

How to Handle Temptation and Failure

by Norman P. Grubb

"How do you handle temptation and failure?" I was recently asked this question by a pastor anxious to have the right answer for himself and for his people; I found it both profitable and confirming to discuss it with him.

It is the big question of the vast majority of born-again Christians. We want to be Christ-like, but we are caught in the same syndrome of which Paul wrote in Romans 7: "*I delight in the law of God after the inward man ... to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.*"

What is the answer? First and essentially, I must know who I am in Christ, and be consciously, freely, and happily that person. And who I am is most perfectly expressed and defined in Paul's great Galatians 2:20: "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*"

First Paul says, and I must say with him, "*I am crucified with Christ.*" That means in actual fact — not just doctrinally and positionally. My previous fallen I, independent of Christ and in the dominion of Satan and sin, is now cut off from sin as the reigning principle of my life. I am in fact dead to sin and to the indwelling satanic spirit of error.

Regardless of how I *feel*, I have to say it and confess it with my mouth: "*I am crucified with Christ.*" I must say, "*I am dead to sin*" as boldly as when I got saved. Then I said I was no longer lost sinner, but was now justified in Christ as though I had never sinned. All we born-again people have said just that in our own terms, haven't we? And we had to say it by looking away from our lost sin condition and the bondages of which we had become so vividly conscious, and transferring our believing and inner seeing to God's written word, which tells us God sees us as though we had never sinned. We have been justified by faith and so have peace with God. God sees us in Christ as perfect and sinless as Christ Himself.

So now we have to go a step further. In the face of our flesh weaknesses, our temptations, and our lapses into sins, we now boldly say: "*I am dead to sin in Christ. I am crucified with Christ.*" And then further still. Just as I once said, "*not only am I no longer a lost sinner, but now righteous in Christ as He is righteous,*" so now I say, "*not only am I no longer a separated self in an old marriage under sin control, but I am now a newly married self (Rom. 7:4) joined to Christ.*" I carry Paul's Galatians statement through to its completion — that now I live, yet it is not I living, but Christ living in me.

Christ is the Real Person expressed through my human I, totally replacing the spirit of error who previously expressed his sin-self through me. I am not saying Christ lives in me as though side by side with me; rather, He *replaces* the independent me as my real inner self. I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. That is *replacement*, and not just a partnership or relationship between two. It is two having become one, for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." It is He and I as Vine and branch. We operate together as one vine. The vine expresses and reproduces itself in its branch forms, the sap always flowing through the branch and producing the fruit. So now I am Christ being Himself through my human self. I am not just I, Norman Grubb, but Christ expressed in His Norman Grubb form.

In the same way, a body is the head expressing itself in its body form. A body is a head in outer action. When we enter a dark room, we should say, "Turn on the lamp," not "Turn on the light," for it is a light manifested through its lamp form. But we don't even remember that it's a lamp; we just call it a light! So are we in our redeemed form, being called by Jesus the light of the world. For He is not only the One who died for me and is now my Savior; He is also my Indweller — not as a separate one in me, but as my replacement. "*I live, yet not I, but He.*" Christ is my Permanent Identity, and I am His means of manifesting Himself.

Now these are two radical statements:

- 1) that I am crucified with Christ and thus actually dead to sin and the spirit of error, and
- 2) that I am no longer just my Norman Grubb I, but Christ is in such an eternal inner union with me that it is He expressed in my human form. It is difficult to make that confessed word of faith which says straight out, "*I am not I, but Christ in me,*" because for so many years as a born-again Christian I have been such a flesh-conscious, oppressed, failing, guilty, and self-condemning I. How then can I honestly say that this I — so tempted, so often stressed and strained, hurt and angry, resentful and lustful — is not only dead to sin, but is Christ Himself?

First let's get it clear: the human self is always a tempted self, and *temptation is not sin*. We know that because Adam and Eve were tempted before they sinned, and Jesus, the one sinless man, was tempted so totally that He is the only one ever named in the Bible as tempted in every way in which we are tempted, and that is saying a big thing. So I can be as perfect as Christ is perfect, yet constantly tempted in every channel of temptation through my bodily desires or soul emotions or feelings or reactions, or through mental doubts or questionings.

What then is temptation? It is the drawing and pulling of a world which in its fallen condition is totally geared to self-interest and self-gratification (John's "*lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life*"), continually pulling at me to respond to some independent self-reaction or self-desire. James describes it as being "*drawn away by our own lusts and enticed*" (Jas.1:18).

Temptation is a subtle attempt to make my human me forget who I really am (Christ in my human form), and act as if I am back off the cross as an independent human being responding to some drawing of my human desires or appetites. In other words, it is the presence of sin (self-loving desires) enticing me back to the illusion of being my old independent self (not joined to Christ), enticing me to commit spiritual adultery (Jas. 4:4). It is the pull back to that illusory, independent, struggling self that Paul so completely describes in Romans 7:14-24, and from which he says in verses 1-4 we have been delivered by Christ's death cutting us off from the old control of the law. For the law held us in its tight grip while we were independent of God, presented us with impossible demands, and thus exposed us to the realization of our captivity to sin. But now we have died in Christ to being those independent selves in the power of sin, and instead have become united selves to Christ, so that there remains no independent self. "Dead to the law" must mean that there is no separate self on which law can make its demands.

To put it another way, my old marriage to sin and the law of "ought to," which gave sin its control over my independent self, is dissolved eternally in Christ's death, and is replaced in His resurrection by the new marriage in which my Husband has taken over my redeemed human self. This human self is God's beautiful creation in His own likeness, which for a time had been stolen and made captive in a false independence by sin and Satan. But God graciously gave the law to expose our blinded selves to the fact that we were captives in our false independence, so that now we are released to be our true selves.

Therefore, temptation is the agency by which sin would deceive me (Rom. 7:11) and pull me back to the illusion of responding as my old independent self, which was subject to the laws of “you ought” and “you ought not.” Then sin, “*taking occasion by the commandment,*” makes me react as an independent self. I temporarily forget that I am Christ in my human self, and thus in my illusory independence once again I become a slave to sin, doing what I ought not, for the independent I can never fulfill the law.

So there lies the snare. If by temptation I can be tricked and deceived into responding as if separate from who I truly am, I am caught, enslaved, and defeated, and guilt and condemnation then follow. The full implication of Paul’s insistence that I am dead to the law is that this apparently independent I is an illusion, because that “I” comes under the law. Being dead to the law means there remains no independent I for the law to give commands to! The new I — Christ in me and as me — is the law; and thus in my union relationship “*the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in me*”.

So what do I do when temptation pulls at me as though I am an independent self? I act as quickly as I can. I can always be who I am. To be competent in a profession means that I have a settled know-how in the use of my tools. It is perfectly easy and spontaneous for a carpenter to use his tools and make his measurements, because he operates by his inner know-how of how to do his job, and not by the outer tools. His years of apprenticeship and training transferred his outer learning into inner know-how. He now enjoys practicing his profession. Recently when I was admiring the panelling of a friend’s new house, he happened to say, “*Yes, I have a good carpenter. But he would be insulted if you were to tell him how to do his job. You only tell him what to do, not how to do it.*”

We operate happily, freely, and spontaneously when we know our profession by inner know-how. That knowing is *being* (just as the Bible word for knowing always means being mixed with a thing or person), and so we are the carpenter, cook, or doctor. And that is precisely how I *know* I am not I, but Christ, the real me in my human form. The faith that changed the apprentice with his outer learning into the professional with his inner know-how is the same faith by which I possess my possessions (as crucified with Christ, and now Christ replacing me in my resurrected I). Faith, being substance (Heb. 11:1), has become my fixed inner consciousness that this union and replacement is the eternal fact, so that I now live freely, spontaneously, and happily by my permanent know-how.

So when temptation draws me and would grab me, it is now easy for me to transfer my initial tendency to respond as if I’m an independent self back to who I really am. I don’t have to seek and pray and try to find a Christ who will deliver me. I simply recognize myself as crucified with Him. Now He is the real me, and I recognize Him as me. He, the love or purity or power or peace or whatever virtue, swallows up the pull of the attraction. We can’t see two ways at once. When I am drawn to see and respond to some negative temptation, I take the place of faith by denying the existence of this false self with its negative seeing and affirm it as now crucified with Christ. I replace it by the positive seeing of Him as my true self. Then where is the temptation or pull? The positive swallows the negative!

In other words, I don’t fight against darkness in a room, or Stop to condemn it, or struggle against it. I just turn on the light, and where is the darkness? And when we inwardly know we are that light (He in us), it is quite easy to recognize Him in us, and that is how we inwardly turn on the light. Life swallows up death, Paul says, and likewise light swallows up darkness.

Temptation is really a means of temporarily diverting my believing into some flesh attraction, for what the Bible calls unbelief is really negative believing. I am temporarily grabbed by that thing — some fear, depression, tension, lust, resentment, sense of inability, or weakness — and sometimes the hold may last for a long time. As soon as I awake to the hold that a thing has on me through my negative believing in it, then I can always exercise my freedom of will (which is not soul-emotion but spirit-action) and affirm who I am, Christ in me. I do this by the word of faith, quite apart from feeling or reasoning, and I am restored and free.

Above all else, I must rely on Romans 8:1 — no condemnation! James says we are to count temptations all joy (count in spirit, not feel in soul!) because they provide practice in becoming established in faith — in faith of Christ as the real me. So when I am tempted and snap back from illusory self to Him, my true self, then I give thanks and enjoy that little bit of good practice, but I never take condemnation. When His own disciples remained in negative believing — fearing a storm, not having food for the multitude, or no fish, or not believing the resurrection — Christ did not condemn them as sinners, but He did call them "*fools and slow of heart to believe,*" and He did chide them for their lack of faith. So I don't mind being often a fool and a slow believer, but I don't mistake foolishness for sinning. No condemnation!

And if I go beyond temptation and indulge in the thing tempting me, then I have sinned and will undoubtedly feel guilty. But I must not remain in that guilt, for God does not see the sin, but only the blood which cleanses from all sin. So I see the same. I confess (a word in 1 John 1:9 which means "say with," so I am inwardly saying with God, "Yes, I did sin"), then immediately the sin is no longer there. Since He remembers it nor more, neither do I. I immediately change from guilt to praise. That is why it says in Hebrews 9:14 that the blood cleanses the conscience from the dead works. It is adding sin to sin, if I choose to remain guilty instead of replacing it by positive believing that I am righteous as He is righteous.

And I refuse to step into the added false bondage of that illusory self which says, "*I'm sure I'll do it again. How can I be delivered from this wrong habit?*" I am not there to be delivered! I am now Christ in one of His human forms, and all I am told again and again is to walk, walk, walk. And "walk" means that I take one step at a time. So I don't say, "What about that habit grabbing me tomorrow?" Take no thought for the morrow, Jesus said. I only say, "*I am my freed self now. As for tomorrow, He is my keeper. He has taken on the keeping of me. I'll surely do it again unless You keep me, but You are my keeper.*" So I only live in the present.

In order to live the "Not I, but He" life, I *must have* that inner consciousness. That is the faith being substance. When I was saved as a sinner, I had to transfer my negative believing in my sinful condition to my positive believing that Christ is my substitute who bore my sins in His own body on the tree. As I said that word of faith, the Spirit witnessed with my spirit that I am a redeemed child of God, and I live in that consciousness.

In the same way, I now turn my attention (my negative believing) away from my flesh-consciousness as "*the wretched man; who shall deliver me from this body of death,*" and I say the word of faith (positive believing) that I have been crucified with Christ and now I do not live, but He lives in me and as me. Then what happens? Into my inner consciousness (my know-how) comes the inner witness, "*Yes, you are no longer your old lonely you. You are Christ in you, the real you.*" And now, with Paul, in place of saying "*I'm a wretched man,*" I am saying, "*I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord that I am a delivered man, and that He who is the Spirit of life is my real inner self*" (Rom. 8:2).

And the outcome is significant, for it changes my attitude — not just toward Christ, but toward myself. I no longer regard my human self as a wretched liability, always bugging and tormenting me. I now see and accept myself as Christ's precious asset. My human ego is His holy temple, His branch form of Himself the Vine for reproducing fruit, His body agency by which He the Head operates in every phase of saving love activity. So I accept myself and love myself as He accepts and loves me! This is precisely what Paul said when He knew he was Christ in His Paul form. He came out boldly to be himself in all freedom; *"the life I now live in the flesh I live I not Christ lives by faith,"* the inner substantial consciousness of the fact that He loves me; and He gave Himself for me, so I can now give myself for others.

I live spontaneously, for I say with St. Augustine, *"Love God and do as you like!"* I think, I will, I choose, I plan. I? It looks like it, but it is really He. I live with a kind of wink. I, yes I, yet actually He!

In that freedom and spontaneity, temptation is less bothersome, for I am no longer living in suspicious fears and anxious watchfulness lest some temptation grab me again. Job said what we greatly fear comes on us, so that a lot of our temptations come because we are temptation and sin-minded, and fearful of our illusory selves. As we become self-accepting in place of self-fearing, temptations will be all the fewer.

Finally, there is a sense in which we forget God and live. For when I have an inner know-how of my profession, I forget about the know-how and just do my job. I don't keep reminding myself, "I'm a cook, I'm a teacher, I'm an engineer." I just cook, teach, design. I don't keep saying or remembering, "I am Christ in me, I am His human form." I just immerse my human self in my thinking, speaking, and acting — and that *is* Christ.

Actually all this is only the background for living. It helps me find out who I really am in God's eternal predestination of us as sons. It helps me to be who I am, and when I am that person, what am I? I am in my God-union. I am a co-lover, co-savior, and co-worker with Christ in God's eternal outgoing love-purposes and love-action. I move with Paul from knowing Christ in me for my liberation to knowing this same Christ as *"mighty in me towards the Gentiles"* (Gal. 2:8). That is, I know Christ not for my own benefits, but for the sake of others. The inner fountain is now an out flowing river. But that is altogether another aspect of things. It is the third stage — from infancy, through adolescence, to adulthood; from co-crucifixion in Galatians, through co-resurrection in Colossians, to co-ascension in Ephesians; from Christ as our Moses, to Christ as our Joshua, to Christ as our Melchisedek. Daniel puts it simply: *"The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits."* That is the final reality of our Christ-union.