

YIELD NOT TO TEMPTATION

Scripture: James 1:12-15; Hebrews 2:18, 4:15
Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Mass.
Sunday, May 19, 1963
Sermon addressed to the young people

Introduction:

A few weeks ago I received an invitation from the young people to address them and the whole congregation this morning on the subject of temptation. I do not know exactly what the young people had in mind when they chose this topic, but I guess that it is their preoccupation with the temptations of youth that inclined them to think along these lines. Rather than approaching the subject from a purely functional point of view, we propose to investigate what the scriptures teach on the subject of temptation and bring out at the same time the possible applications to present day Christians -- young people or otherwise.

To begin with, I must point out that our understanding of the term temptation is almost entirely confined to its negative meaning. When a Christian young person, or for that matter, any adult Christian, thinks of temptation he usually has in mind those situations in life that entice him to sin or to fall short of what he knows to be the highest.

However, the N.T. verb that underlies the word temptation has a much wider and richer connotation than this specific sense of temptation that we have been considering.

The verb in Greek is _____. It can be translated into English as follows: to try, to make trial of, to put to test in order to discover what kind of a person someone is. Under this general definition it has at least four possible connotations. Let us consider them briefly, and discover how they apply to the present day Christian.

I. First: there is a general meaning in which the believer invites God to test him.

Ps. 139:23-24 -- Search me, O Lord, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting!

Ps. 26:1 -- Prove me, O Lord, try me; test my heart and my mind.
For thy steadfast love is before my eyes,
And I walk in faithfulness to thee.

In both these passages the psalmist addresses an invitation to God to examine and test his heart, his mind, his very thoughts. In the first case the believer is opening his whole life to the scrutiny of God -- willing to acknowledge any wickedness inside and to be led in the way of righteousness, that is --

obedience. In the second quotation, the psalmist is also inviting God to examine him, but in order that God himself might see the faithfulness of the believer in following God's steadfast love.

Paul in the N.T. (II Cor. 13:5) invites the saints to test themselves. "Examine yourselves," he says to the Corinthians, "to see whether you are holding your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless, of course, you have failed to meet the test."

The challenge here: self-testing to find out whether the stand of the saints is in Christ or not.

It seems to us that we should not lose sight of this meaning of the verb to test. Perhaps it is this attitude of complete openness to God and to ourselves -- inviting him to examine our lives -- that will keep us in final instance from falling into temptation.

II. In the second place, the verb to test or to try is used in a good sense of God and Christ, who put man to the test, so that they -- that is, men -- may prove themselves true.

A. In Genesis 22 we read that God tested Abraham to see whether he would obey him:

Heb. 11:17 "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promise was ready to offer up his only son."

I Cor. 10:13 "No temptation has overcome you that is not common to men. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure."

Let us not forget the testings and trials that come from God to bring out our obedience. The God who tests us, however, is also the one who gives the strength to overcome in every trial.

III. Thirdly, the word to try or to test is used in a bad sense in order to bring out something against the one who is being tested.

A. Jesus was so tested by his opponents.

Matt. 22:15 ff. "Then the Pharisees went and took council how to entangle him in his talk. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position

of men. Tell us, then, what do you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax.' And they brought him a coin. And Jesus said to the, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"

In the same manner the Romans put the Christians to the test at the beginning of the second century. Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia, wrote to the Roman emperor about 112 A.D. Part of his communication reads as follows:

"Meantime this is the course I have taken with those who were accused before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians, and if they confessed, I asked them a second and third time with threats of punishment. If they kept to it, I ordered them for execution." The test was a matter of life and death.

In Russia the Baptists are put to the test by being ridiculed. They -- the Russians -- say that Baptists are dependent upon faith or feeling without reason to support their doctrines. They rely on mysticism and superstition to support their doctrines.

IV. Fourthly, finally: the verb, to test or try, is also used in a bad sense of enticement to sin.

A. James 1:12-15 -- The temptation that springs from man -- "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted with evil; and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown brings forth death."

Temptation, according to James, then originates in man's own desire -- matures into sin -- and brings on death.

B. The temptations also come of Satan or the devil.
He is called the tempter.
He tempts the believer.
He tempts Christ.

The purpose is always to entice, to deceive, to destroy the believer's faith in God.

C. Some conclusions to be drawn from this fourth meaning of testing or trying.

1. At no time does the Bible admit that
 - a. we are the victims of environment or heredity.
Man is always responsible.
 - b. that the outside powers are stronger than God and his grace.
Heb. 4:15 "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning.
Let us, then, with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."

A final word to the young people:

A. What are some of the typical temptations of young people?

1. Temptation to follow the crowd -- the gang.
 - fear of ridicule
 - young people do in groups what they would not do alone
 - It takes courage and deep spiritual convictions to stand alone.My own testimony --
I became a Christian when I was a young man. I had to make the break -- I had to face the ridicule and ostracism of the young people of my age. I have never regretted that I chose Christ instead of crowd behavior.
2. Moral temptations -- sexual purity.
In many respects sexual impurity is the fad in America -- provoked by Hollywood and the T.V. In this respect it is worthwhile to recall the story of the young American artist who went to Rome to study with a group of American artists. This group of artists was sponsored by an American millionaire who had failed to become an artist and instead became rich. "I am keeping myself pure for her."

Dear Christian friends, keep yourselves pure -- pure in thought, pure in action, pure in speech. Pure for the sake of Christ; pure for the sake of your family, for the sake of your beloved one, for the sake of your children, for the sake of your country. Pure for the sake of the world.

Yield not to temptation.