is why the very same temptation that at one time has little or no power over a person — which he can despise, dismiss, and easily resist — at another time carries him completely away before it. From changed circumstances, it has gained new strength. Or the person himself has been weakened. The hour has come; he has entered into it, and it prevails. David probably faced temptations toward adultery or murder in his earlier years, just as he did in the case of Nabal. But the hour of temptation had not yet come — the advantages were not yet in place — and he escaped, until later. Let those who are exposed to temptations — and who is not? — watch for this: there will come a season when the enticements are more urgent, the arguments more plausible, the pretenses more glorious, the hope of recovery more appealing, and the door to evil more wide open than it has ever been. Blessed is the one who is

prepared for such a season — without that preparation, there is no escape. This, as I said, is the first requirement for entering into temptation. If it stops at this point, we are safe.

Before going on to the other particulars, having now entered on this subject, I want to address two general questions.

1. How, and by what means, a temptation commonly reaches its hour.

2. How we can know when a temptation has reached its peak — when it is in its hour.

1. A temptation reaches its hour in several ways.

1. By prolonged pressure — causing the mind to dwell repeatedly on the evil being urged, until the mind gradually comes to minimize it. When this process is underway, the temptation is approaching its hour. It may be that when the temptation first began pressing on the soul, the soul recoiled in horror at what it aimed at and cried, "Am I a dog?" But if that indignation is not daily renewed, and the soul — through prolonged contact with the evil — begins to grow used to it, no longer startled as before, but instead inclined to say, "Is it not a small thing?" — then the temptation is approaching its peak. Lust has enticed and entangled, and is ready to conceive (James 1:14). I will say more about this later, in our inquiry into how we may know whether we have entered into temptation or not. Our present concern is with the hour and power of temptation itself.

2. When a temptation has prevailed with others, and the soul is not filled with dislike and horror at them and their ways, nor with pity and prayer for their deliverance. This gives the temptation an advantage and lifts it toward its height. When a temptation attacks

someone at the same moment it has already gripped and prevailed with many others, it gains such great advantages from that fact that it is surely growing toward its hour. Its success with others is a means by which it gains its hour against us. The falling away of Hymenaeus and Philetus is said to have overthrown the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

3. By entangling itself with many other considerations that are not entirely evil in themselves. The temptation of the Galatians to fall away from the purity of the Gospel did this — freedom from persecution and unity with the Jews were things good in themselves, yet they were argued into it and gave it life. I will not now go into the many other advantages that any temptation uses to amplify and strengthen itself — the contribution it receives from various circumstances, opportunities, plausible arguments, apparent necessities, and similar things — because I must speak to several of these later.

2. As for the second question — how we may know when a temptation has reached its peak — it can be known in two ways.

1. By its restless urgency and argument. When a temptation is in its hour, it gives the soul no rest. It is the time of battle. Satan sees his advantage, measures the forces he has assembled, and knows that he must prevail now or lose the ground forever. The opportunities are there, the advantages are there, the plausible arguments are in place; the evil has already been minimized through prior reasoning; grounds for hoping for future pardon have been prepared. If he cannot do it now, he must give up on this particular assault. So when he had everything in readiness against Christ, he made it the hour of darkness. When a temptation reveals a thousand clever methods of attack, pressing from within through imag-

ination and reasoning and from without through solicitations, advantages, and opportunities — the soul should recognize that its hour has come. The glory of God and the welfare of the soul depend on how the soul conducts itself in that trial, as will become clear in the particular cases that follow.

2. When it combines fear and allurement together. These two forces make up the full arsenal of temptation. When both are at work together, temptation is in its hour. Both were present in David's case with the murder of Uriah: there was fear of Uriah's revenge on his wife and possibly on David himself, and fear that his sin would be exposed. And there was the allurement of continuing to enjoy the woman he had desired. People are sometimes carried into sin by love for it, and then kept in it by fear of what will follow. But whenever these two forces meet — something drawing us toward a sin, something frightening us regarding it, and the reasoning between them ready to entangle us — that is the hour of temptation.

This, then, is what it means to enter into temptation, and this is the hour of it — of which more as our discussion continues.

3. There is the means of prevention our Savior prescribes. There are two.

1. Watch. 2. Pray.

1. The first is a broad expression, not at all to be restricted to its literal meaning of staying awake from sleep. To watch means to be on guard, to take care, to consider all the ways and means by which an enemy might approach. As the apostle puts it in 1 Corinthians 16:13: "watch" in this context means to stand firm in the faith, to conduct yourself like a soldier, to act like a man. It is

equivalent to "take heed" or "look to yourself" — the same command our Savior often expressed in other words. So in Revelation 3:2: a universal carefulness and diligence, exercising itself in all the ways and means God has prescribed — over our hearts and our ways, over the baits and methods of Satan, over the occasions and advantages of sin in the world, so that we are not ensnared. That is what this word presses on us.

2. As for the second direction — prayer — I need not say much about it. The duty and its importance are known to all. I will only add that these two together — watch and pray — comprise the complete effort of faith for the soul's preservation from temptation.

CHAPTER III. THE DUTY AND IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING TEMPTATION



Having laid open the words of the text in the foregoing chapter, as far as is necessary to uncover the foundation of the truth to be explored and applied, I will now state that truth in the following observation.

It is the great duty of all believers to use all diligence in the ways Christ has appointed, so that they do not fall into temptation.

I know God is able to deliver the godly out of temptation. I know He is faithful, and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but will make a way of escape. Yet I am confident that whoever attends carefully to what follows will be convinced that it is our great duty and concern to use all diligence, watchfulness, and care to avoid entering into temptation. I will prove this by the following considerations.

1. In the brief summary of prayer our Savior gave us, not entering into temptation is explicitly one of the items. Our Savior knew how much it mattered to us not to enter into temptation, which is why He included it as a specific, daily subject of prayer (Matthew 6:13). And the order of the words shows us its importance: "lead us

not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." If we are led into temptation, evil will befall us — more or less. I showed earlier how God may be said to lead us into temptation. In this prayer, it is not so much asking God not to abandon us to temptation as asking Him to powerfully keep us from it.

The final words explain the first: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" — deal with us in such a way that we are powerfully delivered from the evil that attends entering into temptation.

Our blessed Savior knows our condition well. He knows the power of temptations through personal experience. He knows our foolish self-confidence and the reserves we hold about our ability to handle temptation — as He found in Peter. But He also knows our weakness and folly, and how quickly we are knocked to the ground (Hebrews 2:18). So at the very start of His ministry, He laid in this provision of instruction to make us careful about something of such great concern to us. If we are going to place any confidence in the wisdom, love, and care of Jesus Christ toward us, we must accept the truth being argued for here.

2. Christ promises this freedom and deliverance as the great reward of obedience most pleasing to Him (Revelation 3:10). This is the great promise made to the church of Philadelphia, the church in which Christ found nothing He would blame: "You will be kept from the hour of temptation" — not "you will be preserved through it" but something greater: "you will be kept from it." Christ says in effect: there is an hour of temptation coming — a season that will cause havoc in the world. Multitudes will fall from the faith and deny and blaspheme me. How few will be able to stand and hold on? Some will be utterly destroyed and perish for-

ever. Others will receive wounds to their souls that will never fully heal in this life, with bones broken so that they walk with a limp all their days. "But," He says, "because you have kept the word of my patience, I will be tender toward you and keep you from this hour of temptation." Certainly what Christ promises His beloved church as a reward for her service, love, and obedience is no small thing. Whatever Christ promises to His bride flows from unspeakable love — and all the more when it is promised as a reward for special obedience.

3. Consider the general outcomes of entering into temptation — for bad and good people alike, for shallow professors and for the choicest saints.

As for the first group, let two texts of Scripture suffice. Luke 8:13: "Those on the rock are they who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and have no root; they believe for a while." How long do they believe? They are moved by the preaching of the word and believe it, make profession, and bear some fruit — but how long do they remain? "In the time of temptation they fall away." The moment they enter into temptation, they are gone forever. Temptation withers all their profession and destroys their souls. We see this happening every day — people who have heard the gospel preached, been affected and delighted by it, been regarded as believers, and continued that way for years. No sooner does a vigorous and persistent temptation come upon them than they are turned aside and gone forever. They come to hate the word they once delighted in, despise those who profess it, and are hardened by sin. Matthew 7:26 says the same: he who hears Christ's words and does not do them is like a man who built his house on sand. What does this house of profession do? It shelters him, keeps him

warm, and stands for a while. But then (verse 27), when the rain descends — when temptation comes — it falls completely, and great is its fall. Judas followed our Savior for three years and all seemed well. The moment he entered into temptation, Satan had sifted him and he was gone. Demas preached the gospel until love for this world seized him — and he turned aside completely. The examples could go on without end. For this kind of person, entering into temptation is entering into apostasy — more or less, in part or in whole, it never fails.

2. As for the saints of God themselves, let a few examples show us what comes of their entering into temptation. Adam was the son of God (Luke 3), created in the image of God, filled with that integrity, righteousness, and holiness that was a striking likeness of God's own holiness. He had far greater inherent ability than we have, and nothing in him to entice or seduce him — yet no sooner did Adam enter into temptation than he was gone: lost, ruined, and all his posterity with him. What can we expect in the same condition — we who in our temptations face not only a cunning devil, as he did, but also a corrupt world and a corrupt heart?

Abraham was the father of the faithful, whose faith is held up as a pattern for all who believe — yet he entered twice into the same temptation, the fear concerning his wife, and was twice overpowered by it, to the dishonor of God and, no doubt, the disturbance of his own soul.

David is called a man after God's own heart by God Himself — yet how dreadful is the story of his entering into temptation. No sooner is he entangled than he plunges into adultery. Then, seek-

ing deliverance by his own schemes, like a poor creature caught in a snare, he becomes more and more entangled — until he lies as one dead, under the power of sin and folly.

We could also mention Noah, Lot, Hezekiah, Peter, and the rest whose temptations and falls are recorded for our instruction. Surely anyone who truly feels the weight of these things must say, as the inhabitants of Samaria said on reading Jehu's letter: "If two kings could not stand before him, how shall we?" O Lord, if such mighty pillars have been cast to the ground and such great cedars blown down, how shall I stand before temptations? Keep me from entering in! Who among them came out without a wound, or at least a scar? This is why the apostle, speaking to those who had seen a brother fall into sin, urges tenderness — saying in Galatians 6:1, "Consider yourself, lest you also be tempted" — not "lest you also sin," but "lest you also be tempted." The person who has seen so many stronger men fail and be brought low in the trial will take it as his duty to remember the battle and, if possible, to stay out of it. Is it not madness for someone who can barely get around — which is the condition of most of us — to ignore what has brought down giants? You are still whole and sound: beware of temptation, lest what happened to Abraham, David, Lot, Peter, and Hezekiah happen to you — all of whom fell in the hour of trial.

In nothing does the folly of human hearts show itself more plainly in our day than in this reckless boldness — after so many warnings from God and so many sad examples daily before their eyes — of running into and putting themselves directly in the path of temptations. Any company, any society, any conditions of outward advantage — without once weighing their own strength or considering what their souls demand — they rush headlong into.

Though they step over the dead and the wounded who just moments before fell in those very same paths, they press on without concern or trembling. Through this door, hundreds — thousands — of professing believers have gone out within just a few years.

Fourth, consider yourselves: what our weakness is, and what temptation is — its power and force, and what it leads to.

As for ourselves, we are weakness itself. We have no strength, no power to resist. Confidence in any strength within us is itself one great part of our weakness — as it was in Peter. He who thinks he can do anything will do nothing as he ought. And what makes it worse is that this is the worst kind of weakness — a weakness born of betrayal, arising from the party within us that is already on the side of every temptation. A castle may be ever so strong and well fortified, yet if there is a treacherous party within ready to betray it at every opportunity, it cannot be held against the enemy. There are traitors in our hearts, ready to side with every temptation and hand everything over to it — yes, to invite temptations in, the way traitors incite an enemy. Do not flatter yourselves that you will hold out. There are secret lusts lurking in your hearts that may now lie quiet, but the moment any temptation comes they will rise, rage, cry out, disquiet, seduce, and never relent until they are either killed or satisfied. The person who promises himself that the condition of his heart under temptation will be the same as it was before it will be badly mistaken. "Am I a dog, that I should do this thing?" says Hazael — yet you will become that very thing if you ever become king of Syria: temptation arising from self-interest will undo you. The person who now finds the very thought of something repulsive, once entered into temptation, will find his heart inflamed toward it and all opposing reasoning overwhelmed

and silenced. Little did Peter think he would deny and curse his Master the moment someone asked whether he knew Him. Yet so it was when the hour of temptation came — all resolutions forgotten, all love for Christ buried, and the present temptation, seizing on his carnal fear, swept everything before it.

To treat this more fully, I will examine the means of safety from the power of temptation — if we enter into it — that may be expected from ourselves: both in general as to their source, and in particular as to the ways we attempt to exercise the strength we have or think we have.

In general, everything we can draw on comes from our hearts — for what a man's heart is, that is what the man is. But what is the heart of a man in such a season?

Suppose a man is not a genuine believer, only a professor of the Gospel: what can the heart of such a person do? Proverbs 10:20 says the heart of the wicked is little worth — and surely what is little worth in anything is not much worth in this. A wicked man may be useful in outward matters, but come to his heart: it is false and empty. Now, resisting temptation is heart-work, and when temptation comes like a flood, can such a rotten thing as a wicked man's heart stand before it? But of these it has been said already: for such men, entering into temptation and apostasy are the same thing.

Suppose the peace a man trusts in is genuine and good. Yet when the hour of temptation comes and everything rides on this single consideration, so many arguments will be thrown against it as to make it useless. It cannot long hold out.

Fixing on this one thing alone is like guarding one passage while the enemy attacks from every direction. When our eye is on only one point, temptation may enter and prevail by twenty other ways.

Experience shows us that even this will fail — there is no saint of God who does not value his peace, yet how many of them fail in the day of temptation?

There is yet another consideration: the vileness of sinning against God. Yet we see every day that this consideration fails too. There is no child of God who is overcome by temptation who does not first overcome this consideration. It is not a sure and infallible defense.

Temptation will darken the mind, so that a man cannot make a right judgment of things the way he once could.

Temptation so fills and possesses the mind with its own concerns that it takes away a person's clear consideration of other things. The things the mind was once accustomed to holding vividly — things that once held the person back from sin — lose all their force and effectiveness. Indeed, temptation commonly brings people to a state where, even when others who know their condition are speaking to them words of deliverance and peace, their minds are so filled with the matter of the temptation that they can barely understand or even hear what is being said to them.

By woefully entangling the affections — when they are engaged with what they ought not to be — the mind becomes clouded and darkened. Your present judgment of things will not be entirely overturned, but it will be dimmed and weakened in its power to influence the will and govern the affections. Detestation of sin, ab-

horrence of it, the terrors of the Lord, the sense of love, the presence of Christ crucified — all depart and leave the heart a prey to its enemy.

Suppose the peace a man trusts in for safeguarding his soul is genuine and real — yet when everything rests on this one foundation and the hour of temptation comes, so many arguments for relief will be offered against this consideration as to render it useless. The sin seems small; it is questionable whether it actually strikes the conscience; perhaps peace can be kept in spite of it; other godly people have fallen and yet kept or recovered their peace; if peace is lost for a time it may be regained; even if peace is lost, safety may remain. There are a thousand such arguments, all aimed like cannons at this one defense — and so it cannot long hold out.

To fix on this one consideration is to guard one passage while the enemy attacks from every side. A little armor would be enough to defend a man if he could choose where his enemy would strike — but we are told to take up the whole armor of God if we intend to resist and stand. When our eye is only on one point, temptation may enter and prevail by twenty other ways. For example: a man may be tempted toward greed, unjust gain, revenge, or vanity; if he defends himself with only this one consideration — that he will not do this thing and wound his conscience — fixing his attention there and thinking himself safe while he is not overcome at that point, all the while neglect of private prayer or sensuality creeps in unnoticed. He ends up no better off than if he had yielded to the temptation most plainly pressing on him.

Experience shows that this will fail too. There is no saint of God who does not prize his peace — yet how many of them fail in the day of temptation?

There is yet another consideration: the vileness of sinning against God. How can they do this thing and sin against God — the God of their mercies and salvation? How can they wound Jesus Christ who died for them? Surely this must preserve them.

In reply: we see every day that this consideration fails too. There is no child of God who is overcome by temptation who does not first overcome this consideration. It is not, then, a sure and infallible defense.

This consideration takes two forms. Either it expresses particular thoughts of the soul in direct reference to the temptation being faced — in which case it will not preserve — or it expresses the universal, habitual disposition of heart that is in us on every account, in which case it aligns with what I will offer as the universal remedy in this situation, which I will address later.

Consider the power of temptation — partly from the evidence already shown through its effects on the saints of old, and partly from other effects generally attributed to it.

First: temptation will darken the mind, so that a man cannot make right judgments about things the way he once could. Just as the god of this world blinds the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the glory of Christ in the Gospel, and just as sexual immorality, wine, and intoxicants take away the heart — so it is in the nature of every temptation, to a greater or lesser degree, to take away the heart or to darken the understanding of the person being tempted.

It does this in several ways.

First: by fixing the imagination and thoughts on the object the temptation is aimed at, so that the mind is pulled away from any thought that might bring relief. A man tempted to believe he has been abandoned by God, that he is an object of divine hatred, that he has no share in Christ — Satan so fixes his mind on contemplating this condition and its misery that he cannot grasp any of the relief offered against it. Following the fullness of his own troubled thoughts, he walks on in darkness and finds no light. A temptation will so fill the mind with its own concerns that it strips away the clear consideration of other things — so that the things which once powerfully restrained a man from sin come to have no force or effectiveness with him. Indeed, it commonly brings people to such a state that even when others who know their condition speak words of deliverance and peace to them, their minds are so occupied with the matter of the temptation that they can barely hear a word that is said.

Second: by woefully entangling the affections which, once engaged, have a well-known power to blind the mind and darken the understanding. Take a man whose hope, love, or fear is wrongly fixed on some particular object, and you will quickly see how he is darkened and blinded. In such a condition — with your present judgment not entirely overturned but dimmed and weakened in its power over the will and the affections — those affections, set loose by temptation, will run on in madness. Detestation of sin, abhorrence of it, the terrors of the Lord, the sense of love, the presence of Christ crucified — all depart and leave the heart a prey to its enemy.

Third: temptation will fuel and fan our lusts, stir and provoke them, and make them tumult and rage beyond measure — laying the reins on the neck of a lust and putting spurs to its sides, so that it rushes forward like a horse into battle. A man does not know the pride, fury, and madness of a corruption until it meets with a fitting temptation — as it did with carnal fear in Peter, with pride in Hezekiah, with greed in Achan, with lust in David, with love of the world in Demas, with ambition in Diotrephes. What will a poor soul do then? His mind is darkened, his affections entangled, his lusts inflamed and provoked, his defenses defeated — what will come of such a condition?

Third: consider that temptations are either public or private, and let us briefly examine the power of each.

There are public temptations — such as the one described in Revelation 3:10, coming upon the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth — a combination of persecution and seduction aimed at testing a careless generation of professing believers. Regarding such a temptation, consider this:

First: it carries a special power in respect of God, who sends it to avenge the neglect and contempt of the Gospel on one side and the treachery of false professors on the other. When Satan offered to go and seduce Ahab so that he might fall, God said to him, "You shall persuade him and prevail — go and do so." Satan was permitted on account of his wickedness, and commissioned in terms of the outcome and punishment intended. When the Christian world was given over to foolishness and false worship because of their contempt for truth and their empty, Christ-dishonoring profession, it is said that God sent them a strong delusion so that they would believe a lie. What comes from God in such a judicial way

carries power with it and will prevail. That selfish, spiritually lazy, careless, and worldly spirit which in these days has infected nearly the whole body of professing believers — if it has received a commission from God to kill hypocrites, wound negligent saints, break their bones, and make them a public scandal — shall it not have power to do so? Nothing but the strength of God can stand in the way of even the weakest things that have been commissioned by God for any purpose.

Second: public temptations carry the hidden power of bad examples from people considered godly. Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold — the abounding of iniquity in some will quietly pour cold water on the zeal and love of others, so that little by little it grows cold. Some begin to grow negligent, careless, worldly, loose — they break the ice toward indulging the flesh. At first others criticize and judge them, but before long their own love also cools and they fall into the same mold. A little leaven leavens the whole lump — Paul repeats this twice, in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9, warning us of the danger of infection spreading through the whole body from the bad examples of a few. Some shallow, empty professors who never had more than a form of godliness started down this road. Then others began to go along, giving a little ground to the flesh. By little and little this has spread even to the topmost branches of our profession, until almost everyone has corrupted their ways — and the person who still departs from these sins makes his very name a target, if not his person.

Public temptations are usually accompanied by strong arguments and plausible justifications that are too powerful for most people to handle — or at least gradually work on them to under-

value the evil toward which the temptation leads. Consider that complex temptation which in these days has brought God's people down from their excellence, cut away their strength, and made them become like everyone else — how full is the world of convincing excuses! There is the freedom and liberty of Christians delivered from bondage — a door through which I have seen many walk out into sensuality and apostasy, beginning with light and easy behavior, moving to neglect of the Sabbath and private and public duties, ending in complete looseness and ungodliness. There is also the approach of leaving public affairs to providence and being content with what is — things good in themselves, but twisted into wretched worldly compromises and the complete ruin of all zeal for God, the cause of Christ, and His people in the world. These and similar arguments, combined with the ease, plenty, and advancement of professing believers, have worked things around so that while by providence we have changed places with the men of the world, we have by sin changed spirits with them too — like a colony transplanted to a foreign country, which within a short time has abandoned the ways of the people they came from and adopted the ways of the country they have been brought to. Prosperity has slain the foolish and wounded the wise.

Suppose the temptation is private: I add two observations.

First: its union and blending with lust, by which it gets inside the soul and lies at the root of all the soul's actions. The things of the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life — are said to be "in the world" because the world gets into them, blends itself with them, and incorporates. Just as faith and the promises are said to be mixed together, so lust and temptation are mixed: they twine together, each drawing strength from the

other, growing higher and higher. By this process, temptation works so deep into the heart that no opposing argument can reach it. Nothing but what can kill the lust can conquer the temptation. Like a fungus that has worked itself into a wall — the wall itself must be torn down or the fungus will not be cured. Like gangrene that mixes its poison into the blood and cannot be separated from where it is — both must be cut away together. In David's temptation toward sexual sin, ten thousand arguments could have been brought against it. But the temptation had joined itself with his lust, and nothing but the death of that lust could destroy it. This deceives many: they have some persistent temptation that has gained advantages and presses hard on them. They pray against it, oppose it with every powerful argument — each of which seems sufficient to overcome it — yet nothing works and it grows stronger. Why? Because it has blended itself with their lust, and is safe from all their opposition. If they truly want to make progress, they must go after the lust itself — their ambition, pride, love of the world, sensuality, or whatever the temptation has joined forces with. The soul may torment itself for a season by any other approach, but it must come to this: the lust must die, or the soul must die.

Second: in whatever part of the soul the lust resides with which the temptation has united, it draws the whole soul after it by one means or another and so prevents or gets ahead of all resistance. If it is a lust of the mind — such as ambition or vanity — the understanding will find a thousand ways to restrain the affections from clinging too closely to God, presenting everything in the color and hue of what the lust desires. It promises the whole soul a share in the spoil it is after — just as Judas's money, first desired out of

greed, was to be shared among all his lusts. Or if the lust is in the more physical part and first takes over the affections, how those affections will bribe the understanding to agree with them and supply arguments and hope in their favor — as was shown before. In short, every particular temptation, when it is in its hour, draws such support from things good, evil, and neutral, and in some cases brings such plausible arguments and justifications, that its strength will readily be acknowledged.

Fifth: consider the goal of any temptation — this is Satan's goal and sin's goal: the dishonor of God and the ruin of our souls.

Sixth: consider what has been the outcome of any past temptations you have had. Did they not defile your conscience, disturb your peace, weaken you in obedience, cloud the face of God from you? Even if you were not brought to the outward act or the furthest extent of the temptation, were you not damaged? Was not your soul grieved and deeply troubled? Has there been a single temptation in your life from which you came away without some real loss? And would you willingly be caught again? If you are currently free, take heed — do not enter in again if at all possible, lest something worse happen to you.

These are some of the many considerations that demonstrate the importance of the truth stated here, and the full weight of our interest in making sure we do not enter into temptation.

Against this duty there are objections that quietly work their way into people's minds, making them negligent and careless about something of such indispensable importance to anyone who intends to walk with God in any measure of peace or faithfulness. These objections need to be considered and rejected.

Objection 1: Why should we be so afraid and so eager to avoid temptation? James 1:2 commands us to count it all joy when we fall into various temptations — surely I need not anxiously avoid what, when I do fall into it, I am commanded to count as joy.

Answer 1: You would not apply this rule consistently in all areas — that a man need not try to avoid what, when he cannot escape it, is his duty to rejoice in. The same apostle tells the rich to rejoice when they are brought low — and without doubt, to someone who truly knows the goodness, wisdom, and love of God, every condition that is necessary for him can become a reason to rejoice. Yet how few rich godly men can you persuade not to take care and use every lawful means to avoid becoming poor? In most cases, it would be a sin for them not to do so. Our business is to hold our ground and secure ourselves as best we can. If God changes our circumstances, we are to rejoice in it. If the temptations mentioned by James come upon us, we may find reason to rejoice — but not if we brought them on ourselves through neglect of duty.

Second: temptations are taken in two ways.

First, passively and in a general sense — for such things as are, or in certain cases may be, temptations. Second, actively — for such things as actively entice toward sin. James is using the word only in the first sense: having said "count it all joy when you fall into various temptations," he adds "blessed is the man who endures temptation — for when he is tried he will receive the crown of life." But then he clarifies: if "temptation" means something that entices and leads toward sin, God tempts no one — every man is tempted by his own lust. To have such temptations — to be enticed toward sin — is not the blessed thing James intends, but rather the enduring of afflictions God sends for the testing of faith. So while I

must count it all joy when by God's will I fall into various afflictions for my testing — even though those afflictions carry the material of temptation in them — I must still take all care and diligence that my lust has no occasions or advantages given to it to pull me toward sin.

Objection 2: Was not our Savior Christ Himself tempted? Is it not said that His being tempted works to our advantage, in that He is able thereby to help those who are tempted? He also counts His disciples' having stayed with Him in His temptations as a basis for a great promise.

Answer: It is true our Savior was tempted. But His temptations are counted among the evils that came upon Him in the days of His flesh through the malice of the world and its prince. He did not willfully throw Himself into temptation — which He said was to tempt the Lord our God. Our condition is such that even with our greatest diligence and watchfulness we will still be tempted and made like Christ in that way.

This does not prevent it from being our duty to keep ourselves from falling into temptations — and especially for this reason: Christ endured only the suffering side of temptation when He entered into it; we face the sinning side as well. When the prince of this world came to Christ, he found nothing in Him. When he comes to us, he finds a willing ally within. Though in one effect of temptations — the trials and distress they bring — we are made like Christ and are to rejoice in that, yet by another effect — being defiled and entangled — we are made unlike Him. Therefore we are to use every means available to avoid them. For who among us enters into temptation and is not defiled?

Objection 3: But why all this effort and carefulness? Is it not said that God is faithful, who will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape? And He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. What need do we have, then, to be so concerned that we do not enter into them?

Answer: I seriously doubt what help from God a person will receive in a temptation he walked into willingly, on the grounds that God has promised to deliver him out of it. The Lord knows that through the craftiness of Satan, the subtlety and malice of the world, and the deceitfulness of sin that so easily trips us up, even when we have done our very best we will still fall into various temptations. In His love, care, tenderness, and faithfulness, He has provided such a sufficiency of grace that temptations will not ultimately prevail to make an eternal separation between Him and our souls. Yet I have three things to say in reply to this objection.

First: the person who willfully or carelessly enters into temptation has no reason whatsoever to expect any help from God, or any deliverance from the temptation he has entered.

The promise is made to those on whom temptations come in the course of their duty — not to those who willfully seek them out and go looking for trouble. This is why the devil, as is commonly noted, when tempting our Savior left out the phrase from the Scripture he was quoting: "in all your ways." The promise of deliverance belongs to those who are in their God-appointed ways — and one of the chief requirements of those ways is to beware of temptation.

Second: although there is sufficient grace provided for all the elect so that no temptation will cause them to fall away from God completely, it would make any tender heart tremble to consider what dishonor to God, what reproach to the Gospel, and what dreadful darkness and misery they may bring upon their own souls — even though they do not ultimately perish. And those who are only restrained by fear of hell — on whom nothing less than that has any effect — have more reason to fear eternal ruin than they may be aware.

Third: to enter temptation on this basis is to sin so that grace may abound — a thought the apostle rejects with the strongest possible revulsion. Is it not madness for a man to willingly let his ship be wrecked on a rock — with the total loss of all his cargo — simply because he expects to swim safely to shore on a plank? Is it any less mad for a man who will risk the wreck of all his comfort, peace, joy, much of the glory of God, and the honor of the Gospel — all on the mere supposition that his soul will yet escape? You would think such things barely worth mentioning — and yet with reasoning like this, poor souls sometimes deceive themselves.

CHAPTER IV. HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOU HAVE ENTERED INTO TEMPTATION



With these general matters established, I move on to three specific questions arising from the truth we have proposed. The first concerns the thing itself; the second concerns the time or season of it; and the third concerns our conduct in preventing the evil being discussed.

First, then, we may ask:

First: how can a person know when he has entered into temptation?

Second: what are the seasons in which a person may and ought to fear that an hour of temptation is near?

Third: what directions can be given for keeping ourselves from entering into temptation?

How can a person know whether he has entered into temptation? I say:

First: when a person is drawn into any sin, he can be sure he has entered into temptation. All sin comes from temptation (James 1:14) — sin is a fruit that grows only from that root.

However suddenly or violently a man may be caught by or in a sin, it has come from some temptation or other. People often fail to notice this, to their own great harm. When they are overcome by a sin, they set themselves to repent of that sin but do not think about the temptation that caused it — they do not address that as well, or take care that they do not enter into it again. So they are quickly entangled again. The person who genuinely wants to overcome any sin must examine the temptations that lead to it and strike at that root. Without dealing with the root, there will be no healing.

This is a failure that possesses many who otherwise have a keen and living sense of sin: they are aware of their sins, but not of their temptations — troubled by the bitter fruit while tending the poisonous root. So even in the midst of grieving over sin, they continue in the same ways, relationships, and pursuits that were the occasion of it.

Second: temptations have different degrees of intensity. Some rise to such a level and press on the soul so hard — tormenting and disturbing it, fighting against every attempt at resistance — that the person under such an attack can have no doubt that he is wrestling with a peculiar power of temptation. When a fever rages, a man knows he is sick. As James tells us, the lusts of men entice, draw away, and seduce them toward sin — but they do this on their own, without any special driving force, in a quieter and more settled way. If they grow violent, if they throw the soul about and give it no rest, the soul may know that they have been given added power by some temptation working on them.

Take an empty vessel and put it in a stream flowing to the sea: it will inevitably be carried there according to the pace and direction of the current. But let strong winds rise, and it will be driven

violently against every bank and rock until it is broken to pieces and swallowed up in the ocean. Men's lusts will inevitably — if not mortified through the death of Christ — carry them to eternal ruin. But they often do so quietly, following the natural current of their corruptions. Let strong temptations arise like a wind, and men are driven into countless open sins — broken on every side and swallowed up in eternity.

Hezekiah always had the root of pride in him, yet it did not drive him to show off his treasure and wealth until he fell into temptation through the arrival of the ambassadors from the king of Babylon. David also had the same root — yet he could refrain from numbering the people until Satan stood up and provoked and pressed him to do it. Judas was covetous from the beginning, yet he did not scheme to satisfy that greed by selling his Master until the devil entered into him, and through that he entered into temptation. The same could be said of Abraham, Jonah, Peter, and the rest. So whenever any lust or corruption riots and disturbs the soul, violently driving it toward sin, the soul may know — even if it cannot yet identify exactly where — that temptation has gained some advantage over it, and it needs more than ordinary attention.

Third: entering into temptation may be detected even in its earliest stages — for instance, when the heart begins secretly to like the substance of the temptation and is content to feed and grow it by whatever means it can, short of outright sin.

For example: when a man begins to gain a reputation for piety, wisdom, or learning, and his heart is quietly pleased to hear of it, with his pride and ambition drawn in — if this man now with all his energy pursues the very things that have built his reputation, with a hidden aim of increasing it further, he is entering into temp-

tation. If he does not take heed, this will soon make him a slave to his lust. So it was with Jehu, who noticed that his reputation for zeal was spreading. When Jonadab crossed his path, he thought: here is an opportunity to build my reputation for zeal further, and he set to work most energetically. The things he did were good in themselves, but he had entered into temptation and was serving his lust in all of it. So it is with many scholars: they find themselves admired for their learning. This feeds the pride and ambition in their hearts. So they set themselves to study with great diligence — a good thing in itself — but doing it to earn the praise and admiration of others in which they delight, they make provision for the flesh to fulfill its desires.

It is true that God often brings light out of this darkness and turns things to a better outcome. After a man has perhaps studied for many years with an eye on his own lusts — his ambition, pride, and desire for praise — God may come in with His grace, turn the soul to Himself, and so rob those sinful lusts and consecrate to the service of His purposes what had been prepared for self-serving ends.

Men may become entangled in this way by things better than learning — even in the practice of godliness, in the work of the ministry, and in similar pursuits.

Some men's very profession of faith becomes a snare to them: they are respected and honored because of their standing and their strict walk. This often happens in times when everything is driven by factions and parties — some people find themselves to be the pride of their particular group. If thoughts of this quietly work their way into their hearts and motivate them toward more than ordinary effort and activity in their religion, they are entangled.

Instead of aiming at more honor, they need to lie low in a sense of their own unworthiness. This temptation is especially difficult to escape, because even the avoidance of honor and reputation can be quietly whispered in the heart as itself something to be proud of. The same may be said of men who preach the Gospel, engaged in the work of ministry: their ability, their plainness, their faithfulness, their fruitfulness — all of these can in this sense become fuel for temptation. Let a man know, then, that when he finds pleasure in what feeds his lust and sustains it by means that are either good in themselves or not outright sinful, he has entered into temptation.

Fourth: when by a person's condition or circumstances, or by any means whatever, his lust meets with occasions and opportunities that stir it up and provoke it — let that person know, whether he sees it or not, that he has certainly entered into temptation. To enter into temptation is not merely to be tempted, but to be so under its power that you are entangled by it. It is nearly impossible for a person to have opportunities, occasions, and advantages suited to his lust without being entangled. If ambassadors come from the king of Babylon, Hezekiah's pride will cast him into temptation. If Hazael becomes king of Syria, his cruelty and ambition will make him savage against Israel. If the priests arrive with their pieces of silver, Judas's greed will immediately set him to work to sell his Master. Some men think they can play at the hole of a serpent and not be bitten, touch tar and not be stained, carry fire in their clothes and not be burned — but they are mistaken. If your work, your way of life, or your relationships constantly expose you to things, patterns, or people that suit your lust or corruption, know that you have entered into temptation. Fire and combustible

material are more likely to lie together without affecting each other than particular lusts are to lie quietly beside suitable occasions for their exercise.

Fifth: when a person grows weak, negligent, or merely going through the motions in duty — when he omits duties or settles for a cold and lifeless performance of them without delight, joy, or satisfaction, when he once had a very different frame — let him know that though he may not be aware of any specific problem, somewhere he has entered into temptation. He will find this out eventually, to his trouble and harm. How many have we seen and known in our day who, starting from a warm profession, have grown negligent, careless, and indifferent in praying, reading, and hearing? Find me one who came through without a wound, and I dare say you can find a hundred for that one who showed they were asleep on top of the mast — caught in the grip of some corrupt temptation that afterward bore bitter fruit. This is a reliable sign: if the heart of someone who once had a warm frame grows cold, negligent, or merely formal in the duties of worshiping God — whether in their substance or their spirit — some temptation has laid hold on him. Love of the world, pride, sexual sin, self-seeking, malice or envy — one thing or another has taken hold of his spirit. Gray hairs are here and there upon him, though he does not see them. This applies to the manner of duties as well as the substance: men may, for various wrong reasons, keep up religious practices in their outward form while having no heart for them, no spiritual life in their performance. Sardis maintained its duties and therefore had a reputation for being alive — but it lacked the spiritual life that should have animated them, and was therefore declared dead (Revelation 3:1). As with physical sickness: if a man finds his energy failing, his

chest oppressed, his head heavy — though he does not yet have a fever — he says, "I fear I am coming down with a fever; something is wrong with me." A person may say the same when the soul is sick: if he finds his pulse not beating right in the duties of worship, if his spirit is low and his heart faint in them, let him conclude — even though his lust does not yet rage openly — that he has entered into temptation, and that it is high time to identify the particular cause of the problem. If the head is dull and sluggish toward things of grace, if the heart is cold in duties, evil is at the door. And if such a soul escapes a great temptation toward open sin, it will not escape a great temptation by way of God's withdrawal. The bride said "I sleep" (Song of Solomon 5:2) and that she had taken off her robe and could not put it on — a picture of reluctance toward duties and communion with Christ. What is the next news we hear of her in verse 6? Her beloved had withdrawn; Christ was gone, and she searched long and could not find Him. There is such a natural fit between the new nature given to believers and the duties of worshipping God that they will not be separated unless some disturbing disorder comes between them. The new creation feeds on these duties, is strengthened and built up by them, finds sweetness in them, meets God and Father through them — and will naturally, on its own, unless made ill by some temptation, delight in them and want to be exercising them. It is not driven out of this frame and condition except by being weighed down and disordered by one secret temptation or another. There are also other signs of a soul's having entered into temptation, which on careful examination may be discovered.

I offer this to shake us out of the carelessness we are prone to fall into, and to show what our specific duty is in the special seasons of temptation. For the person who has already entered into temptation must apply himself to means of disentanglement — not to preventing his entering in. How that may be done I will explain later.

CHAPTER V. GENERAL DIRECTIONS: WATCH AND PRAY



Having seen the danger of entering into temptation, and having uncovered the ways and seasons in which people commonly do so:

Our second question is: what general directions can be given to preserve a soul from that condition? We see our Savior's direction in Matthew 26:41 — He sums it all up in two words: Watch and Pray. I will unfold what is packed into them, both together and individually.

First: included in these words is a clear, abiding sense of the great evil that entering into temptation involves. The person who watches and prays against something looks on it as an evil to be avoided by every possible means.

This, then, is the first direction: always keep in mind the great danger of entering into temptation. It is a sad thing to see how slight most people's view of this is. As long as a man can keep himself from open outward sin, he is satisfied — scarcely aiming for more. And for any temptation the world can offer, men of all kinds will venture at any time.

Young men will throw themselves into any company, any circle of friends! First they are delighted by evil company, and then by the evil of that company. How useless are all warnings to beware of such corrupt and soul-destroying people? At first they venture into the company while abhorring the thought of practicing its wickedness — but what is the outcome? Unless God snatches them with a powerful hand from the jaws of destruction, they are all lost — and before long in love with the very evil they first hated. If only this were true of young men alone. What kind of person is free from this folly in one area or another?

How many professing believers have I known who insisted on their freedom to hear any teacher, to attend to every spreader of false and harmful opinions, to run and hear every one marked out as a seducer by the wider body of believers — they hated the opinions as much as anyone, they said; they had their freedom. What has been the outcome? I have scarcely ever known any of them come away without a wound. Most have had their faith overthrown. Let no one pretend to fear sin who does not fear being tempted to it. Sin and temptation are too closely linked to be separated. Satan has bound them together so tightly that it is very hard for any person to pull them apart. You do not hate the fruit if you love the root.

When people see that certain ways of life, certain companies, courses of business, studies, and ambitions entangle them — making them cold and careless, quenching their zeal, and putting them out of step with even, consistent, and constant obedience — and they press on in them anyway, sin is at the door. It takes a tender spirit — one that feels its own weakness and corruption, knows the

craft of Satan, understands the evil of sin, and grasps the power of temptation — to carry out this duty. Until we bring our hearts to this frame, we will never free ourselves from sinful entanglements.

Bold recklessness toward temptation, springing from various excuses, has as everyone knows ruined countless professing believers in our day and continues to bring many down from their excellence. Nor do I have the slightest hope of a more fruitful profession among us until I see more genuine fear of temptation. Sin will not long seem great or heavy to anyone to whom temptations seem light or trivial.

This is the first thing wrapped up in this general direction: we are required to daily exercise our minds with a clear awareness of the great danger lying in entering into temptation. Grieving the Spirit of God, disturbing our own souls, losing peace, endangering eternal welfare — all of these lie at the door. If the soul is not moved by this direction, everything that follows will be useless. Temptation despised will conquer. But if the heart is made tender and watchful here, half the work of securing a faithful life is done. Let the person who has no intention of taking this direction seriously read no further.

Second: also included in Watch and Pray — keeping ourselves from entering into temptation is not something in our own power. Therefore we pray to be preserved from it, because we cannot save ourselves. Just as we have no strength to resist a temptation once we have entered it, we must reckon that we have no power or wisdom to keep ourselves from entering in the first place. We must be kept by the power and wisdom of God (1 Peter 1:5). Our Savior teaches us this not only by directing us to pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," but also by His own prayer

for us: "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). The ways by which we enter into temptation are so many, varied, and imperceptible; the means so effective; the entrances so deceptive, subtle, gradual, and plausible; our weakness and unwatchfulness so deep — that we cannot in the slightest keep or preserve ourselves. We fail in both wisdom and strength for this work.

Let the heart reason with itself and say: I am poor and weak. Satan is subtle, cunning, and powerful, watching constantly for advantages against my soul. The world is urgent, pressing, and full of plausible arguments, endless excuses, and deceptive ways. My own corruption is violent and tumultuous — enticing, entangling, conceiving sin and warring against me from within. Occasions and opportunities for temptation are countless in everything I do and in every person and situation I encounter.

The first beginnings of temptation are imperceptible and plausible — so that left to myself I will not know I am trapped until my bonds are strong and sin has taken root in my heart. Therefore I will rely on God alone for preservation, and will continually look to Him for that purpose, doing and undertaking nothing without seeking guidance from Him. This will cause the soul to always commit itself to God's care, resting on Him — and from this a double advantage will come, each of singular value for the soul's preservation from the danger feared.

First: it draws on the grace and compassion of God, who has invited the helpless and fatherless to rest upon Him. No soul has ever lacked supply that, sensing its own need, has cast itself on Him at His gracious invitation.

Second: it keeps the soul in a frame that is useful for its preservation in several ways. The person who looks to God for help in the right way is both aware of his danger and conscientiously careful in using the available means to preserve himself — and those who have their hearts exercised in these things will readily understand how important both of those are.

Third: also included in Watch and Pray — act faith on the promises of God for preservation. To believe that He will preserve us is itself a means of preservation, for this God will certainly do — or make a way for us to escape out of temptation if we fall into it — in a person who maintains this believing frame. We pray for what God has promised; our requests are to be shaped by His promises. Faith lays hold on the promises and finds relief, as James instructs us (1:5-7): what we lack we must ask of God, and we must ask in faith — otherwise we should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Set faith to work on the promises of God — that He will keep us in all our ways, guide us so that though we are foolish we will not go wrong (Isaiah 35:8), lead us, direct us, and deliver us from the evil one — and look for a good and encouraging outcome. It is hard to put into words how much strength accompanies faith when it goes out to meet Christ in the promises, and how great a power for the soul's preservation lies in this.

Fourth: consider prayer. The person who wants little to do with temptation must be much in prayer. Prayer draws on the fitting help and relief laid up for us in Christ (Hebrews 4:16) and puts the soul in a posture of resistance against every temptation. After Paul gave instructions for taking up the whole armor of God, he added

as his general closing word: "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication" (Ephesians 6:18).

Without prayer, all the rest will be powerless for this purpose. Notice the weight Paul places on it: "praying always" — at all times and seasons, always ready and prepared for this duty. "With all prayer and supplications in the Spirit" — bringing every kind of request to God suited to our condition, according to His will, assisted by the Spirit. "And watching thereunto" — so that nothing whatever diverts us from it. And not for a short time, "but with all perseverance" — continuing without end. So shall we stand. The soul that is shaped by this is in a secure position. This is one of the means without which this work will not be done. If we do not abide in prayer, we will abide in ruinous temptations. Abide in prayer — and pray expressly for this: that we not enter into temptations; that God would keep our souls and guard our hearts and our ways from entanglement; that His good and wise providence would so order our affairs that no heavy temptation comes upon us; that He would give us diligence, care, and watchfulness over our own ways. So will we be delivered while others are held fast by the ropes of their own foolishness.

CHAPTER VI. DANGEROUS SEASONS FOR TEMPTATION



The other part of our Savior's direction — namely, to watch — is more general and extends itself to many specifics. I will focus on several things it includes.

First: watch the seasons in which people commonly enter into temptation. There are certain seasons in which an hour of temptation is usually close at hand and will inevitably seize on the soul unless it is delivered by mercy through watchfulness. When we are in such a season, we are especially to be on our guard — that we do not enter into or fall under the power of temptation. Some of those seasons may be named.

First: a season of unusual outward prosperity is usually accompanied by an hour of temptation. Prosperity and temptation go together — indeed, prosperity is itself a temptation, and brings many temptations with it. Without exceptional supplies of grace, prosperity tends to put the soul in a frame that is open and vulnerable to every temptation, providing fuel for every lust and darts for Satan.

The wise man tells us that the prosperity of fools destroys them — hardening them and making them despise instruction. Even for believers, without special help, prosperity has an inconceivably harmful effect. This is why Agur prays against riches because of the temptation they bring: "lest I be full and deny You, and say, who is the Lord?" (Proverbs 30:8-9). We know how David was deceived in this: "I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved" (Psalm 30:6) — yet what was right at the door? God was about to hide His face, and David was on the verge of entering a temptation of desertion, though he did not know it.

In a prosperous condition I will not contradict Solomon's advice, "In the day of prosperity, rejoice" — rejoice in the God of your mercies, who does you good in His patience and forbearance despite all your unworthiness. Yet I may add: also consider whether evil lies at the door. A man in that state is surrounded by snares. Satan has many advantages against him; he forges weapons out of every enjoyment, and if you are not watching, you will be caught before you realize it.

You lack what should weigh down and steady your heart. Mere formality in religion will be apt to creep over you — and that leaves the soul open to every temptation at its full force. Satisfaction and delight in created comforts — the poison of the soul — will tend to grow on you. In such a time, be alert and careful, or you will be caught off guard. Job says that in his affliction God made his heart soft (Job 23:16). There is a hardness, a dull numbness of spiritual feeling, that gathers in prosperity — and if not guarded against, it will expose the heart to the deceptions of sin and the traps of Satan. Watch and pray in this season. Many men's carelessness in

it has cost them dearly — their painful experience cries out: take heed. Blessed is the person who fears at all times, but especially in a time of prosperity.

Second: as was partly shown before, a time of dormant grace, of neglect in communion with God, of going through the motions in duty, is a season that certainly has some other temptation attached to it. Let a soul in such a state wake up and look around — his enemy is close, and he is about to fall into a condition that may cost him dearly for the rest of his life. His present state is bad enough in itself, but it is a warning that something worse is right at the door.

The disciples with Christ in the garden had not only physical drowsiness but spiritual drowsiness upon them.

What did our Savior say to them? "Rise, watch and pray, that you do not enter into temptation." We know how close one of them was to a bitter hour of temptation — and not watching as he ought, he immediately entered into it.

I mentioned before the case of the bride in Song of Solomon 5:2-5: she was sleeping, drowsy, and unwilling to rouse herself to vigorous communion with Christ. Before she realized what had happened, she had lost her beloved. Then she mourned, searched, cried out, endured woundings and reproaches, before she found him again. Consider then, O poor soul, your own state! Does your light burn dim? Is your zeal cold? Are you negligent in prayer or in hearing the word? Is your love for God's people growing faint? If you are drowsing in such a condition, take heed! You are sliding into some terrible temptation that will break all your bones and leave wounds that will stay with you for the rest of your life. When

you wake up, you will find that temptation has already taken hold of you without your awareness — that it has struck and wounded you, though you have not yet felt it or sought healing.

This was the condition of the church of Sardis (Revelation 3:2): "the things that remained were ready to die" — "be watchful," says our Savior, "and strengthen them, or a worse thing will come upon you." If anyone reading these words is in this condition and has any care for his soul, let him wake up now before he is entangled beyond recovery. Take this warning from God — do not despise it.

Third: a season of great spiritual blessing is often turned by the malice of Satan and the weakness of our own hearts into a season of danger and temptation.

We know what happened with Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7): he had glorious spiritual revelations of God and Jesus Christ — and immediately Satan attacked him; a messenger from Satan was sent to buffet him, so that he earnestly begged for its departure. God is sometimes pleased to give us special glimpses of Himself and His love, to fill the heart with His kindness, to bring us into the banqueting house and satisfy our hearts with love — and a person would think this is the most secure condition in the world. What soul does not cry with Peter on the mount, "It is good for me to be here"? And yet very frequently some bitter temptation is close at hand. Satan sees that when we are possessed by the joy set before us, we quickly neglect many of the approaches to our souls through which he normally finds and gains advantages against us. Is this our condition right now? Does God at any time give us to drink of the rivers of pleasure at His right hand and satisfy our souls with His kindness as with the richest of foods?

Let us not say "we shall never be moved." We do not know how soon God may hide His face, or a messenger from Satan may come to buffet us.

Beyond this, there often lies a greater and worse danger here: people deceive their souls with their own imaginations instead of a genuine sense of God's love poured out by the Holy Spirit. When people are puffed up with their own fancies, it is impossible to describe how terribly exposed they are to every kind of temptation — and how their foolish self-deceptions provide them relief for consciences that ought to be troubled. Do we not see such people every day — living in the vanities and ways of this world, yet boasting of their sense of God's love? How dreadful then must their true condition be.

Fourth: a season of self-confidence — this is a season when temptation is usually close at hand. Peter's case makes this plain: "I will not deny You; though all men should deny You, I will not; though I were to die for it, I would not" — these were the very words the poor man spoke while standing on the edge of the temptation that would cost him such bitter tears in the end. That trial taught him to know himself for the rest of his days, and gave him such understanding of the condition of all believers that when he had received more of the Spirit and more power, he had less self-confidence. He therefore urges all believers to pass the time of their pilgrimage here in fear (1 Peter 1:17) — not to be confident and boastful as he was, lest they fall as he did. At his first trial Peter compared himself to others and exalted himself above them: "though all men forsake You, yet I will not." But when our Savior later came to him and put the comparison to him directly — "Simon Peter, do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15) — he

had stopped comparing himself to others and simply said, "Lord, You know that I love You." He would put himself above others no more. Such a season often comes: temptations are abroad, and we are each quick to be very confident that we will not be caught — though all others should fall into these failures, we would not. But the apostle says: "do not be proud, but fear; let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Would you have expected that Peter — who had walked on water with Christ, confessed Him to be the Son of God, and heard the voice on the holy mountain — would, at the word of a servant girl, with no formal charge against him, immediately fall to cursing and swearing that he did not know Him? Let those who wish to beware of sin also beware of self-confidence. This is the first element of our watching: to take careful note of the seasons in which temptation commonly makes its approach to the soul, and to be ready for them.

CHAPTER VII. WATCHING OVER THE HEART



The part of watchfulness against temptation we have considered so far has to do with outward means, occasions, and advantages of temptation. We now move on to what concerns the heart itself — the heart that temptation works on and entangles. Watching over and guarding the heart — which above all other forms of keeping we are bound to — falls within the scope of this duty.

First direction: the person who does not want to enter into temptation must work to know his own heart — to be acquainted with his own spirit, his natural temperament and disposition, his lusts and corruptions, his weaknesses — so that, knowing where he is weak, he may be careful to keep his distance from all occasions of sin. Our Savior told His disciples that they did not know what spirit they were of — the spirit that, under a pretense of zeal, had led them into ambition and desire for revenge. Had they known it, they would have kept watch over themselves.

Men's natural temperaments and makeup often provide ready advantages for temptation. Some are naturally gentle, flexible, and easy to persuade — the finest natural temperament, and the best

ground for grace — yet if not watched carefully, it becomes a means of countless entanglements. Others are earthy, harsh, and sullen — envy, malice, selfishness, and irritability lie right at the door of their natures. Take heed lest you have a Jehu in you that makes you drive furiously, or a Jonah that makes you prone to complaining, or a David that makes you rush to hasty conclusions. The person who does not watch this carefully — who does not know himself thoroughly — will never be free from one entanglement or another all his days.

People may also have particular lusts or corruptions that have taken deep root through natural constitution or upbringing. Unless you know it, unless your eye is always on it, unless you observe its actions and movements, it will continually catch and trap you. Labor to know your own frame and temperament — what spirit you are of, what allies Satan has within your heart, where corruption is strong, where grace is weak. Get acquainted with your own heart: though it is deep, search it; though it is dark, inquire into it; though it gives its sins other names than they deserve, do not believe it.

Second direction: once you know the state and condition of your heart, watch against all such occasions, opportunities, occupations, and relationships that tend to inflame your natural temperament or provoke your corruptions. If you are in a way of life that ensnares you day after day because of your ambition, anger, or discontent — if you have any love for your soul, it is time to wake up and free yourself like a bird from a deadly snare. Since we have so little control over our hearts once they meet with suitable provocations, we must keep them apart — the way a person would keep fire away from the flammable parts of his house.

Third direction: be sure to store up provisions in your heart against the approach of any temptation. The heart is the treasury — there we store whatever we have, good or bad, and from there we draw it for use. Fill the heart with a sense of God's love in Christ — this is the greatest preservative against the power of temptation in the world. Joseph, furnished with a ready sense of God's love, cried at the first appearance of temptation: "How can I do this great evil and sin against God?" — and the temptation took no hold on him. The law's provisions — fear of death and hell — are far more easily overcome and will never stand alone against a vigorous attack. But fill the heart with a sense of God's love in Christ, with a taste of the blood of Christ, with a relish for adoption, justification, and acceptance with God — and you will have great peace and security against the disturbance of temptations. The peace of God — a sense of His love and favor in Christ — will garrison the soul against every assault.

Fourth direction, concerning the first approach of any temptation:

First: always be alert enough to detect a temptation early — to recognize it for what it is. Most people do not see their enemy until they have already been wounded by him. Watch to identify the snares laid for you before they gain strength and power, before they have woven themselves together with your lusts and distilled their poison into your soul.

Second: consider the aim and tendency of the temptation and everything connected with it. Your lust, in its first moves against you, is your mortal enemy — it never rises without having the worst possible outcome in view. Treat it, whatever pretenses it may make, as your mortal enemy setting on you for your complete de-

struction. Satan's design does not stop at the sin he tempts you toward against the law — his deeper design is against your interest in the gospel. He would use sin as a bridge to better ground from which to attack your standing in Christ.

Does Satan have any more friendly aim or intention toward you, since he is a partner in every temptation? To deceive you like a serpent, to devour you like a lion — that is the friendship he owes you. I will only add that the sin he tempts you to commit against the law is not his ultimate target. His real design is against your interest in the gospel. He who today will tell you that you may venture on sin because you have an interest in Christ will tomorrow tell you that you have none, because you have done so.

Third: meet your temptation at its first entrance with thoughts of faith fixed on Christ on the cross. Enter into no discussion, no debate with it, if you do not want to be drawn in. Say: it is Christ who died — who died for sins exactly like these. This is what it means to take up the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of Satan (Ephesians 6:16). Faith does this by laying hold on Christ crucified, on His love shown there, and on what He suffered for sin. Whatever your temptation — temptation to sin, to fear, or to doubt — it cannot stand against faith lifting up the banner of the cross. The Roman Catholics, having lost the power of faith, use the outward sign of the cross to frighten away the devil. To act faith on Christ crucified is truly to mark ourselves with the sign of the cross — and by this we will overcome that wicked one (1 Peter 5:9).

Fourth: suppose the soul has been taken by surprise and caught in a temptation before it could resist — so that it is now too late to resist the first entry of it. What should such a soul do to keep from being plunged deeper and swept away by its power?

First: do as Paul did — plead repeatedly with God that the temptation may depart (2 Corinthians 12:7). If you persist in this, you will certainly either be quickly delivered or receive sufficient grace so as not to be utterly overcome. Only, as I said before, do not focus your thoughts mainly on the things you are being tempted toward — that often deepens the entanglement. Instead, direct yourself against the temptation itself. Pray that the temptation may depart. Once it is removed, the things themselves may be considered more calmly.

Second: go to Christ in a particular way, as one who was Himself tempted, and beg Him to give you help in this time of urgent need (Hebrews 2:18). Consider that He was tempted, that He suffered through it, that He conquered every temptation — and not only for Himself, for He submitted to be tempted for our sake. Lie down at His feet, bring your complaint to Him, beg His help — and it will not be in vain.

Third: look to Him who has promised deliverance. Consider that He is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. Consider that He has promised a good outcome from trials and temptations. Bring all the promises of help and deliverance to mind, ponder them in your heart, and rest on this: that God has countless ways you do not know of to bring you through.

First: He can send an affliction that will mortify your heart to the object of the temptation, whatever it may be — so that what was once a sweet morsel in your mouth will have no taste or attraction for you at all, and your desire toward it will be killed. This is what happened with David.

Second: He can by some circumstance alter the entire situation from which your temptation arises — taking the fuel from the fire and letting it go out by itself. This happened with that same David in his day of battle.

Third: He can tread down Satan under your feet so that Satan dares not suggest anything more to your disadvantage — "the God of peace shall do it" — so that you hear no more from him.

Fourth: He can give you such a supply of grace that though the temptation itself may not be removed, its power to harm you may be taken away — as was the case with Paul.

Fifth: He can give you such a settled assurance of a good outcome that you will have refreshment even in your trials and be kept from the agony of the temptation — as was also the case with that same Paul.

Sixth: He can remove it entirely and make you a complete conqueror. And He has countless other ways of keeping you from entering into temptation so deeply as to be overcome by it.

Fourth: consider where the temptation found its way in, and by what means, and as quickly as possible close up that breach. Stop the opening through which the water got in.

Deal with your soul like a wise physician: find out when, how, and by what means you fell into this sickness. If you find that negligence, carelessness, and a failure to keep watch over your flesh lay at the root of it, settle your soul there — mourn that before the Lord, close up that breach, and then move forward to the work that lies ahead.

CHAPTER VIII. KEEPING THE WORD OF CHRIST'S PATIENCE



The directions given in the previous chapters are partly found in various places in Scripture and partly arise from the nature of the subject itself. There remains one general direction that encompasses everything already given and adds many more specifics to them. This direction contains a proven remedy against the poison of temptation — a cure that Christ Himself has marked with a note of effectiveness and success — found in Revelation 3:10: "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I will also keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try those who dwell on the earth." Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. As He dealt with the church of Philadelphia, so will He deal with us. If we keep the word of His patience, He will keep us from the hour of temptation. Since this is a way of rolling the entire burden of this weighty matter onto Him who is able to bear it, it deserves our particular attention. I will therefore first show what it means to keep the word of Christ's patience, so we know how to do our duty. Then I will show how this becomes a means of our preservation — which will establish us in confidence in Christ's promise.

The word of Christ is the word of the gospel — the word He revealed from the heart of the Father. It is called the word of Christ's patience, or forbearance, on account of the patience and long-suffering that the Lord Christ exercises in dispensing it toward the world and all persons in it — both actively, in bearing with people, and passively, in enduring what they do to Him.

First: He is patient toward His saints — He bears with them and suffers from them. He is patient toward those who believe — and no characteristic of Christ is displayed more gloriously in the gospel than His patience, in bearing with so many unkindnesses, so many causeless breaches, so many neglects of His love, so many insults to His grace, as He endures. The gospel shows itself to be not only the word of His grace but also of His patience. He also suffers from His saints in all the reproach they bring on His name and ways — and He suffers in them, for in all their afflictions He is afflicted.

Second: toward His elect who have not yet been effectually called. He stands waiting at the door of their hearts, knocking for entrance (Revelation 3:20). He deals with them by every means, and yet stands and waits until His head is covered with dew and His hair wet with the drops of the night — like someone enduring cold and the discomforts of the night so that when his morning comes he may be let in. Often for a long time He is scorned in His person, persecuted in His saints and ways, reviled in His word — while He stands at the door in the word of His patience, His heart full of love toward their poor rebellious souls.

Third: toward the perishing world. This is why the time of His reign in this world is called the time of His patience (Revelation 1:9). He endures the vessels of wrath with great patience (Romans

9:22). While the gospel is being proclaimed in the world, He is patient toward the people of it — until the saints in heaven and earth cry out "How long?" (Psalm 13:1-2; Revelation 6:10) — and those very people mock Him as though He were powerless (2 Peter 3:4). He endures bitter things from them in His name, His ways, His worship, His saints, His promises, and His warnings — yet He passes by them, lets them alone, and does them good. Patience must accompany the gospel.

Now this is the word that must be kept, if we are to be kept from the hour of temptation. Three things are implied in the keeping of this word: first, knowledge; second, valuation; third, obedience.

First: knowledge. The person who will keep this word must know it and be acquainted with it — under four aspects:

First: as a word of grace and mercy to save him.

Second: as a word of holiness and purity to sanctify him.

Third: as a word of liberty and power to ennoble him and set him free.

Fourth: as a word of consolation to sustain him in every condition.

First: as a word of grace and mercy able to save us. It is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), the grace of God that brings salvation (Titus 2:11), the word of grace able to build us up and give us an inheritance among all who are sanctified (Acts 20:32), the word able to save our souls (James 1:21). When the word of the gospel is truly known as a word of mercy, grace, and

pardon — as the sole evidence of life and the means of conveying an eternal inheritance — when the soul finds it to be such for itself personally, it will strive to keep it.

Second: as a word of holiness and purity able to sanctify him. "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you," says our Savior (John 15:3); and His prayer in John 17:17 is to the same effect. The person who does not know the word of Christ's patience as a sanctifying, purifying word with real power over his own soul neither truly knows it nor keeps it. The empty profession so common in our day has not taken one step toward this understanding — and this is why most people are so easily overwhelmed by the power of temptations. Men full of selfishness, of worldliness, of anger, ambition, and almost every kind of sinful desire, yet talking about keeping the word of Christ (see 1 Peter 1:22; 2 Timothy 2:19).

Third: as a word of liberty and power, to ennoble him and set him free. This is not only freedom from the guilt of sin and wrath — for the gospel provides that as a word of grace and mercy — nor only freedom from the power of sin, for it provides that as a word of holiness. It also frees from all base, servile regard to people or the things of the world that might entangle or enslave — declaring us to be Christ's free people, in bondage to none (John 8:32; 1 Corinthians 7:23). We are not by it freed from proper submission to authorities, nor freed from any duty, nor freed to commit any sin (1 Peter 2:16). But in two respects it is a word of freedom, liberty, enlarged spirit, power, and deliverance from bondage.

First: in respect of conscience as to the worship of God (Galatians 5:1).

Second: in respect of base, servile regard to the people or things of the world in the course of our pilgrimage. The gospel produces a free, enlarged, and noble spirit — in submission to God and to nothing else. It imparts a spirit not of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7) — a mind terrified by nothing (Philippians 1:28), not swayed by any hidden agenda whatever. Nothing is more unworthy of the gospel than a mind in bondage to persons or things, surrendering itself to the demands of people or the threats of the world. The person who truly knows the word of Christ's patience in its power is thereby freed from countless unspeakable temptations.

Fourth: as a word of consolation to sustain him in every condition — a word attended with joy unspeakable and full of glory, giving support, relief, refreshment, satisfaction, peace, consolation, joy, and glory in every circumstance whatsoever. To know the word of Christ's patience in this way — to know the gospel in this way — is the first part of this condition of preservation from the hour and power of temptation. And it is a great part.

Second: proper valuation of what is thus known belongs to the keeping of this word. It is to be kept as a treasure: "that excellent deposit, guard through the Holy Spirit" (2 Timothy 1:14). And "hold fast the faithful word" (Titus 1:9) — it is a good treasure, a faithful word; hold it firmly. It is a word that encompasses the entire interest of Christ in the world. To treasure it as our greatest possession is to keep the word of Christ's patience. Those who would receive Christ's regard in the time of temptation must not be careless about what matters to Him.

Third: obedience — personal obedience, in universal observance of all Christ's commands, is the keeping of His word (John 14:15). Close, faithful following of Christ in holiness and complete obedience — especially when opposition makes the gospel distinctly the word of His patience — is the life and soul of the duty required.

All three of these must be carried out with that intensity of mind and spirit, that care of heart and diligence of the whole person, as to constitute a genuine keeping of this word — which clearly includes all these dimensions.

We have now arrived at the heart of this duty of safeguarding — this condition of freedom from the power of temptation. The person who, with a genuine acquaintance with the gospel in its excellencies — as for him a word of mercy, holiness, liberty, and consolation — values it in all its concerns as his best and only treasure, makes it his business and the work of his life to give himself over to it in complete obedience, and does so especially when opposition and apostasy put Christ's patience to the greatest test — that person will be preserved from the hour of temptation.

This encompasses everything that has come before and excludes every other path to the end proposed. Let no one think that without this he will be kept even one hour from entering into temptation. Wherever he fails in this, temptation enters. That this is a sure preservative may be seen from the following considerations.

First: it has the promise of preservation — and this alone carries that promise. It is solemnly promised in the passage quoted, to the church of Philadelphia, on this very account. When a great trial

and temptation was to come upon the world at the opening of the seventh seal, a warning was given for the preservation of God's sealed ones — described as those who keep the word of Christ. Now in every promise, three things are to be considered:

First: the faithfulness of the Father who gives it.

Second: the grace of the Son, which is the substance of it.

Third: the power and effectiveness of the Holy Spirit, who puts the promise into effect. All three are engaged for the preservation of such people from the hour of temptation.

First: the faithfulness of God accompanies the promise. Our deliverance is grounded on this: "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able" (1 Corinthians 10:13). What assurance do we have of this? The very faithfulness of God: "He is faithful who promised" (Hebrews 10:23). His faithfulness consists in fulfilling His promises — "He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). By being under the promise, we have the faithfulness of God committed to our preservation.

Second: in every promise of the covenant is the grace of the Son — that is the very substance of all promises. Paul's temptation grew very intense and was on the verge of reaching its prevailing hour. He pleaded with the Lord Jesus Christ for help and received the answer: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). The power of Christ's grace in preserving him was made evident. See also Hebrews 2:18.

Third: the power of the Spirit accompanies the promise. He is called the Holy Spirit of promise — not only because He is promised by Christ, but because He effectively fulfills the promise and brings it to completion in our souls. He is also engaged to pre-

serve the soul that walks according to the rule laid down (see the close of Isaiah 59). So where the promise is, all this support is there as well: the faithfulness of the Father, the grace of the Son, the power of the Spirit — all committed to our preservation.

Second: this consistent, complete keeping of Christ's word of patience will keep the heart and soul in such a condition that no prevailing temptation, by any advantage whatever, can seize it so as to gain total victory over it. So David prays, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me" (Psalm 25:21). This integrity and uprightness is the Old Testament equivalent of keeping the word of Christ — close, universal walking with God. How does it preserve? By keeping the heart in such a frame, so defended on every side, that no evil can approach or take hold. Where a person fails in integrity, he has an opening through which temptation can enter. To keep the word of Christ is to do so completely, as has been shown — this exercises grace in all the faculties of the soul and surrounds it with the whole armor of God. The understanding is filled with light, the affections with love and holiness. Let the wind blow from whatever direction — the soul is fenced and fortified. Let the enemy attack whenever and by whatever means he chooses — everything in the soul of such a person is on guard. "How can I do this thing and sin against God?" is always ready. Deliverance and security arise from this in two particular ways.

First: by mortifying the heart to the substance of temptations. A temptation's power to prevail comes from the heart's readiness to close with what it offers — there are lusts within that correspond to what the world or Satan sets before us. James traces all temptations back to our own lusts, because they either come from those lusts or are made effective through them. Why does fear or threat

turn us away from steadfastness in duty? Is it not because there is an unmortified carnal fear in us that rages in such a season? Why do the allurements of the world entangle us? Is it not because our affections are already attached to what is being set before us? Now, keeping the word of Christ's patience in the manner described keeps the heart mortified to these things — so it is not easily entangled by them. The apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20) — the person who stays close to Christ is crucified with Him, dead to all the desires of the flesh and the world, as Paul more fully explains in Galatians 6:14. Here the bond is broken and all entangling love dissolved.

First: the heart is crucified to the world and everything in it. And the material of almost all temptations is drawn from the world — its people and its things make them up. As to these things the apostle says: "I am crucified to them" — my heart is dead to them; I have no desire for them, no love toward them, no delight in them, and they are crucified to me. The crowns, glories, thrones, pleasures, profits of the world; the lusts, sensual pleasures, love, respect, honor of people, reputation and status among them — they are all nothing to me; I place no value or importance on them. This soul is protected from countless temptations. When Achan saw the beautiful Babylonian robe, the two hundred shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold, he first coveted them and then took them. Temptation subtly spreads before men's eyes the Babylonian garment of favor, praise, and peace; the silver of pleasure or profit; the golden satisfactions of the flesh. If there is something still alive and unmortified in them that will begin to covet — then regardless of whatever fear of punishment may follow, the heart or the hand will be stretched out toward evil.

This is where the security of the described frame lies: it is always accompanied by a heart mortified and dead to the very things that make up our temptations. Without this it is completely impossible to be preserved even a moment when any temptation comes. If liking and love for what is being offered in the temptation are alive and active in us, we will not be able to resist and stand.

Second: in this frame the heart is also filled with better things and their excellence — so strongly that it is fortified against the substance of every temptation. See what resolution this produced in Paul: "All things are loss and rubbish to me" (Philippians 3:8). Who would go out of his way to have his arms full of loss and garbage? And where did this valuation come from? From the dear esteem he had for the excellence of Christ — as he more fully explains in verse 10. When the soul is exercised in communion with Christ and in walking with Him, it drinks new wine and has no desire for the old things of the world — for it says the new is better. It tastes every day how gracious the Lord is, and so does not long for the sweetness of forbidden things, which in truth have none. The person who makes it his habit to eat daily from the tree of life will have no appetite for other fruit, even if the tree that bore it seemed to stand in the center of paradise. The bride in Song of Solomon finds the source of her preservation in the excellence she experienced daily in communion with Christ — far above all other desirable things. Let a soul exercise itself in communion with Christ in the blessings of the gospel — pardon of sin, fruits of holiness, hope of glory, peace with God, joy in the Holy Spirit, freedom from sin's dominion — and it will have a powerful preservative against all temptations. As a person who is full turns away from even the

sweetest honey, so the soul that is satisfied with the kindness of God as with the richest foods holds the baits and allurements of prevailing temptations in holy contempt — and is safe.

Third: the person who keeps the word of Christ's patience in this way is always equipped with preserving considerations and preserving principles — both moral and real advantages that protect.

First: he is equipped with preserving considerations that powerfully shape his walk of diligent closeness to Christ. Beyond the constant sense of duty upon him, he considers:

First preserving consideration: the concern of Christ, whose presence is with him and whose eye is on him as one deeply invested in his conduct in a time of trial. He knows that Christ is concerned for His own honor — that His name not be spoken evil of because of him. Christ is concerned in love for his soul, having the purpose of presenting him holy, blameless, and beyond reproach in His sight (Colossians 1:22). Christ is concerned for His gospel, its advance and reception in the world. Christ is concerned in love for others who may be deeply hurt or even ruined by the failures of such a person. So the soul exercised in keeping the word of Christ's patience says, when tangled, pressing, and entangling temptations arise — public, private, or personal: what does Christ think of me, whose eye is on me right now? Shall I be careless? Shall I give way to the world? Shall I dishonor Him, despise His love, drag His gospel through the mud? Shall someone like me run away, give up the resistance? It cannot be. There is no person who keeps the word of Christ's patience who is not full of this soul-pressing consideration. The love of Christ compels him to guard his heart and his ways.

Second preserving consideration: the great temptations Christ Himself endured on our behalf, and the conquest He made through every assault for our good, also weigh on such a person's spirit. The prince of this world came against Him; the glory of this world was displayed before Him; every allurement and threat that earth or hell could produce was laid before Him to turn Him from the work of redemption He had undertaken for us. He calls His entire earthly life the time of His temptations — yet He resisted all, conquered all, and has become the Captain of salvation for all who obey Him. And the soul says: shall this temptation, these arguments, this plausible excuse, this laziness, this self-love, this sensuality, this bait of the world — shall it turn me aside and prevail over me, so that I desert the One who went before me through every temptation His holy nature could bear, all for my good?

Third preserving consideration: alarming thoughts of losing Christ's love and the light of His countenance also frequently exercise such a soul. He knows what it is to enjoy Christ's favor, to have a sense of His love, to be welcomed in drawing near to Him — and may have sometimes lost some measure of this, and therefore knows what it is to be in the dark, cut off from Him. Consider how the bride in Song of Solomon 3:4 behaves: once she found him again, she held on to him and would not let him go. She would lose him no more.

Second: the person who keeps the word of Christ's patience also has preserving principles by which he is governed. Some may be mentioned.

First: in all things he lives by faith and is governed by it in all his ways (Galatians 2:20). Faith, when properly exercised, has the power of preservation from temptation attached to it in two ways.

First: because it empties the soul of its own wisdom, understanding, and self-sufficiency, so that it may act in the wisdom and fullness of Christ. The best counsel for preservation in trials and temptations is found in the words of the wise man: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). This is the work of faith — it is what it means to live by faith. The great failure of people in trials is their leaning on or relying on their own understanding and judgment. What is the result? "His own counsel shall cast him down" (Job 18:7) — first he is entangled, then brought low, all by his own counsel, until he is ashamed of it as Ephraim was (Hosea 10:6). Whenever in trials we consult our own understanding and listen to our own reasoning — even when it seems aimed at our preservation — the principle of living by faith is stifled, and we will in the end be brought down by our own counsels. Nothing can empty the heart of this self-reliance but faith — living by faith — having Christ live in us as we live by faith in Him.

Second: faith, making the soul poor, empty, helpless, and without resource in itself, draws in the heart, will, and power of Jesus Christ for help — of which I have spoken at greater length elsewhere.

Second preserving principle: love for the saints, along with concern that they not suffer because of us, is a powerful preserving principle in times of temptations and trials. David reveals how powerful this was for him in that earnest prayer: "Let not those who wait on You, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed on my account; let not those who seek You be put to shame because of me, O God of Israel" (Psalm 69:6).

O let me not stumble in such a way that those for whom I would lay down my life are put to shame, spoken evil of, dishonored, ridiculed, and despised on my account and because of my failures. A self-centered soul, whose love has turned entirely inward, will never hold firm in a time of trial.

Why is it that so many in our day are overcome in the time of trial? Is it not because, among the great number of professing believers, few keep the word of Christ's patience? An hour of temptation has come upon the world — in worldliness, sensuality, loose conduct, neglect of spiritual duties, foolish opinions, arrogance, envy, strife, selfishness, and contempt of God. How few keep their garments clean and undefiled! Some are sick, some are weak, many are asleep. Some are wounded, some defiled, many utterly lost. The source of this sad condition: we are not keeping the word of Christ's patience in close, universal walking with Him.

Professing believers fall short of keeping the word of Christ in four ways: (1) conformity to the world in almost everything; (2) neglect of the duties Christ has commanded, from private meditation to public worship; (3) strife, division, and quarreling among themselves, with much condemning and despising of one another; (4) being filled with their own opinions as to principles and self-serving as to their purposes. Would you then be preserved and kept from the hour of temptation? Take these cautions.

First caution: beware of leaning on unreliable supports — your own counsels, understandings, and reasonings. No matter how plausibly you argue in your own defense, when the temptation reaches any height these will turn against you, side with your enemy, and argue as strongly for the object of the temptation as they argued against it before.

Second caution: the most vigorous efforts through prayer, fasting, and similar means against a particular lust or temptation will not avail if in the meantime there are failures in other areas. To see a man strenuously wrestling against one particular temptation while immediately falling into worldly ways and negligence in other things — it is just of Jesus Christ to leave such a person to the hour of temptation.

Third caution: do not misuse the general assurance of the saints' perseverance as a comfort to excuse a particular temptation. Notwithstanding that general assurance, this or that particular temptation may still prevail. Many console themselves with this until they find themselves in the depths of trouble.

Commit yourselves to this great means of preservation — faithful keeping of the word of Christ's patience in the midst of all trials and temptations.

In particular, wisely consider where the word of Christ's patience is most at risk of suffering in the days you live in, and set yourselves vigorously to keep it in that specific area. Consider what works Christ is especially carrying out in your own time — neglect of His word in relation to those works is where His patience is most likely to be dishonored. The works Christ has been especially engaged in during our days appear to be these: first, pouring contempt on the great men and great things of this world, overturning men and institutions to make way for the things that cannot be shaken; second, distinctly owning the portion of His own inheritance, putting a clear difference between the precious and the worthless, and causing His people to dwell apart; third, being close and responsive to faith and prayer, honoring them above all human strength and counsel; fourth, recovering His ordinances and

institutions from the corrupt forms in which they had been held captive. What, then, in such a season, is the particular way in which the word of Christ's patience suffers through neglect? Is it not in placing value on the world and the things of it, which He has treated with contempt? Is it not in slighting His own special people and lot, grouping them together with the men of the world? Is it not in leaning on our own counsels and understanding? Is it not in the defilement of His ordinances — giving the outer court of the temple over to be walked upon by unset-apart people? Let us then be watchful and keep the word of Christ's patience in these things, if we care for our own preservation. And in this frame, urge the Lord Jesus Christ with His blessed promises and with every consideration that might move the heart of our blessed and merciful High Priest to give us the help we need in our time of need.

CHAPTER IX. FINAL EXHORTATION TO WATCHFULNESS



Having now worked through the whole subject of the duty of watching so that we do not enter into temptation, I think there is little need to add further motivation for keeping it. Those who are not moved by their own painful experience, nor by the importance of the duty as laid out at the beginning of this work, I must leave to the further patience of God. I will only close the whole with a general appeal to those who have been in any way prepared for it by what has been said. Imagine going into a hospital and seeing many people lying there sick and weak, sore and wounded, suffering from all kinds of terrible conditions — and asking them how they came to be in that state. If they all agreed on the same cause, would that not make you very careful about having any dealings with that thing or that place? Imagine going to a prison and seeing many miserable people bound in chains awaiting an appointed day of execution — and asking what path brought them to that condition. If they all pointed to the same thing, would you not take every precaution to avoid it? This is exactly the case with entering into temptation. There are so many poor, miserably wounded souls everywhere — one wounded by one sin, another by another; one fallen into corruption of the flesh, another of the

spirit! Ask them how they came to this state. They must all answer: we entered into temptation, we fell into cursed traps and entanglements, and that is what brought us to the wretched condition you see. If a man could look into the dungeons of hell and see the poor condemned souls bound in chains of darkness and hear their cries — what would he learn? Are they not cursing their tempters and the temptations they entered into? And shall we be careless about this? People do not come out of temptation without wounds, burns, and scars. Can a man carry fire in his chest and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be burned? No such thing. I know of no place in the world where there is more need to press this appeal than here. Go to our various colleges and ask about certain young men — what is the answer in so many cases? That one was very promising for a time, but he fell into bad company and is completely lost. That one had some good beginning of faith, but he has fallen into temptation. And in other places: that one was useful and humble, a credit to the gospel, but now he is so hopelessly entangled with the world that he has become entirely self-absorbed, with no freshness or flavor of Christ. How full is the world — how full is this very place — of these dreadful examples! Is it not time for us to wake up before it is too late — to watch against the first stirrings of sin, the first approaches of Satan, and all the ways by which he has made his advances against us, however harmless they may appear in themselves?

Have we not learned from experience our own weakness and folly, and the unstoppable power of temptation once it has gotten inside us? As for this duty I have set out, take these considerations to heart:

First: if you neglect it — being the only means prescribed by our Savior — you will certainly enter into temptation, and just as certainly fall into sin. Do not flatter yourselves. Some of you are long-standing disciples, have a deep hatred of sin, and think it impossible you could ever be so seduced. But let the one who stands — whoever he may be — take heed lest he fall. It is not any grace received, any experience gained, or any resolution strengthened that will keep you from any evil unless you stand on your watch. What I say to you, says Christ, I say to all: Watch. Perhaps you have had some degree of success for a time in your careless frame — but wake up, give thanks for God's tenderness and patience, for evil is at the door. If you will not perform this duty, then one way or another, in one thing or another — whether in spiritual or outward wickedness — you will be tempted, you will be defiled. Remember Peter.

Second: consider that you are always under the eye of Christ, the great Captain of our salvation, who has commanded us to watch and pray that we do not enter in. What do you think are His thoughts, what is His heart toward you, when He sees a temptation rushing toward you, a storm rising around you, and you are fast asleep? Does it not grieve Him to see you expose yourself to such danger after He has given warning after warning? While He was in the days of His flesh, He saw His own temptation coming and armed Himself against it: "The prince of this world comes, but he has nothing in me." And shall we be careless under His eye? Just imagine that you see Him coming to you as He came to Peter when Peter was asleep in the garden, with the same reproach: "Could you not watch one hour?" Would it not grieve you to receive such a

reproof — or to hear Him thundering His rebuke against your neglect from heaven, as He did against the church of Sardis (Revelation 3:2)?

Third: consider that if you neglect this duty and so fall into temptation — which you certainly will — when you are entangled, God may also bring some heavy affliction or judgment upon you. Because of your entanglement, you will not be able to see it as anything other than evidence of His anger and displeasure. And what will you do then, with both temptation and affliction upon you at once? All your bones will be broken, and your peace and strength will be gone in a moment. This may sound like empty words for now — but if you ever find yourself in that condition, you will find it full of pain and bitterness. So let us strive to keep our spirits free and unentangled, avoiding all appearance of evil and every path that leads toward it — especially all ways, occupations, relationships, and pursuits that we have already found to be harmful to us.

FINIS.

THANKS FOR READING



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