

Temptations Must Be Put Away

Charles G. Finney:

TEXT--Mat. 5:29,30: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

In discussing this subject I will show:

I. THAT THINGS IN THEMSELVES LAWFUL AND EVEN IMPORTANT, MAY, BY SINFUL INDULGENCES, BECOME A CAUSE AND A SOURCE OF STUMBLING TO THE SOUL.

II. THAT HOWEVER DEAR, AND EVEN IMPORTANT THEY MAY BE, IF THROUGH ABUSE, THEY, AS A MATTER OF FACT, ARE THE CAUSE OF OUR FALLING INTO BONDAGE TO SIN, THEY MUST BE PUT AWAY.

III. THAT TO CONTINUE THE TEMPTATION, IN SUCH CASES, AND EXPECT GRACE TO OVERCOME IT, IS TO TEMPT GOD.

IV. IF ANY FORM OF TEMPTATION IS ALLOWED TO HAVE DOMINION OVER US, WE ARE INEVITABLY AND FOR EVER LOST.

I. Things in themselves lawful and even important, may, by sinful indulgence, become a cause and a source of stumbling to the soul.

1. This is plainly implied in the text. The text plainly lays down a principle, and a strong case is supposed by way of illustration. If thy right hand or thy right eye offend thee; that is--cause thee to offend--cut off the hand and pluck out the eye. What is more important to us than a right hand or right eye? It is as if the Savior had said, If these things, which are the most important to you, as a matter of fact, become a snare and lead you into sin, put them away. Here it is as plainly implied as possible, that the most lawful and useful things, may become a snare to our souls.

2. It is a very common occurrence. Who does not know, that his eyes, and his ears, his friends, his employments, his possessions, his bodily appetites, and multitudes of useful things, may, by perversion, be made a snare to the soul.

II. However dear and even important they may be, if, through abuse, they, as a matter of fact, are the cause of our falling into bondage to sin, they must be put away.

1. Because, as the text affirms, it is profitable for us; that is--our own good demands it. "For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

2. It must be put away, because whatever is prized more than sin is hated, is our idol and our god. That is our god which we supremely regard. If we supremely love Jehovah, we shall sooner part with any thing than offend Him. Hence Christ teaches that, except a man hate his father, and mother, and brother, and sister, and even his own life, for Christ's sake, he cannot be his disciple. If any thing is loved or prized in comparison with God, we have no religion at all. If a man, therefore, does not dread sin more than he dreads death, he is no disciple of Christ. If there is any thing in the world that he loves more than he hates sin, any thing whatever, that would be spared, notwithstanding it kept him in bondage to sin, he is not, and cannot be a disciple of Christ. I speak of course of those things that can be put away by us, by an act of self-denial on our part. And if there is any kind or degree of self-denial which we would not prefer to being in sin, then, if the Bible is true, we are not the disciples of Christ. Let it be understood, now, that I do not speak of some very rare and high attainments in piety; but of a universal condition of discipleship. Christ has laid it down in as strong language as any in which it can be expressed. He uses the strongest language, without seeming to fear being misunderstood. He says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

III. To continue the temptation in such case, and expect grace to overcome it, is to tempt God.

1. Because Christ has taught us to pray, that we may not be tempted. Now what is tempting God, if this is not--to pray that we may not be tempted, without using all the means in our power to avoid temptation? Suppose, that a drunkard should pray against temptations to intemperance, and still keep his side-board loaded down with all kinds of tempting liquors? I know it is sometimes related of persons, that they have set some tempting object continually before them, to show the strength of their resolution to overcome. Whether there is any truth in such reported cases I know not; but this I know, that it is very unwise. And, if persons are instructed, it is nothing less than tempting God, to suffer a temptation, that can be removed at our pleasure, and that actually brings us into sin, to continue before us and exert its influence upon us.

2. It is tempting God, because grace was never designed to purchase exemption from self-sacrifice, and self-denial; but to lead to them and support the soul under them.

3. To suffer the temptation in such cases to continue is to tempt God; because grace was never designed to purchase exemption from cross-bearing, cutting off right hands, and plucking out right eyes, and putting away our idols, and those indulgences that overcome us. But grace was designed to enable us to empty ourselves of all those things.

4. It is enough for the servant to be as his master. Christ, as a man, was obliged to watch and deny Himself, and keep Himself clear of those besetments and temptations that would naturally overcome Him. His Apostles followed in his steps. Paul found it indispensable to keep his body under, to mortify his members which were upon the earth; and it is an unalterable law of the kingdom of grace, that men must put away those weights and easily besetting sins that hinder and overcome them, or they will never enter into the kingdom of God. Therefore, to continue the temptation and expect grace to overcome it, is to "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness."

IV. If any form of temptation is allowed to have dominion over us, we are inevitably and for ever lost.

1. Because it is a state of impenitence. He is an impenitent sinner, who prefers living in sin, to cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye.

2. To suffer a temptation that prevails over us to continue, when by an act of self-denial on our part we can put it away, is but to confirm a state of impenitence. Every day and hour we suffer ourselves to continue under such an influence, the bonds of impenitence are strengthening, until we are hopelessly delivered up to the dominion of our besetting sins.

3. To suffer any form of temptation to continue, which as a matter of fact leads us into sin--which temptation can be put away by us--is totally inconsistent with any degree of holiness. Suffering the temptation under such circumstances is an impenitent state of mind. It is the opposite of all holiness. It so supremely loves the darling object as to refuse to part with it, although as a matter of fact it leads us to sin against God! I say again, that this is not merely a state of defective piety; it must be a state of no piety at all.

REMARKS.

1. If things the most lawful and important in themselves must, if through abuse they have become a stumbling-block to us, be put away, how much more needful then that we put away useless and unnecessary things.

2. From this subject we can see the error of those who hold on to practices and things, that are a cause of stumbling to them, on the ground that they are lawful in themselves. What is more lawful or more important than a right hand or a right eye? Suppose, that when Christ delivered this sermon on the mount, of which the text is a part, one of his hearers had replied-- 'Surely, this man is mad and hath a devil. Will he teach us to cut off our right hands and pluck out our right eyes? Did not God make them for lawful and useful purposes? Would he have a man maim himself, or make himself a cripple for life? Is it not lawful for us to enjoy the good things of providence? This is altogether a legal spirit, and by no means the doctrine from God.' What reply, suppose you, Christ would have made to such an objection as this? And yet how many vehement debates do we hear, in which men are pleading for and defending their lusts, indulging their appetites, and ruining their souls, on the ground that these things are lawful in themselves? Suppose they are lawful in themselves, and yet, as a matter of fact, you abuse them and suffer them to lead you into sin. If they are lawful in themselves, you do not use them lawfully. They have become your masters, instead of your servants; and therefore you

must put them away, however lawful they may be in themselves, or you will lose your souls.

3. We see the mistake and the presumption of those who hold on to things which prove a snare to them, on the ground that they are useful things. What is more useful than a right hand or a right eye? And yet Christ says, put them away; for however useful they may be, they will never pay you for the loss of your souls.

4. We see the folly and madness of those who hold on to their indulgences in things that lead them into sin, on the ground that these things are not expressly forbidden in the word of God. One man can find it no where forbidden in the scriptures to use ardent spirits--another can find no express passage, forbidding the use of wine--and a third can find slavery no where prohibited in the word of God. In short, many seem disposed to indulge themselves in whatever is not expressly forbidden, without at all regarding the actual influence of those things upon them.

5. How little he cares for sin, or knows of God, who can willingly spare that which leads him into sin. What can he know of God? What does he really know of sin? What idea can he have of true religion? Surely none that are not infinitely far from truth.

6. From this subject it is easy to see, that if property becomes a snare it should be put away. If a man's state of mind is such that, as a matter of fact, worldly possessions lead him into a state of worldly-mindedness, he should give his property at once to the cause of God, and refuse to possess any, even if he become as poor as Lazarus. Such a course is altogether indispensable to the salvation of his soul. If his property is a snare, he must put it away, whether it be much or little. Any and every article of property, that gets hold of the heart, diverts the attention and affections from God, whether it be a dollar or a mine of gold, a horse, a house, a farm, a store, or any thing whatever, that as a matter of fact alienates the soul from God, must be put away, or the soul is lost. Now is this any stronger than the doctrine of the text? No, verily. If this is extravagant, then Christ was extravagant. If this is not solemn truth, and if as much as I here affirm is not true, then the text is not true, and Christ is a false witness. I know that such statements are apt to be looked upon as extravagant; but mark what I say--It is no extravagant assertion, that whatever piece of property, whatever kind or amount of worldly goods, seduces the soul away from God, they must be put away, and put away for ever, or the soul is inevitably lost.

7. What vast madness possesses the souls of those who are endeavoring to get all the worldly goods they can, and even to lay up wealth for their children, when they are as conscious as they are of their own existence, that their worldly possessions, are diverting their minds from God and heaven. It would seem as if they were enlisted to work out their own damnation with all their might.

8. If you are inclined to eat too much, you must deny yourselves those kinds of diet that betray you into gluttony. Whatever those kinds of diet are, of which you are so fond, and that overcome you when placed before you, and lead you to transgress the laws of your being, put them entirely away. Do not suffer them to find a place upon your table.

9. The exact opposite of this course is generally pursued by mankind. From the general conduct of mankind, it would seem that they fear starvation a thousand times more than they do gluttony, and that the utmost attention must be paid to preparing tempting dishes, or mankind would not have sufficient appetite to meet the demands of their nature. Now gluttony is one of the most common sins in the world. It is the testimony of the best judges upon this subject, that excessive eating is the most common form of intemperance that prevails among mankind, and is the cause of more disease, especially in this country, than any other form of intemperance. How unwise then, how wicked, what tempting God is it, to continue to prepare and set before yourselves those tempting dishes, instead of furnishing your tables with those wholesome, bland articles of diet of which you will be likely to eat but the requisite quantity.

10. If any article of dress, as a matter of fact, begets pride and vanity, occupies your thoughts, and diverts your mind from God, put it away for ever. A woman in one of our large cities, who was justly considered beautiful, and had been recently converted, was seen by a female friend with her hands filled with artificial flowers and curls, approaching the fire. 'What,' said she, 'are you going to do with them?' 'What!' answered the young convert, 'I am going to burn them up.' 'O,' said the friend, 'don't burn them up; you can sell them and give the avails to some benevolent object.' 'Sell them,' said she, 'and thus tempt somebody else to be as proud and vain of them as I have been! No! I will burn them up. They shall no more be a temptation and a snare to any human being.'

How wonderful is the conduct of human beings, and especially of professors of religion. Knowing, as they do,

their weakness and liability to be overcome by pride, one would suppose that they would avoid, in the purchase of articles of dress, every thing that might excite pride or vanity, as they would avoid destruction itself. But alas! how different is their conduct. Under the pretense of consulting good taste, they are at the utmost pains, and spare no expense, in tempting themselves to pride, by the purchase of any and every article that will adorn their persons, and show them off to advantage. Let me say, then, that whatever of dress, or equipage, or furniture, as a matter of fact excites pride and vanity, must be put away, or the soul is lost.

11. Every appetite and passion that has the ascendancy, and leads us into sin, must be crucified and its dominion entirely destroyed, or the soul is utterly lost.

12. Those who live in self-indulgence, and still think that they know and enjoy Christ, are deceived Antinomians. I have heard of some, who professed to come into the liberty of the gospel, decrying every thing that looked like self-denial and mortifying the flesh, as legal and belonging to Judaism, rather than to Christianity. Hence they indulge in the use of wines and strong drinks--their women indulge in dress, and flutter about after the fashions of this world; because, forsooth, they are now in a state of liberty, they spurn and despise a course of temperance, self-denial, and cross-bearing, of non-conformity to the world, as altogether a legal and self-righteous spirit and course of life. So did not Paul. So did not Christ. So does not any one who truly knows Christ.

13. Many seem to understand the gospel as designed to purchase indulgence, instead of begetting self-denial. The gospel was evidently designed to enlighten the minds of men in regard to the value of heavenly things--to bring them out from under the dominion of the objects of sense, and engage their thoughts and their hearts, in the pursuit and enjoyment of spiritual objects; and thus to lead mankind to neglect the glitter and baubles of this world--to forgo pampering their appetites, indulging their passions, adorning their bodies, and floating on in the currents of this world. But many seem so entirely to mistake the true spirit and intent of the gospel, as to suppose it designed to sanctify conformity to the world, instead of entirely delivering the soul from it. With this understanding of the gospel some persons seem to be in a very wonderful state of mind. I heard, sometime since, of a young woman, a professor of religion, who was in the habit of cohabiting with a young man as if she had been his wife, and who, before retiring to her bed of iniquity and shameless lust, would kneel down, and very gravely thank God, that He allowed her such indulgences.

Now, she no doubt supposed herself to be very thankful, and in a very humble frame of mind. Although this was an extreme case, yet I have myself seen many things that seemed to involve the same principle, and to be the result of the same utter misunderstanding and perversion of the gospel, where persons were manifestly living in self-indulgence, pride, and luxury, and appeared to be very thankful that the gospel had relieved them from the necessity of an opposite course of life, and had sanctioned and sanctified such a use of the good things of providence, as that in which they were indulging--squandering Christ's money, injuring their health, stupefying and imbruting their minds, adorning their bodies, compressing their chest with tight lacing, and in multitudes of ways making war on both moral and physical law; and yet, having the idea that the gospel sanctioned all this, they were highly pleased with such a gospel, and such a Christ, and such a salvation--a salvation evidently not from sin, but in sin; not from the dominion of the flesh, but a salvation that throws up the reins to appetite, lust, and vanity. These poor dreamers seem to suppose that there is, under the gospel, no need of restraining the natural appetites, but that all may be indulged with perfect safety and propriety, if there is only faith in Christ. Now it should be for ever understood, that faith in Christ is that which gives victory over these things, instead of sanctifying indulgence in them.

14. I next remark, that what may be expedient for one to possess, or enjoy, may not be so for another. On account of natural temperament, or the influence of grace, one man may have possessions without being a temptation to him, to draw him away from God, which another cannot have. It is never safe for us to possess or indulge in any thing because another does so; for it may be that we are not equally able to bear it.

15. Under some circumstances, we may not be able to bear, what under other circumstances we could bear without injury.

16. From this subject it is easy to see the importance of watchfulness, and giving the utmost attention to the occasions of our stumbling, whether proximate or remote. When I was a young convert, I was struck with this resolution of Edwards:

"Resolved, that when I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back till I come to the original cause, and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it."

It is no doubt of the utmost importance, that our eyes should be continually open to all the influences that are acting on us, and affecting our moral characters. Every article of dress, every thing in our employments, amusements, companions, books, diet, in all our habits, and in all our ways, whatever leads us into sin, should be put away.

17. Some indulge temptation and sin, until so blinded and hardened, as to feel no condemnation, and think that all is well. Their consciences have become stupefied and remain indignantly silent. And what they once esteemed to be sin they no longer regard as such. They can now complacently indulge in what would once have made them tremble. And because they feel no condemnation, they imagine that they are not condemned. Now it is one thing to have a seared conscience, and to be in that negative state of mind in which there is no felt condemnation, and that active, positive, and conscious state of love to God and souls, in which the soul has the continual testimony that it pleases God.

18. All the promises in regard to support under temptation and deliverance from it, are to be understood to be upon the condition that we avoid and put away all temptation as far as we possibly can. We often find promises to which no express condition is annexed, but where a condition is either plainly implied or expressed in some other part of the word of God. Take the promise in 1 Cor. 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Here is a promise without any condition expressed with regard to deliverance from the power of temptation. But our text, is to be regarded as a condition annexed by Christ Himself to all promises of this stamp. And these passages together teach this doctrine, that we need not fall under the power of any temptation, that we cannot avoid or put away from us--that when we have gone the full length of sacrificing a right hand or a right eye, to be rid of temptation, that no unavoidable temptation shall come upon us, from which we shall not have grace to escape. And this is all that such promises can mean, when viewed in the light of the expressed or implied conditions of the gospel.

19. If we are not enabled to put away and overcome temptation, it is because we have no Savior. The Savior's name is JESUS, because He saves his people from their sins. If, therefore, you are not enabled to overcome your sins, it is because you reject the Savior.

20. How many are engaged in defending their idols and their lusts, rather than in putting them away.

21. If any thing is found to be a temptation and a cause of stumbling to us, we should never indulge or defend it, because others indulge in the same thing. Perhaps they may do it without its being an overcoming stumbling-block to them. Or if it does overcome and lead them into sin, their going to destruction is certainly no good reason why we should do so.

22. Where a thing may be reasonably suspected as the cause of our falling into sin, it should be put away. It sometimes happens, that we are not fully aware of what the particular thing is, in our habits, which grieves the Spirit of God, and yet have some or much reason to suppose that it is the practice or indulgence of some particular thing. A doubtful thing should never be allowed.

23. A thing may be overlooked as a cause or occasion of our stumbling, because it is not a proximate but a remote cause. The thing which acted immediately upon us to cause our fall, may perhaps be something that we cannot put away. But should we candidly inquire, we might find the more remote occasions, and by removing them, continue in a state of liberty.

24. If a man but love God, he will not, cannot rest until every cause of stumbling be searched out, and removed. Can a man love God supremely, and yet find himself betrayed into sin against Him, and rest until he has searched out and removed the cause? No!

25. Those who secretly dislike the doctrine of entire holiness in this life, are not Christians. From the manner in which many professors of religion treat this question, it seems manifest that they feel a secret dislike to it. They seem indisposed to understand it. They appear to set themselves to object to and pervert it, rather than candidly and earnestly to investigate it, with a manifest desire that it might be true. What they say and write, often makes the impression upon those who hear and read, that there is in the bottom of their hearts a spirit of secret but deep opposition to it. It may be supposed by some, that this manifested opposition is because it is regarded as error, and that Christians will naturally and of right manifest opposition to error. I should be glad to believe, that this opposition is founded in the conviction that this doctrine is false; but there is one circumstance that seems to forbid accounting for this opposition upon this principle. When a doctrine is hated because it is false, the doctrine will be fairly stated and met, and hated for what it is, and not for what it is not.

Whenever we see a mind betaking itself to misstatement, and misrepresentation, in order to evade a doctrine, it is difficult for us to believe, that the misrepresented doctrine is rejected because it is believed by the mind to be false. If the doctrine, as it is, were believed by the mind to be false, it would be stated and met as it is, and not misrepresented and misstated.

26. We see why so many, who admit the truth of the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, do not practically embrace it. They have some idol with which they will not part. Their right hand and their right eye are so dear to them, that they will not spare them for the sake of eternal life. Especially, they will not do this, as from the common sentiments of the Church, they think they can get along very well without. They seem to reason thus: "We are about as good as common Christians, although to be sure, we are in the practice of many sins. The great mass of Christians do not believe that entire sanctification in this life is necessary or even attainable. We can, therefore, satisfy ourselves with but partial sanctification in this life, and still go to heaven. Why then should we throw away all our idols, merely for the sake of entire sanctification here, when partial sanctification will, in the judgment of the Church, and even of the ministers, do just as well. Now it is doubtful whether any such state is really attainable; and if it is, as I can get to heaven just as well without, I will not be so extravagantly foolish as to part with a right hand or a right eye, for the sake of being wholly without sin in this life." Now this seems to be a statement in words of the real, though unexpressed sentiments, of many professors of religion. The truth is, they are unwilling to give up their sins, and they resolve, if possible, to get into heaven without. Let such hear the words of Christ: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

27. If a temptation is of such a nature, that it cannot be utterly put away, every thing should be done by us that can be, to destroy its influence over us. For example: Our appetites and passions cannot, at our will, be annihilated; but those things that excite them can be avoided.

28. How terrible is the delusion of those who expect to be sanctified, or even saved, in the courses of life which they are pursuing.

29. It is no wonder that the Church do not believe in the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life. They are well satisfied that, with their present habits and indulgences, they cannot be entirely sanctified. And as these habits and indulgences appear to be stereotyped, they reject the doctrine of entire freedom from sin in this life, as unreasonable.

30. Whenever all is done that can be done, to avoid temptation, and to put away whatever brings us into bondage to sin, we may expect, and are bound to expect, that no temptation shall come upon us, from the power of which we are not able to escape. It is then entirely within the reach of every individual to live in a state of entire consecration, or sanctification, to God.

And now, whatever you do, do quickly. Will you put away now and for ever those temptations that overcome you, which can be put away by you? And will you now commit yourselves to the keeping and protection of the Lord Jesus Christ, to sustain you against the power of those temptations which you cannot avoid? Or will you hold on to your idols but a little longer, until all is lost. Again I say, whatever you do, do quickly. Every moment's delay is grieving the Holy Spirit. And even while I speak, unseen hands may be ready to toll the knell of eternal death over your soul! while you sink, weeping and wailing, down the sides of the pit!

Professor of religion, and you, impenitent sinner, do you realize, that while I speak the curtain may be ready to drop, the scene close, and your soul shut up to the horrors of the second death! O, do you know, "that now of a long time your judgment lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not"--that the Spirit is grieved--God is provoked; Divine forbearance almost exhausted--and your soul for ever lost! Again I say, what you do, do quickly.