

TEMPTATION AND FAILURE, THE CHALLENGE TO FAITH

For us, then, the two greatest facts in history are these: that all our sins are dealt with by the Blood, and that we ourselves are dealt with by the Cross. But what now of the matter of temptation? What is to be our attitude when, after we have seen and believed these facts, we discover the old desires rising up again? Worse still, what if we fall once more into known sin? What if we lose our temper, or worse? Is the whole position set forth above proved thereby to be false?

Now remember, one of the Devil's main objects is always to make us doubt the divine facts. (Compare Genesis 3:4.) After we have seen, by revelation of the Spirit of God, that we are indeed dead with Christ, and have reckoned it so, he will come and say: "There is something moving inside. What about it? Can you call this death?" When that happens, what will be our answer? The crucial test is just here. Are we going to believe the tangible facts of the natural realm which are clearly before our eyes, or the intangible facts of the spiritual realm which are neither seen nor scientifically proved?

Now we must be careful. It is important for us to recall again what are facts stated in God's Word for faith to lay hold of and what are not. How does God state that deliverance is effected? **Well, in the first place, we are not told that sin as a principle in us is rooted out or removed.** To reckon on that will be to miscalculate altogether and find ourselves in the false position of the man we considered earlier, who tried to put down the twelve shillings in his pocket as fifteen shillings in his account-book. No, sin is not eradicated. It is very much there, and, given the opportunity, will overpower us and cause us to commit sins again, whether consciously or unconsciously. **That is why we shall always need to know the operation of the precious Blood.**

But whereas we know that, in dealing with sins committed, God's method is direct, to blot them out of remembrance by means of the Blood, when we come to the principle of sin and the matter of deliverance from its power, we find instead that God deals with this indirectly. He does not remove the sin, but the sinner. Our old man was crucified with him, and because of this the body, which before had been a vehicle of sin, is unemployed (Romans 6:6). Sin, the old master, is still about, but the slave who served him has been put to death and so is out of reach, and his members are unemployed. The gambler's hand is unemployed, the swearer's tongue is unemployed, and these members are now available to be used instead "as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13).

Thus we can say that "deliverance from sin" is a more scriptural idea than "victory over sin". The expressions "freed from sin" and "dead unto sin" in Romans 6:7 and 11 imply deliverance from a power that is still very present and very real—not from something that no longer exists. Sin is still there, but we are knowing deliverance from its power in increasing measure day by day.

This deliverance is so real that John can boldly write: "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin . . . he cannot sin" (1 John 3:9), which is, however, a statement that, wrongly understood, may easily mislead us. By it John is not telling us that sin is now no longer in our history and that we shall not again commit sin. He is saying that to sin is not in the nature of that which is born of God. The life of Christ has been planted in us by new birth and its nature is not to commit sin. But there is a great difference between the nature and the history of a thing, and there is a great difference between the nature of the life within us and *our* history. To illustrate this (though the illustration is an inadequate one) we might say that wood

“cannot” sink, for it is not its nature to do so; but of course in history it will do so if a hand holds it under water. The history is a fact, just as sins in our history are historic facts; but the nature is a fact also, and so is the new nature that we have received in Christ. What is “in Christ” cannot sin; what is in Adam can sin, and will do so whenever Satan is given a chance to exert his power.

So it is a question of our choice of which facts we will count upon and live by: the tangible facts of daily experience or the mightier fact that we are now “in Christ”. The power of His resurrection is on our side, and the whole might of God is at work in our salvation (Romans 1:16), but the matter still rests upon our making real in history what is true in divine fact.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), and “the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). I think we all know that Hebrews 11:1 is the only definition of faith in the New Testament, or indeed in the Scriptures. It is important that we should really understand that definition. You are familiar with the common English translation of these words, describing faith as “the substance of things hoped for” (AV). However, the word in the Greek has in it the sense of an action and not just of some thing, a “substance”,--and I confess I have personally spent a number of years trying to find a correct word to translate this. But the New Translation of J.N. Darby is especially good in regard to this word: “Faith is the *substantiating* of things hoped for.” That is much better. It implies the making of them real in experience.

How do we “substantiate” something? We are doing so every day. We cannot live in the world without doing so. Do you know the difference between substance and “substantiating”? A substance is an object, something before me. “Substantiating” means that I have a certain power or faculty that makes that substance to be real to me. Let us take a simple illustration. By means of our senses we can take things of the world of nature and transfer them into our consciousness so that we can appreciate them. Sight and hearing, for example, are two of my faculties which substantiate to me the world of light and sound. We have colors: red, yellow, green, blue, violet; and these colors are real things. But if I shut my eyes, then to me the color is no longer real; it is simply nothing—to me. With my faculty of sight, however, I possess the power to “substantiate”, and by that power, yellow becomes yellow *to me*. It is not only that the color is there, but I have the power to “substantiate” it. I have the power to make that color true to me and to give it reality in my consciousness. That is the meaning of “substantiating”.

If I am blind I cannot distinguish color, or if I lack the faculty of hearing I cannot enjoy music. Yet music and color are in fact *real* things, and their reality is unaffected by whether or not I am able to appreciate them. Now we are considering here the things which, though they are not seen, are eternal and therefore real. Of course we cannot substantiate divine things with any of our natural senses; but there is one faculty which can substantiate the “things hoped for”, the things of Christ, and that is faith. Faith makes the *real* things to become real *in my experience*. Faith “substantiates” *to me* the things of Christ. Hundreds of thousands of people are reading Romans 6:6: “Our old man was crucified with him.” To faith it is true; to doubt, or to mere mental assent apart from spiritual illumination, it is not true.

Let us remember again that we are dealing here not with *promises* but with *facts*. The promises of God are revealed to us by his Spirit that we may lay hold of them: but facts are facts, and they remain facts whether we believe them or not. If we do not believe the facts of the Cross they still remain as real as

ever, but they are valueless to us. It does not need faith to make these things real in themselves, but faith can “substantiate” them and make them real in our experience.

Whatever contradicts the truth of God’s Word, we are to regard as the Devil’s lie, not because it may not be in itself a very real fact to our senses, but because God has stated a greater fact before which the other must eventually yield. I once had an experience which (though not applicable in detail to the present matter) illustrates this principle. Some years ago I was ill. For six nights I had high fever and could find no sleep. Then at length God gave me from the Scripture a personal word of healing, and because of this I expected all symptoms of sickness to vanish at once. Instead of that, not a wink of sleep could I get, and I was not only sleepless but more restless than ever. My temperature rose higher, my pulse beat faster and my head ached more severely than before. The enemy asked, “Where is God’s promise? Where is your faith? What about all your prayers?” So I was tempted to thrash the whole matter out in prayer again, but was rebuked, and this Scripture came to mind: “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). If God’s Word is truth, I thought, then what are these symptoms? They must all be lies! So I declared to the enemy, “This sleeplessness is a lie, this headache is a lie, this fever is a lie, this high pulse is a lie. In view of what God has said to me, all these symptoms of sickness are just your lies, and God’s Word to me is truth.”

In five minutes I was asleep, and I awoke the following morning perfectly well.

Now of course in a particular personal matter such as the above, it might be quite possible for me to deceive myself as to what God had said, but of the fact of the Cross there can never be any such question. We *must* believe God, no matter how convincing Satan’s arguments appear.

A skillful liar lies not only in word but in gesture and deed; he can as easily pass a bad coin as tell an untruth. The Devil is a skillful liar, and we cannot expect him to stop at words in his lying. He will resort to lying signs and feelings and experiences in his attempts to shake us from our faith in God’s Word. Let me make it clear that I do not deny the reality of the “flesh”. Indeed we shall have a good deal more to say about this further on in our study. But I am speaking here of our being moved from a revealed position in Christ. As soon as we have accepted our death with Christ as a fact, Satan will do his best to demonstrate convincingly by the evidence of our day-to-day experience that we are not dead at all but very much alive. So we must choose. Will we believe Satan’s lie or God’s truth? Are we going to be governed by appearances or by what God says?

I am Mr. Nee. I know that I am Mr. Nee. It is a fact upon which I can confidently count. It is of course possible that I might lose my memory and forget that I am Mr. Nee, or I might dream that I am some other person. But whether I feel like it or not, when I am sleeping I am Mr. Nee, and when I am awake I am Mr. Nee; when I remember it I am Mr. Nee, and when I forget it I am still Mr. Nee.

Now of course, were I to pretend to be someone else, things would be much more difficult. If I were to try and pose as Miss K., I should have to keep saying to myself all the time, “You are Miss K.; now be sure to remember that you are Miss K.,” and despite much reckoning the likelihood would be that when I was off my guard and someone called, “Mr. Nee!” I should be caught out and should answer to my own name. Fact would triumph over fiction, and all my reckoning would break down at that crucial moment. But I *am* Mr. Nee, and therefore I have no difficulty whatever in reckoning myself to be Mr. Nee. It is a fact which nothing I experience—or fail to experience—can alter.

So also, whether I feel it or not, I am dead with Christ. How can I be sure? Because Christ has died; and since “one died for all, therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Whether my experience proves it or seems to disprove it, the fact remains unchanged. While I stand upon that fact, Satan cannot prevail against me. Remember that his attack is always upon our assurance. If he can get us to doubt God’s Word, then his object is secured and he has us in his power; but if we rest unshaken in the assurance of God’s stated fact, assured that He cannot do injustice to His work or his Word, then it does not matter what tactics Satan adopts, we can well afford to laugh at him. If anyone should try to persuade me that I am not Mr. Nee, I could well afford to do the same.

“We walk by faith, not by appearance” (2 Corinthians 5:7, marg). You probably know the illustration of Fact, Faith and Experience, (as they were) walking along the top of a wall. Fact walked steadily on, turning neither to right nor left and never looking behind. Faith followed and all went well so long as he kept his eyes focused upon Fact; but as soon as he became concerned about Experience and turned to see how he was getting on, he lost his balance and tumbled off the wall, and poor old Experience fell down after him.

All temptation is primarily to look within; to take our eyes off the Lord and to take account of appearances. Faith is always meeting a mountain, a mountain of evidence that seems to contradict God’s Word, a mountain of apparent contradiction in the realm of tangible fact—of failures in deed, as well as in the realm of feeling and suggestion—and either faith or the mountain has to go. They cannot both stand. But, the trouble is that many a time the mountain stays and faith goes. That must not be. If we resort to our senses to discover the truth, we shall find Satan’s lies are often enough true to our experience; but if we refuse to accept as binding anything that contradicts God’s Word and maintain an attitude of faith in him alone, we shall find instead that Satan’s lies begin to dissolve and that *our experience is coming progressively to tally with that Word.*

It is our occupation with Christ that has this result, for it means that he becomes progressively real to us on concrete issues. In a given situation we see him as *real* righteousness, *real* holiness, *real* resurrection life—*for us*. What we see in him objectively now operates in us subjectively—but *really*—to manifest him in us, in that situation. That is the mark of maturity. That is what Paul means by his words to the Galatians: “I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you” (4:19). Faith is “substantiating” God’s facts; and faith is always the “substantiating” of eternal fact—of something eternally true.

The Normal Christian Life by Watchman Nee