

Tackling Temptation
James 1:12-18
Matthew 6: 9-13

The sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer is about temptation and evil in life: "Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil." This petition comes right after asking for forgiveness of sin. The Lord Jesus shows us how we can prevent committing sin after forgiveness of our sin. The disease of sin originates from temptation and concludes with evil.

Everybody knows the story of Adam and Eve. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is all about the temptation by the serpent. The serpent tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve were tempted by the Serpent's suggestion, ate the forbidden fruit and fell into sin and the destiny of death. This is the first story of human tragedy in the Bible.

God created humans, who had free will. That means humans can do either wrong or right. If a thing is free to be good, it is also free to be bad. And, free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give humans free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, it is also the only thing that makes possible love or goodness or joy worth having. However, where there is free will, there is temptation to do bad also.

Human beings have the power of self determination, according to their own free will, which God offered. So, every decision that is made is made by human free will, and consequently, humans should take responsibility for their decisions. This is our understanding of the human being. But, there is a certain power which is evil that tempts us to fall into evil traps in life. But, why would we confront temptation? To explain this question, I have reflected on Christian philosophy which Christian churches have believed throughout history.

There are two kinds of philosophical ideas regarding God and Evil: monotheism and dualism—a single, good, almighty source of being, verses two equal, uncreated, antagonistic Powers, one good and the other bad. One is the Christian view, called monotheism, which believes in a good world that has gone wrong, but still retains the memory of what it ought to have been.

The other view, called Dualism, is the belief that there are two equal and independent powers at the root of everything, one of them good and the other bad. Dualism is the belief that this universe is the battlefield in which they fight out an endless war. In Christian philosophy, we do not accept the idea of two, conditioned and mutually independent beings as self-grounded, self-comprehending and absolute. Christians believe in two opposite essences, good and evil, but evil is not equally powerful as God. In the world, light and darkness cannot co-exist at the same time. Where there is light, darkness cannot exist. Likewise, the power of evil is not absolute like God. As evil is compared to darkness, and God to light, evil is a temporal being in this world and not an eternal being.

In some sense, Christianity is much nearer to Dualism than one might think. One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talked so much about a Dark Power in the universe – a mighty evil spirit who was held to be the Power behind death and disease, and sin. The difference is that Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God, and was good when it was created, but went wrong. Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But, it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel.

Sun has started packing for our move. One day, she spent all day packing, and then when I came back home from church, she asked me to take her on an outing for some fresh air. We went shopping at the Frontier Mall. There were many things there, tempting us to purchase. Actually, just to go outside is to be tempted. It is no sin to be tempted when life honorably brings the temptation; it is sin only to fall, for strength beyond our own strength is available to us. But, we should never be sure of ourselves. Yet, how sure we are!

I would like to share the Bible message regarding temptation and evil. First, there are two kinds of temptations in terms of test or trial: one from God and the other from Satan.

God tests His people whom He loves and people who love Him. God loved Abraham who obeyed Him always, and God tested him to know whether he really trusted Him or not. God asked him to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering. As Abraham was trying to give his son, Isaac, as burnt offering, God stopped him and He called to him, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Do not lay a hand on the boy!” God said, “Now I know that you fear God.” God blessed him, “I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.”

The Apostle James testified in James 1:2-3, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” And, he said again, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12) God sometimes tests whom He loves so that they might get up higher and higher in the grace of God after the testing.

The other kind of temptation is from evil. This temptation is different from the test from God. This temptation from evil is to drag down someone who loves God from the grace of God, and to separate them from God. Satan uses greed that we have as a means of temptation. James clarifies, “We know that God does not tempt us – this is the work of our own lusts and the enemy.” (James 1:13)

Greed is the problem always. It leads our life into temptation and makes us fall into sin. The Apostle James said, “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me,’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” He diagnoses, “Then, after

desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” The Korean Bible translates “desire” into “greed.” (James 1:15)

Second, human beings are vulnerable and weak, so it is easy to be tempted by Satan. The Apostle Paul confesses that he is vulnerable to be tempted by Satan in Romans 7:15: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature, for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.” He admits his weakness, “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body.”

Temptation comes with our desires and conflicts with our faith. In Paul’s testimony, it brings conflict between the law of God and the law of the body. Ironically, in our self there are two tendencies—one to follow God’s will, and another to follow desires. Paul found that there are two laws, the law of God and the law of the body in us. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful person is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by sinful nature cannot please God. (Romans 8:15-8) The Apostle Paul said of himself, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

Lastly, we cannot defeat Satan’s temptation by the power of our free will only. According to the Apostle Paul, we human beings cannot resist the temptation of evil by our free will. So, the Lord Jesus taught us how to prevent the temptation and be delivered from evil. We need God’s help and His Spirit not to fall into temptation. C. S Lewis says, “To love means to be weakened.” To keep from being hurt, we should not give our hearts to anybody, not even to a pet! Except heaven, there is no place to keep love from the dangers in the world.

However, this world is not a place to escape from temptation and evil, but a place for us to wrestle with temptation and evil. The Lord Jesus said, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.” (John 17:15) Similarly, the Apostle Paul encourages us, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But, when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Temptation by evil is real in our daily life, and it is not fantasy and cannot be ignored because it brings diseases of sin when we fall into its trap. The temptation comes subtly, suddenly, camouflaged, with weapons appropriate for each walk and decade of our life. But, don’t be discouraged that we are too weak to resist the temptation of evil. We have the power of prayer!

Last Thursday, at midnight, I struggled with some power. A powerful woman grasped me from my back and threatened to kill me. She was so powerful that I couldn't resist her and I sensed that she was Satan. I asked my Lord, "Lord I believe you that you would strengthen me. And then I shouted, "Satan! Get away from me." Then, Satan disappeared. Then, Sun shook me from my sleep, saying, "Did it get away?" I said, "Yeah." And I went backed to sleep.

The prayer in my sleep confesses also that only God's power can save us. Only he can deliver. (Matthew 26:39) Without prayer, it is impossible, but with prayer everything is possible. The Lord said, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Matthew 26:41) The Lord also taught us how to prayer, "Lord, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Rely on God's will, and will be a way to overcome it, whatever the temptation is. The Lord Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will." That is absolute trust in God, power.