

Lies In Disguise—Battling Temptation

By Hannah Whitall Smith

There are many questions surrounding the topic of temptation. Many ask - is it sin? Can I really overcome? Will I ever stop being tempted? We believe this article will shed some much-needed light on this important subject.

*Hannah Whitall Smith was a woman of unwavering faith who practiced what she preached. She was a Quaker minister, the author of several books, and a public speaker. Hannah was also a founding member of the Keswick Movement - a holiness movement started in 1874 in Keswick, England. Hannah had seven children but only three of them lived to adulthood. She was born in Philadelphia in 1832 and moved to England with her husband 56 years later. She died there in 1911, at the age of 79. This article was edited and paraphrased from Chapter 10 of her classic book, **The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life**, which has over a million copies in print.*

- Melody Green, Last Days Ministries

Many great mistakes are made concerning the problem of temptation. First of all, some people seem to think that after becoming a Christian temptations will cease. They think God promises deliverance not only from *yielding* to temptation, but also from *being* tempted.

Next, some make the mistake of viewing temptation as sin. They blame themselves for suggestions of evil, even though they detest them. This brings them into condemnation and discouragement. And since a discouraged soul is easy prey for sin, they often fall due to the very *fear* of falling.

Are Committed Christians Still Tempted?

To solve the first misconception it's only necessary to refer to the many scriptures stating that the Christian life will be full of warfare. Actually, rather than decreasing, temptations generally *increase in strength tenfold* after we've entered into the deeper Christian life. It's there that we're called upon to wrestle against spiritual enemies whose power and skill to tempt us is far superior to that of any enemies we've encountered before. But no amount or type of temptation should lead us to think we haven't really found a true relationship with Christ.

Strong temptations are often more a sign of great grace than of little grace. When the children of Israel first left Egypt, the Lord did not lead them through the country of the Philistines, even though it was the nearest way, "... lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt." (Ex. 13:17) But later, when they learned how to trust God better, He permitted their enemies to attack them. Even in their wilderness journey they met few enemies and fought few battles compared to those they encountered in the Promised Land. It was in the Promised Land that they found seven great nations and 31 kings to be conquered - besides walled cities and giants to be overcome!

The Israelites couldn't have fought their enemies without entering the land where those enemies lived. Therefore, the very power of your temptations, dear Christian, may be one of the strongest proofs that you really are in the land of promise you've been seeking to enter!

Lies In Disguise

Battling With Temptation!

by Hannah Whitall Smith



Is Being Tempted A Sin?

The second misconception is not as easy to deal with. It seems hardly worthwhile to say that temptation is not sin, yet much distress comes from not understanding this fact. The very suggestion of wrong seems to bring such pollution with it that the poor tempted Christian feels horrible - and very far from God - about having such thoughts.

It's like a burglar who breaks into a house and when the owner begins to resist him and drive him out, he turns and accuses the owner of being the thief. This is the enemy's scheme for entrapping us. He comes and whispers suggestions of evil to us - doubts, blasphemies, jealousies, envyings, and pride - then turns and says, "Oh, how wicked you must be to think such things! It's clear you're not trusting God - if you were it would be impossible for these things to enter your heart." The enemy's reasoning sounds so believable, we often accept it as true. This brings us under condemnation and fills us with discouragement - and the enemy knows that when we're discouraged it's easier for temptation to develop into actual sin.

One of the most fatal things in the life of faith is discouragement. One of the most helpful things is confidence. A wise man once said that in overcoming temptations, confidence was the first thing, confidence was the second, and confidence the third. We must expect to conquer! That is why the Lord often said to Joshua, *"Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed... Only be strong and very courageous. (Josh. 1:7, 9)* And it's also the reason He says to us, *"Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."* (John 14:27) The power of temptation is in the fainting of our own hearts. The enemy knows this well and always begins his assaults by discouraging us if he can in any way.

True Humility

Discouragement sometimes arises from what we think is a righteous grief and disgust at ourselves. We are shocked that such things could be tempting to us. But actually, this mortification is coming from the fact that we've been secretly congratulating ourselves, believing that our tastes were too pure, or our separation from the world was too complete, for such things to tempt us. We're discouraged because we've expected something from ourselves and that "something" is not there. This mortification and discouragement may look like true humility, but it's really a far worse condition than the temptation itself. It's only the result of wounded self-love. True humility can bear to see its own utter weakness and foolishness revealed, because it never expected anything from itself. True humility knows its only hope and expectation must be in God. Therefore, instead of discouraging the humble soul from trusting, such revelations drive it to a deeper and more utter trust. But the counterfeit humility that self-love (or pride) produces plunges the soul into the depths of discouragement without faith and can drive it into the very sin about which it's so distressed.

Here is an allegory which illustrates this wonderfully: Satan called a meeting of his servants to talk about how they could make a good man sin. One evil spirit said, "I'll make him sin by setting the pleasures of sin before him. I'll tell him of sin's delights and the rich rewards it brings." "That won't work," said Satan. "He's tried sin and knows better than that." Then another demon said, "I'll make him sin by telling him of the pains and sorrows of virtue. I'll show him virtue has no delights and brings no rewards." "That won't do either," cried Satan, "for he walks in virtue and knows Wisdom's ways are *'pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace.'*" (Prov. 3:17) "Well," said another evil spirit, "I'll make him sin by discouraging his soul." "Ah, that *will* do it!" cried Satan. "We'll conquer him now!"

An old writer said, "All discouragement is from the devil." I wish every Christian would make this a motto and realize he must flee from discouragement just as he'd flee sin. But if we fail to recognize the truth about temptation, this is impossible. The Bible says, *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation"* and we're exhorted to *"count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations."* (James 1:2) Temptation, thus, cannot be sin.

Our Responsibility

It's no more a sin to hear the whispers of evil in our souls than it is to hear the wicked talk of bad men as we pass them in the street. *The sin comes, in either case, only by our stopping and joining in with them!* If we keep turning these evil whisperings over and over in our minds, rolling them under our tongues, and dwelling on them with half consent of our will as being true, then we sin! But when the wicked suggestions come, if we turn from them at once, as we would from wicked talk in the street, we do not sin. We may be enticed by temptations a thousand times a day without sin. But if we begin to think these enticings are actual sin, the battle is half-lost already, and the sin can hardly fail to gain a complete victory.

A Victory Story A dear lady once came to me in great distress because she didn't understand the truth about temptation. She'd been a contented Christian for some time and was so free from temptation she almost thought she'd never be tempted again. But suddenly, she was attacked by a very odd form of temptation and it horrified her. She found that the moment she started to pray all sorts of terrible thoughts rushed into her mind. She had lived a very sheltered and innocent

life. In light of this - and the fact that these thoughts were so awful - she felt she must be one of the most wicked sinners to even be *capable* of having them. She began thinking she must not have really been horn again and her soul was in agony. I told this dear lady that these dreadful thoughts were simply temptations - that she wasn't to blame for them any more than she'd be blamed for happening to hear a wicked man blaspheme in her presence. I urged her to recognize them as temptations and to turn and commit them to the Lord immediately. I explained that the enemy had gained a great advantage by making her think the thoughts were her own, and that thinking this way had plunged her into condemnation and discouragement. I assured her she'd find speedy victory if she paid no attention to these thoughts - but instead turned her back on them and looked to the Lord.

She grasped the truth, and the next time these blasphemous thoughts came, she said to the enemy. "I've found you out. *You* are suggesting these dreadful thoughts. I hate them and I'll have nothing to do with them. The Lord is my helper. Take these thoughts to Him, and settle them in His presence." The baffled enemy, finding him-self discovered, immediately fled in confusion, and her soul was perfectly delivered.

If a Christian recognizes that a suggestion of evil is from the enemy, Satan knows he'll reject it sooner than he would if he thinks it's coming from his own mind. If the devil prefaced each temptation with the words, "I am the devil, your relentless enemy; I have come to make you sin," I suppose we'd hardly feel any desire to yield to his suggestions. He has to hide himself to make his snare attractive. Our victory will be gained much more easily if we're not ignorant of his devices, but recognize them at his very first approach.

Enduring Makes Us Strong

We make another great mistake by thinking that all the time spent in combating temptation is lost - hours pass in battle and we seem to make no progress. But often we've been serving God far more truly during these hours than in our times of comparative freedom from temptation. For we're fighting our Lord's battles when we're fighting temptation, and hours are often worth days under these circumstances. We read, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation,*" and I'm sure this means enduring the continuance of it and its frequent recurrence. (*James 1:12*)

Nothing grows patience as much as enduring temptation, and nothing so drives the soul to an utter dependence upon the Lord Jesus as it continues. And finally, nothing brings more praise and honor and glory to our Lord Himself than the trial of our faith that comes through manifold temptations. We are told that the proof of our faith is "*more precious than gold... even though tested by fire,*" and that we who patiently endure will receive for our reward "*the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*" (*1 Pet. 1:7, James 1:12*) We should not marvel at the opening exhortation in the book of James. "*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations: knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*" Temptation is something God can turn around and use as an instrument to help complete our perfection. Thus sin's own weapons are turned against itself, and we see how all things, even temptations, can work together for good to them that love God. (*Rom. 8:28*)

The Way To Victory

The way of victory over temptation is by faith, which is, of course the foundation upon which our whole Christian life rests. Our one great theme must be: "We are nothing. Christ is all!" Once we've discovered our utter helplessness, we learn the only way to deal with temptation is to hand it over to the Lord and trust Him to conquer it for us. But when we put it into His hands we must leave it there, which I think is the greatest difficulty of all. It seems impossible to believe that the Lord can or will manage our temptations without our help - especially if they don't immediately disappear. To go on patiently "enduring" a continuing temptation without yielding to it or snatching ourselves out of the Lord's hands is a wonderful victory for our impatient natures. It's a victory we must gain if we want to please God.

We must commit ourselves to the Lord for victory over our temptations just as we committed ourselves at first for forgiveness. We must leave ourselves as totally in His hands for one as for the other. Thousands of Christians have done this and can testify to marvelous victories over countless temptations. They've actually become "more than conquerors" through Him who loves them.

It's my strong desire for Christians to be delivered from the bondage they fall into when they don't understand the true nature and use of temptation. When temptation is recognized as temptation - and not confused with sin - we can immediately say, "*Get thee behind me, Satan!*" We'll know that "*when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.*" (*Is. 59:19*) Then we can walk through the most aggressive assaults with unclouded and triumphant peace!

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