

George Whitefield

Sermon 19

Christ the Support of the Tempted

Matthew 6:13, "Lead us not into temptation."

The great and important duty which is incumbent on Christians, is to guard against all appearance of evil; to watch against the first risings in the heart to evil; and to have a guard upon our actions, that they may not be sinful, or so much as seem to be so. It is true, the devil is tempting us continually, and our own evil hearts are ready to join with the tempter, to make us fall into sins, that he thereby may obtain a victory over us, and that we, my brethren, may be his subjects, his servants, his slaves; and then by-and-by he will pay us our wages, which will be death temporal, and death eternal. Our Lord Jesus Christ saw how his people would be tempted; and that the great enemy of their souls would lay hold of every opportunity, so he could but be a means of keeping poor sinners from coming to the Lord Jesus Christ; hurrying you with temptation, to drive you to some great sins; and then if he cannot gain you over, sell it to a smaller, and suit his temptations time after time; and when he finds none of these things will do, often transform himself into an angel of light, and by that means make the soul fall into sin, to the dishonor of God, and the wounding of itself; the Lord Jesus, I say, seeing how liable his disciples, and all others, would be to be overcome by temptation, therefore advises them, when they pray, to beg that they might not be led into temptation. It is so dangerous to engage so subtle and powerful an enemy as Satan is, that we shall be overcome as often as we engage, unless the Lord is on our side. My brethren, if you were left to yourselves, you would be overcome by every temptation with which you are beset.

These words are part of the prayer which Christ taught his disciples; and I shall, therefore, make no doubt, but that you all believe them to be true, since they are spoken by one who cannot lie. I shall,

I. Show you who it is that tempts you.

II. Shall show, my brethren, why he tempts you.

III. Mention some of the ways and means he makes use of, to draw you over to his temptations.

IV. Let you see how earnest you ought to be to the Lord, that he may preserve you from being led into temptation.

V. I shall make some application by way of entreaty unto you, to come unto Christ, that he, my brethren, may deliver you from being tempted.

I. FIRST, We are to consider who it is that tempts us.

And the tempter is Satan, the prince of the power of the air, he that now ruleth in the children of disobedience; he is an enemy to God and goodness, he is a hater of all truth. Why else did he slander God in paradise? Why did he tell Eve, "You shall not surely die?" He is full of malice, envy, and revenge; for what reasons else could induce him to molest innocent man in paradise? The person that tempts ye, my brethren, is remarkable for his subtlety; for having not power given him from above, he is obliged to wait for opportunities to betray us, and to catch us by guile; he, therefore, made use

of the serpent to tempt our first parents; and to lie in wait to deceive, is another part of his character. And though this character is given of the devil, if we were to examine our own hearts, we should find many of the tempter's characters legible in us.

Do not many of you love to make a lie? And if it is done in your trade; you therefore look on it as excusable; but whether you believe it or not, it is sinful, it is exceedingly sinful. Though you may value yourselves as fine rational creatures, and that you are noble beings; and you were so, as you first came out of God's hands; but now you are fallen, there is nothing lovely, nothing desirable in man; his heart is a sink of pollution, full of sin and uncleanness: Yet, though a man's own heart is so desperately wicked, he is told by our modern polite preachers, that there is a fitness in men, and that God seeing you a good creature, gives you his grace; but this, though it is a modern, polite, and fashionable way of talking, is very unscriptural; it is very contrary to the doctrines of the Reformation, and to our own Articles. But however contrary to the doctrines of the Church of England, yet our pulpits ring of nothing more, than doing no one any harm, living honestly, loving your neighbor as yourselves, and do what you can, and then Christ is to make up the deficiency: this is making Christ to be half a savior, and man the other part; but I say, Christ will be your whole righteousness, your whole wisdom, your whole sanctification, or else he will never be your whole redemption. How amazing is it, that the ministers of the church of England should speak quite contrary to what they have subscribed! Good God! If these are the guides of the ignorant, and esteemed to be the true ministers of Jesus, because they have a great share of letter-learning; when at the same time they are only the blind leaders of the blind; and without a special Providence, they both will fall into the ditch.

No wonder at people's talking of the fitness and unfitness of things, when they can tell us, that the Spirit of God, is a good conscience, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost are consequent thereupon. But this is wrong; for it should be said, the Spirit of God, are the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and a good conscience consequent thereupon. Seneca, Cicero, Plato, or any of the heathen philosophers, would have given as good a definition as this; it means no more than reflecting we have done well.

But let these modern, polite gentlemen, and let my letter-learned brethren, paint man in as lovely colors as they please, I will not do it; I dare not make him better than the word of God does. If I was to paint man in his proper colors, I must go to the kingdom of hell for a copy; for man is by nature full of pride, subtlety, malice, envy, revenge, and all uncharitableness; and what are these but the temper of the devil? And lust, sensuality, pleasure, these are the tempers of the beast. Thus, my brethren, man is half a beast, and half a devil, a motley mixture of the beast and devil. And this is the creature, who has made himself so obnoxious to the wrath of God, and open to his indignation, that is told, that he must be part his own savior, by doing good works, and what he cannot do Christ will do for him.

This is giving the tempter great room to come in with his temptation; he may press a soul to follow moral duties, to go to church, take the sacrament, read, pray, meditate; the devil is well content you should do all these; but if they are done in your own strength, or if you go no farther than here, you are only going a smoother way to hell.

Thus, my brethren, you may see who it is that tempts us. But

II. Why he tempts you, is the second thing I am to show you.

It is our of envy to you, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, he endeavors to keep you from closing with Jesus; and if he can but keep you from laying hold by faith on Christ, he knows he has you safe enough; and the more temptations you are under, and according to their nature and greatness, you are more hurried in your minds; and the more unsettled your thoughts and affections are, the more apt you are to conclude, that if you were to go to Christ, at present, in all that hurry of mind, he would

not receive you; but this is a policy of the tempter, to make you have low and dishonorable thoughts of the blessed Jesus; and so by degrees he works upon your minds, that you are careless and indifferent about Christ. This, this, my brethren, is the design of the tempter. Nothing will please him more, than to see you ruined and lost forever. He tempts you for that end, that you may lose your interest in Jesus Christ, and that you may dwell with him and apostate spirits to all eternity. He knows that Jesus Christ died for sinners, yet he would fain keep souls from seeking to this city of refuge for shelter, and from going to Gilead for the true balm.

It is he that rules in thy heart, O scoffer, O Pharisee; the devil reigns there, and endeavors to blind your eyes, that you shall not see what danger you are in, and how much evil there is in those hearts of yours; and as long as he can keep you easy and unconcerned about having your hearts changed, he will be easy; though if he can, he will tempt you to sin against him, until you are hardened in your iniquity. O, my brethren, do not give the devil a handle wherewith he may lay hold on you; alas! it is not wonder that the devil tempts you, when he finds you at a play, a ball, or masquerade; if you are doing the devil's work, it is no wonder if he presses you in the continuation thereof; and how can any say, "Lead us not into temptation," in the morning, when they are resolved to run into it at night? Good God! Are these persons members of the church of England? Alas, when you have gone to church, and read over the prayers, it is offering no more than the sacrifice of fools; you say Amen to them with your lips, when in your hearts you are either unconcerned at what you are about, or else you think that the bare saying of your prayers is sufficient, and that then God and you have balanced accounts.

But, my dear brethren, do not deceive yourselves, God is not to be mocked. You are only ruining yourselves for time and eternity. You pray, "lead us not into temptation," when you are tempting the devil to come and tempt you.

III. I shall now point out some of the ways and means, he makes use of to draw you to himself.

But this is a field so large, and I have but just begun to be a soldier of Jesus Christ, that I cannot name many unto you. I shall therefore be very short on this head.

1. He endeavors to make you think sin is not so great as it is; that there is no occasion of being so over-strict, and that you are righteous over-much; that you are ostentatious [showy, pompous, egotistical], and will do yourself harm by it; and that you will destroy yourselves. He shows you, by brethren, the bait, but he hides the hook; he shows you the pleasure, profits, and advantages, that attend abundance of this world's goods; but he does not show you crosses, losses and vexations that you may have while you are in the enjoyment of the blessings of this world.

2. When he finds he cannot allure you by flattery, he will try you by frowns, and the terrors of this world; he will stir up people to point at you, and cry, "Here comes another troop of his followers;" He will stir them up to jeer, scoff, backbite, and hate you; but if he still finds this will not do, then he throws doubts, my brethren, and discouragement in your mind, whether the way you are in is the true way or not; or else he will suggest, What! Do you expect to be saved by Christ? Also, He did not die for you; you have been too great a sinner; you have lived in sin so long, and committed such sins against Christ, which he will not forgive. Thus he hurries poor sinners almost into despair.

And very often, when the people of God are met to worship him, he sends his agents, the scoffers, to disturb them. We saw an instance of their rage just now; they would fain have disturb us; but the Lord was on our side, and so prevented all the attempts of wicked and designing men, to disturb and disquiet us. Lord Jesus, forgive them who are thus persecuting thy truth! Jesus, show them that they are fighting against thee, and that it is hard for them to kick against the pricks! These, my brethren, are some of the ways Satan takes, in is temptations, to bring you from Christ. Many more might be

named; but these are sufficient, I hope, to keep you on your guard, against all that the enemy can do to hinder you from coming to Christ.

IV. I come to show you, how earnest you ought to be with Jesus Christ, either not to suffer you to be led into temptations, or to preserve you under them.

And here, my dear brethren, let me beseech you to go to Jesus Christ; tell him, how you are assaulted by the evil one, who lies in wait for your souls; tell him, you are not able to master him, in your own strength; beg his assistance, and you shall find him ready to help you; ready to assist you, and to be your Guide, your Comforter, your Savior, your All; He will give you strength to resist the fiery darts of the devil; and, therefore, you can no where find one so proper to relieve you, as Jesus Christ; he knows what it is to be tempted; he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, and he will give you the assistance of his Spirit, to resist the evil one, and then he will fly from you. In Christ Jesus you shall have the strength you stand in need of, the devil shall have no power; therefore fear not, for in the name of the Lord we shall overcome all our spiritual Amalekites. Let the devil and his agents rage, let them breathe out threatenings, yes, let them breathe out slaughters, yet we can rejoice in this, that Jesus Christ hath them in his power, they shall go no farther than he permits them; they may rage, they may rage horribly, but they can go no farther, until they have got more power from on high.

If they could do us what mischief they would, very few of us should be permitted to see our habitations any more; but, blessed be God, we can commit ourselves to his protection; he has been our protector hitherto, he will be so still. Then earnestly entreat of the Lord to support you under those temptations, which the devil may assault you with; he is a powerful adversary, he is a cunning one too; he would be too hard for us, unless we have the strength of Christ to be with us. But let us be looking up unto Jesus, that he would send his Spirit into our hearts, and keep us from falling. O my dear brethren in Christ Jesus, how stands it now between God and your souls? Is Jesus altogether lovely to your souls? Is he precious unto you? I am sure, if you have not gone back from Christ, he will not from you; he will root out the accursed things of this world, and dwell in your hearts. You are candidates for heaven; and will you mind earth? What are all the pleasures of earth, without an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ? And one smile from him is more to be desired than rubies, yea more than the whole world.

O you who have found Jesus Christ assisting you, and supporting you under all the temptations of this life, will you forsake him? Have you not found him a gracious master? Is he not the chiefest of ten thousand, and altogether lovely? Now you see a form and comeliness in Christ, which you never saw before. O! how do you and I wish we had known Jesus sooner, and that we had more of his love; it is condescending love, it is amazing, it is forgiving love, it is dying love, it is exalted and interceding love, and it is glorified love. Methinks when I am talking of the love of Jesus Christ, who loved me before I love him; he saw us polluted in blood, full of sores, a slave to sin, to death and hell, running to destruction, then he passed by me, and said unto my soul, "Live;" he snatched me as a brand plucked from the burning. It was love that saved me, it was all of the free grace of God, and that only. The little experience I have had of this love, makes me amazed at the condescension, the love, and mercifulness of the blessed Jesus, that he should have mercy upon such a wretch. O, my brethren, the kingdom of God is within me, and this fills me so full of love, that I would not be in my natural state again, not for millions of millions of worlds; I long to be with Jesus, to live with the Lord that bought me, to live forever with the Lamb that was slain, and to sing Hallelujah's unto him. Eternity itself will be too short to set forth the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot, indeed I cannot forbear speaking again, and again, and again, of the Lord Jesus.

And if there are any here who are strangers to this love of the Lord Jesus Christ, do not despair; come, come unto Christ, and he will have mercy upon you, he will pardon all your sins, he will heal all your backslidings, he will love you freely, and take you to be with himself.. Come therefore, O my guilty brethren, unto Jesus, and you shall find rest for your souls. You need not fear, you need

not despair, when God has had mercy upon such a wretch as I; and he will save you also, if you will come unto him by faith.

Why do ye delay? What! Do you say, you are poor, and therefore ashamed to come? It is not your poverty that Christ mindeth; come in all your rags, in all your pollution, and he will save you. Do not depend upon any thing but the blood of Jesus Christ; do not stand out an hour longer, but give your hearts to Christ, give him the firstlings of the flock; come unto him now, lest he should cut you off before you are prepared, and your soul be sent to that pit from whence there is no redemption.

Do not waver, but give him that which he desires, your hearts; it is the heart the Lord Jesus Christ wanteth; and when you have an inward principle wrought in your hearts by this same Jesus, then you will feel the sweetness and pleasure of communion with God. O consider, my brethren, the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, in dying for you; and are you resolved to slight his dying love? Your sins brought Christ from heaven, and I humbly pray to the Lord that they may not be a means of sending you to hell. What language will make you leave your sins and come to Christ? O that I did but know! And that it lay in my power to give you this grace; not one of you, not the greatest scoffer here should go hence before he was changed from a natural to a spiritual life; then, then we would rejoice and take sweet council together; but all this is not in my power; but I tell you where you may have it, even of the Lord Jesus; he will give it to you, if you ask it of him, for he has told us, "Ask, and you shall receive;" therefore ask of him, and if you are repulsed again and again, entreat him more, and he will be unto you as he was to the poor Syrophenician woman, who came to Christ on account of her daughter; and is she was so importunate to him for a body, how much more should we be solicitous for our souls? If you seek to him in faith, his answer will be to you as it was to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee, be it as thou wouldest have it."

O, do not forsake the seeking of the Lord; do not, I beseech you, neglect the opportunities which may be offered to you, for the salvation of your souls; forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, to build up and confirm and strengthen those who are weak in faith; to convince sinners, that they may feel the power of God pricking them in their hearts, and make them cry out, "What must we do to be saved?"

The devil and his agents have their clubs of reveling, and their societies of drunkenness; they are not ashamed to be seen and heard doing the devil their master's works; they are not ashamed to proclaim him; and sure you are not ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ; you dare proclaim that Jesus, who died that you might live, and who will own you before his Father and all the holy angels; Therefore, dare to be singularly good; be not afraid of the face of man; let not all the threats of the men of this world move you; what is the loss of all the grandeur, or pleasure, or reputation of this life, compared to the loss of heaven, of Christ and of your souls? And as for the reproaches of the world, do not mind them; when they revile you, never, never revile again; do not answer railing with railing; but let love, kindness, meekness, patience, long-suffering, be found in you, as they were in the blessed Jesus; therefore, I beseech you, do not neglect the frequent coming together, and telling each other, what great things Jesus Christ hath done for your souls.

I do not now, as the Pharisees say I do, encourage you to leave your lawful callings, and your business, in which God, by his providence, hath placed you; for you have two callings, the one a general, and the other a special one; it is your duty to regard your families, and if you neglect them out of any pretense whatever, as going to church or in societies, you are out of the way of your duty, and offering that to God which he commanded you not. But then, my brethren, you are to take care that the things of this life do not hinder the preparing for that which is to come; let not the business of the world make you unmindful of your souls; but in all your moral actions, in the business of life, let all be done with a view to the glory of God, and the salvation of your souls.

The night draws on, and obliges me to hasten to a conclusion; though, methinks, I could speak until my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth, yes, until I could speak no more, if it was to save your souls from the paws of him who seeketh to devour you.

Therefore let me beseech you, in all love and compassion; Consider, you, who are Pharisees; you, who will not come to Christ, but are trusting to yourselves for righteousness; who think, because you lead civil, honest, decent lives, all will go well at last; but let me tell you, O ye Pharisees, that harlots, murderers, and thieves, shall enter the kingdom of God before you. Do not flatter yourselves of being in the way to heaven, when you are in the broad way to hell; but if you will throw away your righteousness and come to Christ, and be contented to let Jesus Christ do all for you, and in you, then Christ is willing to be your Savior; but if you bring your good works with you, and think to be justified on the account of them, you may seek to be justified by them forever, and never be justified; no, it is only the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth us from the filth and pollution of all our sins; and you must be sanctified before you are justified. As for good works, we are justified before God without any respect to them, either past, present, or to come: when we are justified, good works will follow our justification, for we can do no good works, until we are cleansed of our pollution, by the sanctification of the Spirit of God.

O ye scoffers, come and see this Jesus, this Lord of glory whom you have despised; and if you will but come to Christ, he will be willing to receive you, notwithstanding all the persecution you have used towards his members; However, if you are resolved to persist in your obstinacy, remember, salvation was offered to you, that Christ and free grace were proposed; but you refused to accept of either, and therefore your blood will be required at your own hands.

I shall only say this unto you, that however you may despise either me or my ministry, I shall not regard it, but shall frequently show you your danger, and propose to you the remedy; and shall earnestly pity and pray for you, that God would show you your error, and bring you home into his sheepfold, that you, from ravenous lions, may become peaceful lambs.

And as for you, O my brethren, who desire to choose Christ for your Lord, and to experience his power upon your souls, and as you do not find your desires and prayers answered; go on, and Christ will manifest himself unto you, as he does not unto the world; you shall be made to see and feel this love of Jesus upon your souls; you shall have a witness in your own breast, that you are the Lord's; therefore, do not fear, the Lord Jesus Christ will gather you with his elect, when he comes at that great day of accounts, to judge every one according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil; and, O that the thought of answering to God for all our actions, would make us more mindful about the consequences that will attend it.

And now let me address all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to accept of mercy and grace while it is offered to you; Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation; and will you not accept it, now it is offered unto you? Do not stand out one moment longer; but come and accept of Jesus Christ in his own way, and then you shall be taken up at the last day, and be with him forever and ever; and sure this should make you desirous of being with that Jesus who has done so much for you, and is not interceding for you, and preparing mansions for you; where may we all arrive and sit down with Jesus to all eternity!

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, &c