

“Why Does God Permit Temptation?”

QUESTION:

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

ANSWER:

That is a question that troubles very many, and is simply another form of the old question, “Why does God permit evil?” It is a great problem, but a very few minutes’ consideration may suffice to set our minds at rest concerning it.

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

Here are the words of the Scripture: “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:13, 14). And again: “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Verses 2-4).

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

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

Nobody can account for the origin of evil. It is a strange thing, a monstrosity, having no reason for its existence. It first appeared in the heart of Lucifer, while he was yet in

heaven, in the immediate presence of God, and occupying the highest position of authority and trust possible to any created being. What temptation could there have been for him to sin? Every circumstance was as favorable to righteousness as it could possibly be, or as it ever will be for the redeemed saints. **No; the temptation sprang up in his own heart. He was led away of his own lust, and enticed, and God had no responsibility in the matter.**

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

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

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

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