

Why Temptation?

by Pat Mace

How are we to view temptation? Are we to run from it? Or do we pray that God will keep us from it?

Because Jesus knew that the disciples were not mature enough at that time to understand the ways of the Father, He taught them to pray, *“Lead us not into temptation.”* But for those who are mature, James says, *“Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, when you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort, or fall into various temptations”* (1:2, *Amplified*).

James then goes on to tell his readers the purpose of these temptations (vs. 3,4). They will bring out endurance, steadfastness and patience, which we must allow to do a thorough work in us so that we will be fully developed and lacking in nothing.

But what is temptation? In that same chapter of James, verse fourteen tells us that it is being *“drawn away”* and *“enticed”* by our desires. But temptation is not sin. Only when the desire has conceived is it sin (v. 15). Our desires are not wrong, but when we say, *“Given the chance, I will do such and such,”* then it becomes sin. When we *“marry”* the idea, it gives birth to sin. If sin overtakes us, 1 John 1:9 is there to show us that we can confess the sin and get on with living.

Temptation is a negative that has its positive purpose. To me, a negative is the means by which a positive is expressed. One writer calls this *“the law of opposites.”* We know light because of darkness, sweet because of bitter, and on and on. The opposing principle gives meaning or substance to the positive. Because the nucleus or center of the atom is positive, the opposing force, the electrons, are the necessary negative to give the atom validity. Though the positive and negative are in union, there exists a tension between them, and as the negative gives way to the positive, the positive swallows up the negative. But the negative is not bad or wrong, it is just the flip side of the coin.

That is why I see us as God’s wonderful, necessary negative. My spirit is joined to His spirit, the Positive. But my soul (emotions and reason) and body are the negative—His means of expression.

That is where temptation comes in, and I see it as so wonderful. It is the catalyst that sets this positive/negative dynamo in motion. I am pulled out, and tempted downward to commit a sin. My flesh (soul-body) desires this, as it always thinks of itself. It wants, wants, and wants more; it wants to get. I am torn; there is a tension. That’s where I see the death coming in. I go back to Who I am, to my Real Self, who is the Positive (because my spirit is joined to His), and Christ as me dies to the possibility of being for myself—of fulfilling the flesh. The positive swallows up the negative.

It bothers some people when they hear that we are always dying, or rather, Christ as us is continually dying to bring forth life. But, this is the death that Paul speaks about in 2 Corinthians Four. We are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus’ sake that the life of Jesus also may be evidenced through our flesh which is subject to death: death in us—life in others.

But what about the resurrection-life side? First comes the death, then, of course, we see the resurrection life. It is just so wonderful to see how it works out. I finally understand why I experience the inner tension. All Life works on this principle: a kernel of wheat must die before it can yield the harvest.

It is important to see that temptation has a purpose not only for ourselves, but also for others. First and foremost, we must see the purpose of temptation as being for ourselves until we are totally secure; then we can go on to the higher way—seeing our temptations as primarily for others. How could it be any other way if the Other Lover lives in us? We are His means of reaching the world.

An area where this is amply demonstrated is in relationships between the sexes. Our flesh is attracted to a person, thinking it will in some way get something for itself. But we stop and say, “What is going on here?” We recognize that God is using our soul-emotions to get our attention turned toward someone He wants to love through us. At times our emotions can be very strong and the pull is excruciating; nevertheless, we affirm who we really are and speak a word of faith about ourselves. As we die to our flesh desires, His Life is poured out to that other person.

Since there is a Cross in the heart of God, we know that the same Cross is forever operating in us. The Son is continually dying in us so that He, as Light, can be brought forth to others. The catalyst that sets this in motion is our negative pullings, or desires. Sometimes we feel like our flesh will be stretched beyond return. We are pushed to the very edge of our desires, to the very brink of hell. Why? So that Christ as us can die to the possibility of being for ourselves. We have to go back to our center, the Lover of the Universe, and stand fast in who we are. Our flesh will always be torn by this; it is meant to be. Just as a rubber band, when stretched to its limit, leaves a sting when released, so our soul and body will feel the pain. But our Spirit, our True Self, is steadfast and sure.

So, there is nothing wrong with temptations. They are our spring-board for faith. We embrace the negative because we know it is God’s only way of bringing forth Himself as the Positive: Light out of darkness, Strength out of weakness, Life out of death. So, as James says, we can count it all joy, because He alone is our Joy.