

BACK TO BETHEL

Separation from Sin, and Fellowship with GOD

by

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"Old Testament Heroes," "Meet for the Master's Use," etc.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRINITY OF TEMPTATION

When the Lord JESUS received the filling of the Holy Spirit at His baptism, He was immediately led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The person who has been powerfully drawn toward GOD by the Holy Spirit will be, like the sweep of the pendulum, almost immediately exposed to strong temptation.

It is almost necessary, I think, in order to root the tree deeper in the soil. When I was a boy my schoolmates would go often to a neighboring orchard when the fruit was ripe. You could always tell when the fruit was ripe, because the boys made for it. As long as the fruit of your life is immature and sour, the devil will not trouble you much; but just so soon as your fruit is ready, you may expect all the devils of hell to try to steal it. It may be considered rather an honor to have thieves break into your house, because it shows that you have a repute for having money - thieves never break into a poor man's house. And if the devil comes about your house, it shows that you are becoming better off than you used to be. Count it all joy, therefore, when you are tempted.

Now in dealing with temptation we must remember that a man may be tempted either of GOD (and we generally use the word "**tried**" when we speak of this) or he may be tempted of Satan. In Hebrews 11:17 we are told that GOD did "**tempt**" or "**try**" Abraham.

GOD tries us that we may rise; Satan tries us that we may fall. GOD puts an occasion in our way to be a stepping stone up; Satan puts an occasion in our way to be a stumbling block, and cause us to fall.

I am not now speaking about GOD's side in trial, but about temptation to failure.

I will take as my basic text a passage, which, if you understand, you will have the key to the mystery of the New Testament. It is found in Ephesians, the second chapter. In the first ten verses you have the seed plot of the main teachings of the Apostle Paul.

He begins with our terrible state in sin through our connection with our first parent, Adam; for everyone is connected with Adam in his sin. He says: "**You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.**"

Then he speaks of the trinity of evil.

There are three trinities in the world:

- The trinity in unity above us, the Father, Son, and Spirit - one GOD;
- the trinity within us, spirit, soul and body one man; and
- the trinity beneath us, the world, the flesh and the devil.

In Ephesians 2:2, 3 you will find:

- "**In time past ye walked according to the course of this world**" there is the world;
- "**according to the prince of the power of the air**" there is the devil; and
- "**in the lusts of our flesh**" there you have the flesh.

These three are present in every temptation that comes to man.

WHAT IS THE WORLD?

What is the world? In I John 2 126 we are told what is in the world: "**The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.**" These were the lines along which CHRIST's three temptations came. These the apostle shows are in the world, but he does not give a definition of the world.

The world really is the appearance or semblance of things, a mirage! The Hindoo philosophers call it *maia* that which attracts, the glamour, the dream, that entices and puzzles the soul, promising much, but always disappointing.

Are you not conscious when you are tempted that there is always a sort of bait held out to you of something you are to get, some pleasure or joy? As a matter of fact, you never get lasting pleasure when you do yield to the temptation. It is simply a mirage.

Just as the child blows soap bubbles, which are radiant with a thousand hues, but which, when touched, sink into drops of soapy water: so the worldly spirit is always grasping after the semblance of things, grasping at the unreal.

WHAT IS THE FLESH?

As for the flesh, there is no better definition than that given in Romans 7:18, where the apostle says, "**In me, that is, in my flesh.**"

"Flesh" is "me-ism," - egotism. Sometimes in London, where they drop their h's, I tell them that if they will drop the 'h' and spell "flesh" backward, they will get the best definition I know of: "Self."

Whenever you meet a man who makes self the pivot of his life, that man is living according to the flesh.

What is the center letter of the word "sin"? "I"; and the center of egotism is "I." The fall was the putting "I" as the center of life, and redemption is putting man back to the center of love, which is "not I." GOD will finish the work in your soul, when you live, yet not you, but CHRIST lives in you.

When I was in Germany recently, they gave me a beautiful card on which two words were printed "Ich" (I), and "Er" (He); and the "I" was crossed out by a stroke, leaving only "He." Myself crossed out, CHRIST the only pivot or center of my life.

Self is the curse of our life before regeneration and after. Before conversion it is clothed in rags; after conversion it becomes respectable and puts on a white dress; but the devil does not care whether it is clothed in one or the other, so long as we have it inside us, dominating us.

The epistle to the Galatians is the great epistle about the flesh, and how to deal with it.

There we find two passages to which I call attention.

One is Galatians 5:19, where the apostle enumerates the works of the unregenerate life: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and so on. But if you turn to Galatians 3:13, you will find there were a number of people who began by trusting JESUS for justification, and then tried to perfect themselves by their own efforts. They were perfectionists.

So when I hear people who talk about their goodness, who tell us they are perfect, they are revolving about the pivot of the self-life as much as those who are unregenerate, though probably they are not aware of it.

I believe GOD will never be satisfied until we have been lifted clean off the "I" pivot and placed upon the "Not I" pivot, until we no longer live for ourselves, but for JESUS CHRIST, who died for us.

The temptation of Satan is to get us to live on the self-pivot, and in order to do that he holds before us the mirage of pleasure which will be ours if only we will make the self-life our objective.

THE DEVIL

And now a word about the devil.

The nearer you live to CHRIST, the more certain you are there is a personal devil. Those who say he is not a real person, not only go in the face of the New Testament, but show they do not know the reality of JESUS CHRIST.

In London, when a gang of thieves wants to get into a house with the most impunity, they advertise that they have left that section. So if the devil can get anyone to believe in his non-existence he is much more likely to achieve his designs. The devil does not trouble about those who are not specially spiritual. It is those who stand nearest to CHRIST who are most assailed. If you are a straggler on the edge of the battle you are likely enough to come off with a whole skin.

The devil is evidently a real person, because JESUS said, "**The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me.**" Mark also II Corinthians 11:3: "**But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ**"; and John 12:31: "**Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out**"; and Revelation 20:2: "**And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.**"

Of course, I do not think that the devil has the attributes of GOD. He does not trouble much about you and me, but reserves himself for CHRIST, Luther, Spurgeon, and men who are worth his steel; any little demon is strong enough to upset you and me. If you say that the devil tempts everybody you make him omnipresent and omniscient, which are attributes of GOD alone.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

I believe that behind every brothel and saloon there is a demon, that over the darkness of every dark continent, like China or Africa, and any stronghold of evil, there are myriads of demons, who have beneath them principalities and powers. Compare Daniel 10.

In one sentence our Saviour gave the history of Satan. He said: "**He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth**" (John 8:44).

There you have his origin. Probably he was an archangel, and having been created in the truth, he did not remain in it, but, as Jude says, lost his first estate, he was the vicegerent of GOD. JESUS CHRIST recognized that when He spoke of Satan as the prince of this world. When he was an unfallen archangel, I believe GOD made him the prince, perhaps of the sun and its attendant worlds. When he fell he dragged down with him other angels and this world, which has been groaning ever since. "**For the creature was made subject to vanity, not of his own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation should be delivered**" (Romans 8:20, 21).

I believe that cyclones, devastating tidal waves, and a great deal that is so puzzling in the present world are the result of the reaction of that original fall of Satan, its vicegerent and prince.

Now, why should Satan tempt man to fall? What was the reason for the fall on Satan's side?

In Genesis I 126, "**God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let him have dominion.**" As soon as Satan heard that, it seems as though he thought to himself:

"Have dominion! Man have dominion! It shall never be. I am lord here, fallen though I am. These are my palaces, my court, and man shall never rule over this world!"

So he laid his plan to make man subject to himself, and the whole gist of the fall is that Satan should rule, should take from the brow of man the crown that the Creator put there.

In the third chapter of Genesis you get the story of the fall. There was the tree which was pleasant to the eyes, and a thing to be desired to make man wise. In that you have the world the appearance, the semblance, the beautiful mirage. Man wants to be wise, to be as GOD. Next there was the devil speaking through the serpent. And you have the flesh in what Eve saw, in the 6th verse: "**The woman saw that the tree was good for food.**" The world, the flesh, and the devil! In that moment Eve fell, Satan again became supreme. The threatened intrusion upon his dominion was brought to an end by man becoming his subject.

When I was a young man I never could understand why Milton made *Paradise Regained* turn upon the temptation of CHRIST. It always seemed to me that I should have made the regaining of Paradise turn upon Calvary. But he could not have done otherwise. When Satan had made man his subject, GOD's plan seemed thwarted; but GOD, in the person of His Son, became man and encountered Satan, not in the exercise of His Deity, but "**He emptied Himself.**" He temporarily laid aside the use and exercise of those divine attributes, by which He could stamp Satan under His foot, and entered the arena as a man.

When the holy, blessed CHRIST met Satan in the wilderness, the first temptation was repeated, only the conditions were worse. It was not in a garden, but in a wilderness. Adam was tempted in his innocence; CHRIST as the scion of a biased race. Again there was the question of food not a tree with its luscious fruit, but stones of the desert and the hunger in our Saviour's body. Satan said to Eve: "You have all you want to eat. Now take that fruit to make you wise."

But the tempter knew CHRIST had hunger, not for a luxury, but a necessity, and he said:

"You have power. Use it. Feed yourself."

"No," said CHRIST, "if I did I should have an existence independent of GOD. I depend upon my Father, and when my Father sees I want food He will send it."

The moment CHRIST said that, He undid, as far as He was concerned, the coil the devil had woven around Adam and our race.

CHRIST was also tempted by the world. There was the mirage, the semblance of the nations of the world, in a moment of time, and Satan said:

"See how fair the empire is. You need not die, you need not bear the cross. All this is mine, and I can give it to you. Only worship me."

CHRIST knew that if He worshipped him the semblance of the empire of the world would have fallen to dust. It would not have been His. The devil had lied. CHRIST could not rule men unless He died for them. So CHRIST withstood the temptation of the world, and said:

"No, Satan, I will not take it at that price, but I will get it nevertheless. I will not have it as your gift, but my Father's; not by conquering, but by dying a death of shame."

There are two mountains in our Saviour's life, the mount of temptation and the mount of ascension. On the mount of temptation CHRIST saw the kingdoms of the world, and the devil said: "**I will give Thee these if Thou wilt worship me.**" But the Lord refused and went down that mountain poor, lonely, to suffering and to death; but at last through the cross and the grave He came out on the other side more than a conqueror, and said: "**All power is given to me in heaven and upon earth. Go and preach.**" He refused the devil's crown and got GOD's crown; and one day we shall hear the anthem float over the redeemed world, "**The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.**"

But it would not help us if JESUS had done this for Himself only. We must remember that on the cross JESUS CHRIST became the representative man, and again He met the world, the flesh, and the devil in the hour of His weakness.

If He could overcome them then, what can He not do now He is strong in resurrection glory? He said distinctly in John 14:30: "**The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me**"; and again, "**I have overcome the world.**" When our Saviour died He put his foot on the devil; He bruised the serpent's head. When He rose as the representative man He was raised above the power of the devil, and got back the dominion that GOD gave Adam, and Adam lost. We see not yet all things put under man, but we see JESUS crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:8, 9).

In the ascended Lord, man rose above the devil and resumed the honor and glory, the power and authority, with which GOD had endowed him in the first moments of his creation. When Satan saw that GOD was lifting our race, in the person of a perfect man, to sit in glory, he knew that the work of six thousand years was in vain, and that in spite of everything GOD's purpose would stand, that man should have dominion and power.

Now, here are two men. On the one hand there is the first Adam. By the first birth you and I were born of him, and are all children of a fallen man. The devil knows that, and as long as you are living in the old Adam he feels free to do as he will with us, because he has already subdued the father, and he knows he can subdue the child. By the second birth we are born into the second Adam, the royal CHRIST, and stand in Him, and He has made us kings and priests. The pity is that men do not use their royalty!

This is one of the most wonderful subjects that a man can present to his fellows, the intention of GOD to give men royalty; the jealousy of the devil in trying to stop it. GOD refusing to have His plans frustrated, coming down as though the God-man should fight a battle with His right hand

tied behind Him, and saying to Satan, "I will come down and overcome you with my left hand, without the use of my deity." In the wilderness He overcame him. All through His life in His weakness He met the devil and overcame him. On the cross He met him once more. Satan said to Him:

"Spare Thyself."

But the Lord answered: "Never. I refuse to do as you tell me. I am going to do the Father's will, and if My Father leads Me to bear the sin of the world, I will bear it, though it bring midnight on My soul. I will do My Father's will."

When we believe thus, and take our stand in the risen Lord, Satan is powerless.

It happened in Switzerland once that two travelers went to explore an extremely difficult part of the Alps. They took three guides. When they reached a steep cliff of ice they roped themselves together, first a guide, then a traveler, then a guide, then a traveler, and then a guide, and they began to climb up the cliff. As the first guide crawled up he cut in the ice little rests for the feet of those who followed, and the whole five of them crept carefully and anxiously up the side of the cliff.

When they were midway, the last man lost his footing. As he swayed to and fro he dislodged the man above him. He tried to regain his footing, and could not, and pulled the third, and the third the fourth, and four of them were swinging slowly to and fro over the precipice.

When the first guide perceived what was happening, he drove his ice-ax with all his might into the cliff above him, and held to it. As he stood firm, the man beneath had time to get his footing, and the man beneath, until the whole were saved because the first man stood.

JESUS CHRIST has bound us to Him, but some of us have lost our footing; we cannot keep the notch. But if we are linked to CHRIST by faith, we shall keep our standing, in spite of temptations, and CHRIST will bring Satan under our feet.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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