

Section Six - The Victorious Heart

Overcoming

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. [1 John 2:15-17]

There are three main avenues of temptation, lust of the flesh (selfishness), lust of the eyes and pride. These three ways we can be tempted can be seen in operation in the three temptations of Jesus Christ in the wilderness. [Matt 4, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1] We need to humble ourselves and ask for God's mercy to reveal to us if we have fallen into pride. It is not hard to notice if we are subject to lustful eyes, the lusts of the flesh (selfishness) are probably for many the most common form of temptation.

Temptation

After we have fully presented ourselves to God we can then step out all shiny and new in our fresh victorious life style but then what do we do? We stumble and respond badly when under pressure.

"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived (taken root in the heart) it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death." [Jas 1:14-15]

We are not talking about spontaneous reactions here although they can be profoundly revealing. We are talking about ungodly desires that we watch growing in us and we do not defuse them but we allow them to grow until we give in and indulge ourselves. We usually indulge in unloving and selfish ways because we have toyed with the idea in our minds for far too long beforehand. We need to develop the skill of noticing selfish desires and fears as soon as they start to affect us and trample them down immediately.

We need to watch over and protect our hearts like a soldier should when guarding a city. He should be vigilant so that when he sees the enemy coming he can warn the city to prepare to defend itself. So often we indulge ourselves by enjoying and playing with the temptation and then wonder why we gave in. We should wise up and respond quickly when temptation visits us. Otherwise when we do wake up to what is going on it feels like the enemy is not just burning down the city gates but has almost taken the whole city. We must learn to recognise temptation early and deal with it promptly.

Understanding the nature of temptation will help us to recognise it early. Temptation is an attempt by evil spirits to get you to absorb their attitudes. They fire arrows of fear into our selfishness and emotional pain, stand back and hope for us to respond badly. They often hijack a legitimate feeling and try to inflame it and turn it into an illegitimate lust. A lust is often an over desire for something that in its right place may not necessarily be wrong.

It is legitimate to desire food when hungry but not to use it to try and comfort other pains that only God can heal. It is legitimate to desire friendships but not to use them to form our own identity that only God can form. There is no harm in treating yourself

occasionally to something you enjoy, but if you are not careful you can start to over desire these things and become self-indulgent and become full of lust and strife.

The desire not to impose on others can be turned into self-sufficiency and independence, for it is not healthy for anyone to try to be an island. We all like to be respected but if you achieve this by deceit you are the one deceived most of all. Genuine grief should not be allowed to be exploited by self-pity. An uninhibited person should not overcome their insecurities by being domineering, just as a shy person should not try to overcome their insecurities by withdrawing and minimising their social activities.

There are times when we may feel vulnerable but we should learn how to give and not hide out of fear and self-protection. If we loved and gave and were taken advantage of, then we should see ourselves as having loved in Jesus' name. The person has now taken advantage of Jesus not us we were just the mediator. It is not ours to take offence. If we do what Jesus tells us to do, then He will give us the strength to do it, and He takes responsibility for the outcome and comforts our sorrows.

An important feature of temptation that helps us to recognise what is happening when we are tempted is that it hurts. Jesus suffered temptation.

"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." [Heb 2:18]

We need to say no when temptation attacks, and proclaim these feelings to be what they are. They are simply the temptation to accept a lie into our thoughts, emotions or desires. It is the truth that sets us free. The truth is that Jesus has washed us in His blood. If we accept that these tempting painful lies are genuine pains that need comforting then we are accepting these wrong feelings into our hearts and are taken captive by them. One of the enemy's greatest weapons is to make us believe a lie about ourselves.

Word Of Testimony

"And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith." [1 John 5:4]

Faith is demonstrated by what we say. If our speech is full of fear then we are full of unbelief and we fail.

"Now salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser (Satan) of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word (message) of their testimony (spoken evidence / declaration) ..." [Rev 12:10-11]

We overcome our spiritual enemies through the blood of the lamb washing out any sin fear or ungodly emotional pain in us that they may be able to influence. Then we hold off their lies so that they do not influence our attitudes by the word of our testimony. This last phrase is a rather old traditional translation of the scriptures. In modern language it says we overcome by the message of what we say. Some would comment that this is no more than positive thinking. In some ways it is, but it is so much more than that. We overcome by faith and the way we demonstrate our faith is by the words we put on our lips. We do not hype ourselves up to have self-confidence. There is nothing mystic about faith it is simply having confidence that God keeps His promises and means what He says.

Once we had no defence against death's fear but in Jesus we do now. Most fearful behaviour and attitudes are driven by evil spirits working to hijack or snare the human heart with their own nature. All evil spirits are full of fear. I like to think this is so because they all know their **ultimate destiny is to be cast into the Lake of Fire.**

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." [2 Tim 1:7]

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out Abba Father." [Rom 8:15]

"There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear..." [1 John 4:18]

"... being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness..." [Luke 1:71&74]

Fear can appear just a natural function of the human spirit but wherever possible it is hijacked by evil spirits. They aggravate and exploit our weaknesses and vulnerabilities so that they can land up influencing much of what we do. If we have allowed them in, or we have been snared even before our birth, they can be expelled by faith in the blood of Jesus. When tempted by fear to be selfish we can hold them off by faith, which we demonstrate by proclaiming the truth of what Jesus has done for us and as required presenting/yielding ourselves to God.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exults itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." [2 Cor 10:3-5]

"... be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." [Eph 6:10-12]

When we are battling against our fears it is good not to voice them (except if receiving counsel) but to pour them out to God by praying in our thoughts. We do voice however proclamations of truth and our faith in them. This is important because the Devil does not have access to our thoughts he only has our words to work on. If we admit out loud our weakness he then knows exactly where to attack and he will do so without mercy although he does seem pretty good at guessing anyway.

We need courage and perseverance as we wage personal spiritual warfare in our thoughts and attitudes. It is foolish to try and hide from the things in us that need dealing with, for their removal can only do us good. Let us open up our minds to the possibility that all may not be as it once seemed. The temptation to hide would be understandable if we had to overcome in our own strength because these forces are too strong for us alone, but with God they become dust for us to walk on.

Consider this:

"Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us." [2 Cor 5:20]

Christ no longer represents himself on earth personally. He has given this great commission and awesome responsibility to us His disciples. An ambassador is the top negotiator sent to represent his own government before another country's government, which is exactly what we are. We are not of this world anymore we are heirs of another kingdom's ruler. While here, we are to skilfully negotiate release for ourselves and others from this world's unauthorised and defeated ruler.

A very exciting aspect of this mission is that while the rulers of the kingdom we have been sent to are hostile to us, the power of their weapons has been taken away. In the name of Jesus we are authorised to break the bondage these usurpers have over us but until we do so the enemy just carries on like normal. It is as we expose his lies and trample him under our feet that we break free and overcome him. His primary weapon against us is to try and make us believe a lie. Knowing the truth it sets us free as we proclaim it. Our weapons are the blood of Jesus that washes us clean and the words of our mouth that proclaim our faith in the truth of God's Word.

Handling Pain

Once our lives were controlled by the desire to minimise our personal pain. Now we can understand the various sources of this pain and deal with them so that they do not dominate our attitudes and behaviour. Here is a summary of the five main sources of pain that we can feel in our hearts.

1 The un-cleansed heart has death within that produces selfish fears and lusts that are felt as spiritually tormenting pain. They need repenting of and washing away.

2 When attacked by temptation it hurts and wants us to try and stop its painful attacks by indulging in a selfish lust. We trample this underfoot by proclaiming the truth.

3 If someone should offend us we forgive them even if they do not ask for it.

4 Unsatisfied legitimate basic human needs cause pain. For example loneliness especially that felt at the death of or separation from a loved one. This type of pain needs to be endured. The wounds it causes can heal quickly if we flee self-pity.

5 There is one pain that can do us good. As we see the truth about how selfish and sinful we are, we can be filled with awe, remorse and grief by what we see.

"For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted..."

[2 Cor 7:10]

But this grief should only last for a relatively short time. As we see all our sins forgiven then the joy of the Lord will rise in us. If your sins continually cause you grief seek the help of a counsellor who appreciates these matters.

Remember there is absolutely nothing that can stop you being set free other than how willing you are to cooperate with God.

"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." [John 8:36]

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." [Gal 5:1]

Our Most Intimate Relationship

The need to be set free to love is revealed most of all by our most intimate relationship. For a young person it may be a parent but for most adults it will be their spouse.

If for some reason you have hurt your body and a friend who did not know about it greeted you with a hearty hug, they would be surprised when instead of a warm reply they get pushed away amidst squeals of agony. The friend was being friendly but got treated as though he had just attacked you.

This can happen in the world of our inner man too. A close one draws close but instead of enjoying the intimacy you feel disturbed by fear and pain. An unwise person can go as far as blaming the close one for causing them pain and push them away. To develop the harmony and intimacy we all long for in close relationships requires we deal with all those hidden wounds from our past. We really do need to make sure there are no skeletons in the cupboard and that we are not carrying around any baggage.

When close ones draw in any unresolved inner pain will be exposed. For depth and true harmony in our most intimate relationships we need to make sure we deal and respond to all sources of pain correctly so that we can give love instead of putting on a mask of self protection.

It is demanding to face this challenge and many run from it. Yet we would have less pain in the long run if we shaped up and entered the fight early. We can deal with these things God's way or back off and try in our own strength but we will in effect be putting even greater demands on those close to us than those that we are prepared to face ourselves.

We are being very selfish if we expect others to compensate for our own inner pain. They may be able to cope with it and respond to you gracefully but the full joys of intimacy will start to die.