

What About Temptation?

by Norman Grubb

One of the chief objections by the critics of **UNION LIFE** is that we make the life of faith sound too easy. Certainly, life is not a bed of roses. Life is not lived on Cloud Nine.

What about its conflicts, which Paul called "*fightings without and fears within*"? What about those areas of our daily living which appear to contradict a life which we say is not we living it, but He as us? What about those experiences that are certainly temptations, and often appear to be failures and even sins?

Paul and James speak of these aspects of life as temptations and trials, which are translated from the same word in the original Greek. But for convenience we will subdivide our discussion into two areas: (1) temptations, which are enticements to want what we should not, and (2) trials, which confront us with what we don't want, but can't avoid!

First then, temptations are the most troublesome to us until we have them in right focus. They are the reason many people say, "This Christ-in-you-life is not liveable or workable, because of the way we succumb to so many temptations." Yet we know that such temptations are a part of even a perfect human life, because it is said of Jesus that "*He suffered being tempted*" and "*was tempted in all points like as we are.*" The value of this is that "*having suffered being tempted, He is able also to succor those that are tempted.*" And so are we!!

So we squarely face constant temptation on this new level of living, just as much as in the former level. The question is often asked, "What is it in us that is tempted and responds to temptation, if we are this new man in Christ, and say we are dead to sin, and have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts?" The answer is simply that we are human selves, and our oneness with Christ does not alter our two-ness in being He and I. God's whole purpose is to express Himself through our fully human selves, just as He did through Jesus.

So this human self of ours is just as continually tempted as His was. James explains temptation as being the inevitable fact that, as humans, we have all the human appetites of soul and body, for it is by these faculties that God manifests Himself through us. If our humanity is responsive to what we might call the upward temptations of producing the fruit of the Spirit (see how God "tempted" Abraham to sacrifice His son: Gen. 22:1), so also it is fully open and responsive to all downward temptations of the flesh, the world and the devil. And this world consists of every form of solicitation to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, for "*the whole world lies in the wicked one*" (1 John 5:19). To these we have responded all our unsaved days. We have been at home in them. So no wonder we are constantly assailed by such "drawings." James says temptation is being "*drawn away of our own desires and enticed.*" Indeed, temptation definitely makes us want to do what we should not.

Now the vital point is to recognize that temptation is not sin. Scripture clearly states that Jesus was tempted in all points (and that covers a great deal) as we are, and it also says that He was "*without sin.*" That means that He was enticed to do such things and yet never sinned. Therefore, temptation is not sin. We know He was so tempted, because we are given one instance when He did temporarily respond to temptation. That was when He had constantly told His disciples that His Father's will was in Him to die and to rise again; yet when the time came, He plainly said He didn't want to die. He was "enticed" to want to escape death and to live: "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.*" That was temptation, and He plainly experienced it. Of course His victory was: "*Not My will, but Thine be done*"; but it took three hours of bloody sweat to settle the matter. Knowing this

is of great value to us because we are so often tempted and falsely drag our feet under a sense of guilt and condemnation, as we feel these various pulls of soul and body.

Sin only occurs when we go a step further. *“When,”* as James says, *“lust has conceived, it brings forth sin.”* Conception and birth is a product of union. In other words, we have gone beyond the wanting condition to a deliberate conscious choice of doing the thing; but we don’t often go that far.

But now in our union life, a total reversal has taken place—not just a change of our spirit joined to His Spirit, but of the control of our whole personhood, including our soul emotions and body appetites. All are now His property. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Our members are *“instruments of righteousness unto God.”* We are slaves of righteousness, where we used to be slaves of sin. We are *“renewed in the spirit of our minds,”* and every thought is *“brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ.”* There is now this upward pull on our souls and bodies, this upward “temptation” to respond to Him. Our bodies are living sacrifices. We delight to do His will.

This is a radical reversal from our fears of flesh responses, and our constant guarding against them. We have been so accustomed, even as Christians, to seeing ourselves negatively. For example, we have seen sex as so dangerous and so close around the corner that we have been captured by illicit loves; and, close on its heels are greed, love of material things, jealousy, hate and resentment. We have been so afraid of our flesh that we have not been free to fearlessly use our body faculties and soul emotions for Christ and for others.

We therefore, in our new union relationship, take a further step of faith on the soul and body level. We are firm in our faith that we are “kept,” and that He does the keeping—*“Kept by the power of God through faith,”* wrote Peter. *“Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling,”* wrote Jude. And, said John, *“Perfect love casts out fear.”* Then why be fearful?

We have our emotions to use to express our love, joys and interests. We have our intellect to be stretched in daily launches of faith in the God of the impossible. Our bodies too, appetites and all, are to express our love and care for others, without our being fearful of their misuse. That is our new boldness of faith, even though these appetites and emotions have formerly had such a negative hold on us. But fear not. Have faith in the Keeper, who keeps us from sin.

Knowing that through our union with Christ we have the power to be kept from sin, we have had a radical change of outlook on temptation. It used to be something to be fearful of, to avoid, and to be plenty guilty about; now we see temptation as an asset, not a liability! Why and in what sense? Because light must have darkness to shine out of. A temptation is a pull on us to walk again in darkness. But if we now know who we are, we see all our temptations as something God means us to have, and each exactly suitable to us. We see them all as opportunities for Him to manifest Himself through our souls and bodies. Temptation has become opportunity! We understand why James tells us that we are to count all temptations as joy. Christ is manifested by them.

But how can we say that it is Christ who is manifested when we are tempted? Let us look at what we do when we are tempted, and then the remedy for it. We realize that what is happening is that the human part of us is being drawn away by some solicitation to function as our old flesh selves used to. What this means is that we temporarily forget who we are. We forget that we are He in our human forms. We are pulled to respond as if apart from Him. Instead of remaining in our normal daily condition of subconsciously recognizing that we are in a vine-branch union, we are diverted into believing in some attractive flesh-response of body or soul; and what we believe in at any time has us in its grasp.

Now in our former self-striving life, in which we tried to combat temptation and sin in our own strength, we found ourselves responding to it even while we attempted to resist. We even had that inner sense of condemnation as we were dallying with it, and thus we also regarded the actual temptation as sin. But usually the more we resisted and condemned ourselves, the more the thing tightened its hold on us. So we lived this fighting, struggling, supposedly “two-nature” life with one nature resisting the other.

But now in our new understanding, we don't first deny or fight the temptation. We don't resist or struggle against it. No, we admit that we have it and accept it without condemnation, because we recognize it is not sin. It is the normal pull the outer world of flesh has on us as it did on Jesus, and we now know that God means it. But acknowledging and accepting, not resisting the temptation, is that which draws its teeth. What you resist, resists you. What you fight, fights you. So we see the point in Jesus' words: “*Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him; or else he will put you in prison.*” In other words, acknowledge that he is your adversary, and that will take the bite out of him.

Then the result of my accepting and agreeing is that it takes the heat out of my resistance and loosens me from the grip of my false believing in this enticement. As I free the temptation to be a temptation, I equally free myself from being bound to it by my false believing in it as a terrible enemy to be frightened of. And I am free to do what? To remember and recognize who I really am—Christ in me! And recognition is faith in its completed form, which means recognizing that He is the peace when I am tempted to worry; He is the courage as fear is grabbing me; He is the love for a person toward whom I am feeling hate; He is the other-love who can reverse my temptation to an illicit love and cause me to love that one for his benefit and not for my self-gratification.

As He is all these to me, as me, I am the manifestation of peace, love and power. Christ is the light, using the darkness as something which by His swallowing it up manifests Him as light in a new form. If I wasn't tempted to hate, I wouldn't experience and manifest His love. If I wasn't tempted to fear, I wouldn't experience and manifest His courage. If I wasn't tempted to an illicit love, I wouldn't experience and manifest how He expresses His other-love for the benefit of that person through me. My temptations are my assets in continually manifesting Him in new forms.

Therefore we have this totally reversed outlook on our temptations. We used to be frightened of them because, while still thinking we were independent selves, we were afraid of ourselves and how we could be captured by sin. So we would pray, “*Lead us not into temptation.*” But now we see temptation as an adventure of faith! For it is the necessary negative on which the positive of Christ is built. That's why I can say with James that I “*count it all joy*” (a strong total word—*count*, not *feel*) when I have my various temptations.

Let's look a little more closely at the remedy James gives us for the assaults of all kinds of double-mindedness in his strongly practical letter, where we see works not as an antagonist to faith, but as its fulfillment. The question is, how do we add the right kind of works to our faith?

It looks as if we have a constant struggle. James speaks of us having two minds (believing or wavering); two standards in our brotherhood relationships (one for the rich or one for the poor); two tongues (blessing or cursing); two friendships (for the world or for God); two motives in prayer (for self-interest or for others). He mentions all these doubles and speaks of our having a conflict between them, with the negative usually overwhelming the positive.

But let's look more closely at the beautiful remedy James slips in for those eager enough to search it out and find it—or shall we say, to be open to its God-given reality. He puts it in his first chapter in the form of God's goodness in "*begetting us with the word of truth*," his expression for the new birth (1:18). But then, he continues, we get mixed up with all kinds of disturbing self reactions, not yet knowing the remedy for the self problem. He calls it "*all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness*" (1:21). Then what is the answer? It is when by faith the living Word of truth has not only begotten us, but is then engrafted in us. This is his way of describing the vine-branch union relationship when we become inwardly fixed.

Now fixation means that we see ourselves in a union whereby we are forms by which He manifests Himself. James calls that form "*the perfect law of liberty*" (1:25).

He gives this subtle illustration: While we are just ourselves and don't yet know Him in us, as us, we are like a man who looks into a mirror and sees himself merely as his normal helpless self with no hope of changing himself (1:24). So he just goes away and forgets about it. But, James says, when we know the inner union, He in our form, then when look into the mirror, we no longer see our human failing selves, but we see ourselves as who we are—human expressions of that perfect law of liberty (the Spirit of other-love). So now we can go back into life with confidence, because we are no longer just ourselves—we are Christ in us, as us.

From now on we do not meet the conflict of these doubles as though we had two natures, one against other. When we are tempted, we see the temptation as not ourselves, but something seeking to draw us away from who we really are. And we know how to easily and naturally replace that drawing, not by denying or fighting it, but by recognizing Him in us, as us; and He uses the temptation for a new manifestation of Himself by us.

Thus James says that life will always consist of endless trials and temptations, because they are the negative by which He the positive can reveal Himself. Therefore, when we lack wisdom in a situation, and ask for it, we take it for granted that He is in the process of giving it to us. Then come the questionings. Will He really show us what to do? If we were in the old two-nature conflict, we should be swinging between faith and doubt. But knowing we are He in us, we dissolve the temptation by saying, "I'm not taking that temptation to doubt. That is an external assault on me. I'm not double. I'm single, and He is my wisdom." And the stand of faith dissolves the doubt.

The same is true with our new tongue. James says our old tongue is a filthy one, whereas our new tongue glorifies God and blesses man (3:1-18). What then when our tongue slips back into some negative speaking such as James describes when he says, "*Therewith bless we God, even the Father: and therewith curse we men, who are made after the similitude of God*"? Have we then two tongues, and must always swing from the one to the other? No, says James, for we are like a fountain of water which can't produce "*both salt water and fresh*." We know we are a fountain of fresh water. Therefore, the salt is just something which gets mixed up with the water as it flows out of the fountain. It cannot be from the fountain itself. So we recognize the wrong things we said as a slip into sin that doesn't affect the purity of the fountain in our union reality; and it is remedied by a word of repentance and cleansing. We no longer live in a struggle between speaking good and speaking evil. We speak positively and lovingly from our love-source—what James calls "*the wisdom that is from above, not that from beneath*."

James continues by raising the question of motives in prayer, as if they could be double and mainly for our own self-interest (4:1-4). At one time that was so. That made us often question what we were asking for, as if we lived with double motives. But now we don't. Our motives are pure from their pure center, and we go boldly forward in our prayer requests, asking, as Jesus said, "*Whatsoever you desire*." We have become established in this glorious fixed reality where we see ourselves as the expression of the perfect law of

liberty, that law which James also calls *"the royal law according to the Scripture, you shall love thy neighbor as yourself."* And we do that!

We remain unchanged through all the temptations. "I am single, not double." The double assaults are only temptations to divert me from my basic singleness; and that is why temptations are always such an adventure of faith, and the means of perfecting my faith so that I count them all joy (1:1-4). Finally, James calls on the brethren to move into this faith union in Christ, and out from that apparent double-mindedness. *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts you double-minded"* (4:8).

There is one further question—a favorite one— which is always asked with respect to temptation. "But what about sin? Do we still commit sins?" Why do we always bring that up? Because, until we have found a way out, we are congenitally sin-minded. We have become so used to our struggles, failures and guilt—perhaps we also want some confirmation for our continuance in sin!

The favorite Scripture on which we have based that question is 1 John 1:9, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves . . . if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins . . ."* But our anxious concern about sin is what gives us away, for the whole point of this summit letter of John's is not about sinning, but our union reality. We are in the light as He is in the light (for He is the light in us). We walk as He walked (for He is walking in us). We know all truth (for the Spirit is the knower in us). We live the right life, as He does (for the sin spirit in us has been replaced by the Holy Spirit). We love as He loves (because He is love and dwells in us). We believe as He believes (with the world-overcoming faith of the Son of God). We are as He is (for as He is, so are we in this world). It is the total union level. The totally positive level. We are! We are! We know we are!

Because we have our real temptable humanity, John starts his letter with these statements: there is sin, and if we sin there is immediate remedy in His blood. If it is quick sinning, it is quick cleansing; and indeed we add sin to sin if we don't immediately replace the sin and guilt consciousness with a total forgetting of it in Him who says that *"our sins and iniquities He remembers no more."* We go right ahead praising and indeed use even our sin-slips to magnify the grace of God—the loss turned to gain! But then John also adds, *"These things I write unto you that you sin not."* That is all that John has to say in his whole five chapters about the possibility of our sinning. It is a detail to him.

We are Christ-minded, not sin-minded, and we walk so confidently in our new union relationship that John says, *"He that is born of God does not commit sin . . . he cannot sin because he is born of God"* (3:9). We cannot return to sin as a principle, but if we do slip into a sin there is the immediate remedy. But forget it: don't engage in sin-talk and ask sin-questions. Talk Christ-union and live it.