

Bible Witness

MCI (P) 044/04/2022 | ISSN: 0219-5364 | VOLUME 22 ISSUE 4 (JULY-AUGUST 2022)

DEALING WITH TEMPTATION





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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). This magazine is distributed free from 2006 onwards. Postage and handling charges still apply. 2 years (12 issues): **S\$10.00** Singapore/Malaysia surface mail delivery, **S\$14.00** international surface mail delivery, **S\$26.00** Asia air mail, **S\$34.00** for air mail to all other countries.

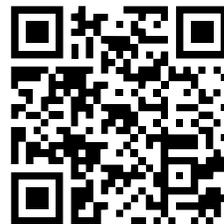
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On the Cover ▲

"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die."
—Genesis 3:4



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DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

Volume 22 Issue 4 | July–August 2022

All articles in this issue are written by Prabhudas Koshy, Pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church and Editor of the Bible Witness Magazine.



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Whose Fault Is It When You're Tempted?

Some are prone to point a finger at others and even at God, when they fall into temptation and commit sins. So, the apostle James cautions us, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13). Blaming others for one’s own sin started in the Garden of Eden. Adam said to God, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12). Adam blamed his wife, and he extended the blame to God as well! He seemed to imply that he would not have sinned if God had not put Eve in the Garden with him.

The blame-shifting in the Garden continues today. Proud and unyielding hearts desperately look for someone else to bear the blame when they are confronted with their own sins. There must be someone else—the spouse, sibling, parent, boss, co-worker, pastor, friend, or (maybe even) God Himself!

Don't Blame God!

It is important that we take note of James’ caution: “Let no man say ... I am tempted of God”. Some believers tend to misinterpret God-sent trials as God tempting them with opportunities to sin. Such a notion is far from the truth. Hence, James gives a stern warning to those who may pin the blame on God when they are confronted with temptation to sin. Though our trials are permitted by God, He is not the author of the temptation of sin that befalls us simultaneously with those trials. No temptation of sin is designed or discharged by God. James is very concerned about such an idea of God, and desires that his readers will reject the suggestion that God has a hand in inducing people to sin. One’s thoughts about God will affect one’s decisions and responses to life’s experiences. If one presumes that the temptations of sin that one is experiencing come from God, one would then have an ill-conceived excuse for the sins one would commit. As James noted, that person would then say impious and despicable things, such as “God tempted me with sins.” God forbid!

To say that “I am tempted of God” is, first of all, to make a false claim about God. It is a heresy to say that God tempts us with sin. Any thought or statement

that depicts God as the author of sin is contrary to the unmistakable teaching of the Holy Scriptures that all of God’s works are holy. Moses avows his high regard of God in Deuteronomy 32:4, “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” Similarly, David declares, “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psalm 145:17). Likewise, the psalmist affirms in Psalm 92:15, “the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him” (cf. 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalms 111:3; 119:137; Zephaniah 3:5; Revelation 4:8).

Besides, such a misstatement deceives the heart to consider sin as an unavoidable matter that God has laid on him. Such a belief stands contrary to all the counsels and admonitions of God in His Word. God commands us to depart and be separate from everything unholy. For instance, 2 Corinthians 6:17 admonishes us, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”. The LORD God will have nothing to do with those who follow the way of sin! He calls all His people to “come out” from all sorts of unclean people and their false ways.

Scripture is clear on this: God influences us only unto righteousness while Satan, the world and our own lust tempt us with sin unto unrighteousness. The Lord never tempts us with sin. God will never influence us to sin by infusing evil thoughts, inclinations, or desires. He will never cajole and coax us to sin. The tempter is the devil (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:3, 13–15; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). God is holy

and He leads only into the paths of righteousness. As David confesses, “He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake” (Psalm 23:3).

Let no one think that God lays upon him, through his trials, an unavoidable compulsion to sin. The trials that God permits in one's life are never to compel one to sin, but to sanctify and strengthen that one. All that God does is good and perfect (cf. James 1:16–17). Therefore, do not yield to the temptations of sin, saying, “God has tempted me!” It is downright scandalous and diabolical to say, “I am tempted of God”! It is very impious of anyone to make such a dreadful assertion.

Admit Your Guilt

Some may not blame God, but they point the finger at the devil, the world, friends, parents, siblings, church members, church leaders, etc. Though some of these are common sources of evil temptations, the apostle James points out that there is a more subtle and dangerous fountainhead: “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). It lies within everyone, and is identified as “his own lust”!

Now, the word “lust” (*epithumía*) indicates “strong desire” or “longing” in a bad sense. It depicts man's inordinate and impure desire or appetite. The King James Bible has translated it also as “concupiscence”. It is often used with words that connote materialism and sensuality. The New Testament usages of the word are instructive: “evil concupiscence” (Colossians

3:5), “deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22), “foolish and hurtful lusts” (1 Timothy 6:9), “youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22), “worldly lusts” (Titus 2:12), “fleshly lusts” (1 Peter 2:11), “ungodly lusts” (Jude 1:18), etc. Hence, “lust” represents the corrupt inclinations of the human heart.

The “lust” that is in us is not a dormant, harmless curiosity or idea of the heart. Quite the reverse – it is a very powerful feeling that can numb one's moral and spiritual senses, and can draw one to corrupt and damaging activities. James reveals to us lust's powerful ploy with the two verbs he used in the above verse. The first verb (*exélkō*), translated as “drawn away”, conveys the idea of being “dragged out”, or “forcibly hauled or compelled”. The second verb (*deleázō*), translated as “enticed”, comes from a root word (*délear*) that means “bait”; it signifies being beguiled and lured into a trap or snare. Powerful enticements and deceptions are at play when lust is at work in our hearts.

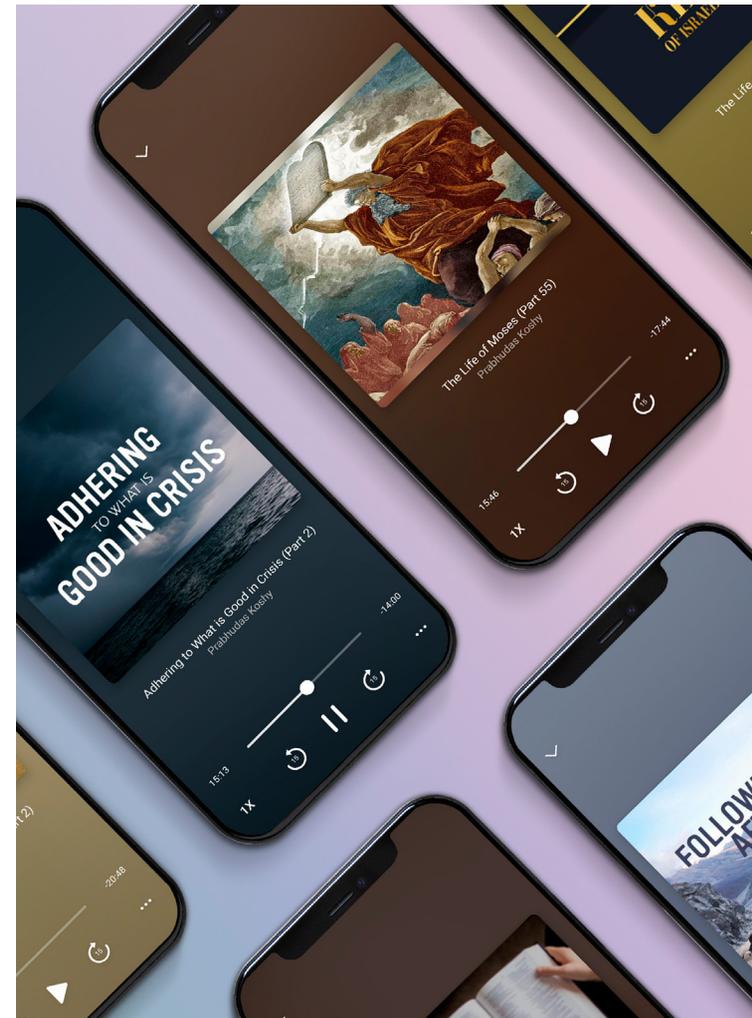
Lust is a very powerful feeling that can numb one's moral and spiritual senses, and can draw one to corrupt and damaging activities.

Our thinking and feelings will be so desensitised that we can be wheedled into destructive conduct. Like the bait on the fisherman's hook that entices the fish, lust also would entice a man into sin's temptations. And once hooked, he, like the fish, would be dragged away!

That's why the apostle John solemnly admits, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). But “[i]f we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Conclusion

Beloved Christian, there is a great need for us to realise that our own lust is a great danger to us. We must recognise and act against our own lust, lest it may soon drag us into shameful and hurtful mischief of sin. Our temptations are often self-inflicted perils. So, let us be vigilant against even ourselves. As the apostle Peter cautions, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). ■



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Be Not Overcome of Evil!

Though Satan is much more powerful than every Christian, we can overcome his onslaught against our souls. This is possible because in the Scriptures we are given God's promises and wise counsels to overcome the devil's evil ploys. Nonetheless, each of us has to acknowledge that we have an equally great, if not more formidable, enemy within ourselves—due to the total depravity of human nature. This spiritual recognition is most crucial in our dealing with temptation. Here are four things to note in our relentless fight in not being overcome of evil.

Deal with Yourself

Even if there were no devil to tempt us, and no wicked men to entice us, yet that cursed sinful flesh that is in us would draw us to sin. Satan cannot bring us to sin without our consent; but a man may easily commit sin without Satan. Do not excuse yourself by accusing the devil. Neither blame God for temptations that lead you to sin. James reminds us that “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and

enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14–15). Often, our temptations are self-inflicted perils; hence may we recognise and act against our own lust, lest it may soon drag us into shameful and hurtful mischief of sin.

As Thomas Brooks once wrote, “The whole frame of man is out of frame: the understanding is dark, the will cross, the memory slippery, the affections crooked, the conscience corrupted, the tongue poisoned, and the heart wholly evil, only evil, and continually evil.” Did not Scripture starkly pronounce that “[t]he heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). But thanks be to God, since our Lord has broken the dominion of Satan over us, now he has only a persuading sleight, not an enforcing might, over us. He may tempt us, but without our agreement, he cannot conquer us! Therefore, take responsibility and be diligent to fight and defend yourself against every form of temptation. “Harden not your hearts ... in the day of temptation ... But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:8, 13). To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Do the Word

To be further forearmed, note what the apostle John said explicitly in 1 John 2:14b, “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” Our strength to overcome temptation is very much

dependent on our reliance on God's Word. It is the mighty sword from the Spirit of God for our spiritual battle, as attested to by the apostle Paul, when he described it to the Ephesian believers as “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

If you throw away the commandments of His Word, you have nothing else that is mighty to fend off the devil and his temptations. Soon you will be easily overthrown by Satan. So, do not lay aside the Word of God. Know its precepts and live by them. Know its promises, and believe and obey them. Every Christian who lives by God's Word will be an overcomer of every ploy of the devil.

Devote unto Prayer

Our spiritual battles have to be fuelled by spiritual power, be it power to bear witness for Christ (cf. Acts 1:8), or power to overcome temptation. Jesus' exhortation to His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane was instructive: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Like the disciples, we often respond to the weakness of our flesh more readily than the weakness of our souls. We excuse ourselves from prayer, citing the tiredness of our bodies. But the Lord's admonition to us is that we should awake unto prayer. He said to the sleeping disciples, “Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Luke 22:46).

Dear brethren, we must be devoted to prayer. In order to be diligent in prayer, we need to be awake unto the presence

of temptation and the seriousness of our spiritual vulnerability. When you see that your heart is affected by the sinful distractions in the world, you must go to the Lord in prayer. You must specifically pray to the Lord for wisdom and strength to overcome those particular temptations. Pray, as Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13a).

When you pray, you are asking God to fight the battle for you. You are also acknowledging before Him your inability to fight without His help. Then you will receive His help. He has already declared in His Word that He is “The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:8). The devil cannot overcome the LORD, who is your Defence. If you abound in prayer, you will be able to say with joy, like the psalmist, “Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name” (Psalm 33:20–21).

If you throw away the commandments of His Word, you have nothing else that is mighty to fend off the devil and his temptations.

Dare to Resist

Finally, when it comes to the crunch, we are to put up a strong resistance against every attempt that Satan makes to tempt us. James exhorts us, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7b). Never negotiate or reason with the devil when he comes with temptation. No opportunity should be given to the devil to find his way into our hearts. Paul says it emphatically in Ephesians 4:27, “Neither give place to the devil.” In Ephesians 6:11, Paul further exhorts us “to stand against the wiles of the devil”. We should never be in a tolerant mood when confronted with the devil’s temptations.

Thus, the apostle Peter admonishes us, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith...” (1 Peter 5:8–9a). So, if he plants in you the idea of skipping the worship and fellowship meetings, immediately you disagree and persist in your plan to attend them. If he instigates you to dwell on others’ mistakes, you must refuse his suggestion and rather decide to forgive as Jesus has forgiven your sins. The safest action on your part is to resist. Debating with the devil is dangerous. While we see that Eve had argued with him, and had thus fallen in the garden of Eden (cf. Genesis 3:1–6), we are gratified to notice Job resisting Satan and thereby conquering him upon the dunghill (cf. Job 2:7–10). He that will play with Satan’s bait, will quickly be taken with Satan’s hook!

Be sure of this one spiritual fact: the promise of conquest is made to those

who resist, not those who dispute. Hence the apostle James pointedly exhorts, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Do note that the way to resist is to first “submit yourselves ... to God” (v. 7a). Submission to God also means obedience to all His revealed will in His Word. We must attend to His Word reverentially. We must hear His Word with eagerness and readiness to believe and obey. When the Spirit of God convicts and directs our hearts through His Word, we should immediately yield ourselves to do what He bids us to do. So when the devil comes with his wicked suggestions and temptations to lure us away from obeying God, we are able to resist him by submitting ourselves to God’s Word. Then, and only then, shall the devil flee from us, and we shall have victory.

Conclusion

Dear Christian reader, the Bible is clear about the reality of evil in the world around us, as well as within us, specifically in our hearts. We know we are involved in a great spiritual warfare. So, do beware, “if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door (of your heart)” (Genesis 4:7)! The seeds of every sin are present in our own hearts. If we do not deliberately, by God’s wisdom and power, subdue them, evil will pervade our speech and action.

“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24), that I be not overcome of evil. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 7:25a)! ■



BIBLE WITNESS MAGAZINE

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Do Not Minimise the "Sinfulness" of Sin!

We are living in a very spiritually disastrous time, because our society minimises the sinfulness of sin. Woe unto our human tendency to make sin lighter than it really is! Christians too have adopted this tendency of our modern culture to look at sin as less serious than it really is.

Sin Not to be Taken Lightly!

Do you minimise the sinfulness of sin? God certainly doesn't! He was filled with wrath at Judah's sins: "Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezekiel 8:17–18). Don't take sin lightly!

Unfortunately, in these modern times, many a Christian passionately pursue unwholesome music and filthy songs of worldly men, without feeling any shame at all. In fact, they arrogantly and unabashedly defend their pursuit by declaring that there is nothing wrong about such worldly music. Many watch carnal and sensual shows on television and through various media; worryingly, they do not feel at all that they are allowing sinful thoughts and vain imaginations to enter their minds. Many young Christians follow the worldly way of life—engaging in pornography, fornication (premarital

sex), adulterous relationships, covetousness, etc. They casually engage in them, without thinking about the evil of those pleasures and the harmful consequences they will bring.

Are you, dear reader, also viewing temptation and sin with reduced or minimised gravity? If you are engaging in filthy communications or activities without any restraint, if you are a keen adherent of contemporary trends, fashions and suchlike fads, then you are certainly deceiving yourself when you say to yourself (while engaging in them) that all will be alright. You might even feel that you should passionately follow after those unrestrained fleshly passions in order to stay relevant and 'in-touch' with the modern world.

The foregoing notwithstanding, the reality of the matter of sin is that it is perilous and God-defying. We need to see sin for what it is. Consider in your heart what sin is truly all about. Then consider whether it is worth pursuing.

Sin Alienates!

Firstly, sin is contrary to all that God is. God is holy; there is no sin in Him.

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Let us remember that sin is contrary to the nature of God, the name of God, the will of God, the purposes of God, the Word of God, the works of God and the glory of God. God hates sin. Will you, then, love that which God hates? To consider sin lightly is to defy the holy God. Romans 8:7 says that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

It must be remembered that the most outrageous thing about sin is that it blasphemes God. Sin does not honour God’s glory. It does not show reverence for the holiness of God. It does not regard the omnipresence of God. It violates the love of God. It does not acknowledge the greatness of God. It takes God’s grace for granted. It belittles the truth of God. It despises the wisdom of God. It doubts the faithfulness of God. It defies the law of God. It provokes the justice of God. It does not fear the wrath of God. It tramples on the goodness of God. Let us remember that minimising the seriousness of sin is the ultimate outrageousness against God!

Let us also take note that our sin will provoke God to wrath. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). O

**Sin does not honour
God’s glory.**

inexcusable sinner, be duly warned of the certainty of God’s wrath against sin: “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart (thou) treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 2:5–6)!

Sin Enslaves!

Secondly, let us remember that if we allow sin to slowly take root in us, it will soon become a terrible enslavement or addiction of our life. Sinful living is not freedom, as many mistakenly think. Instead, it can lead to a sort of hardening of the heart, or a deadening of one’s soul to live a righteous life. As the writer of the Book of Hebrews admonishes, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:12–13).

The deceitfulness of sin is such that while those indulging in sin think they are living a free, unrestrained life, they are in actual fact being enslaved by sin. “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). Thus, Jesus pointedly said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34)! May we rather take heed unto Paul’s advice: “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity

unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Romans 6:19).

Sin Troubles!

Thirdly, take note that sin will make you a distressed, troubled soul. Those who engage in sin without restraint will soon experience a loss of meaning in life, and will descend into guilt, and all the resultant emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical and mental chaos. They would be filled with shame and sorrow, as attested to by David when he spoke of his terrible experiences resulting from secretly engaging in sin—“There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me ... I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long ... I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart” (Psalm 38:3–8; cf. Psalm 32:3–4).

That’s not all. Sin also troubles others. The uncontrolled pursuit of lust, covetousness, self-glory, etc. has hurt many others. Many of the hurts inflicted on others can never be fully repaired. Sin is violent and cruel. Its pleasures are for a moment; but over time it will be damaging and tormenting.

Sin Must be Punished!

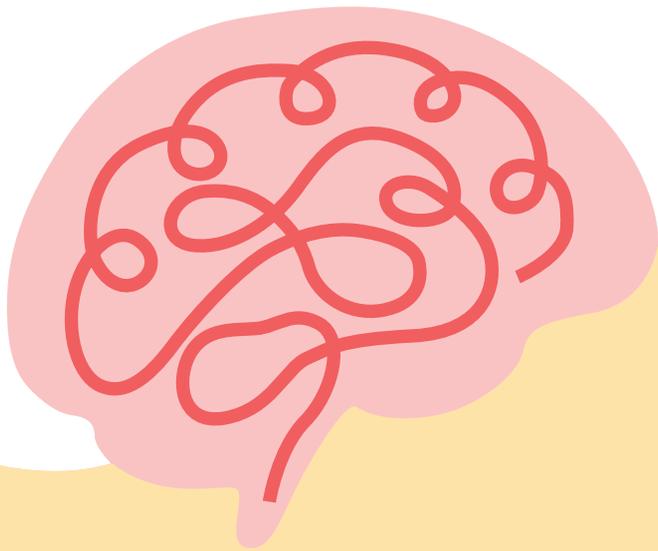
Now, we know from Scripture that without shedding of blood, there can be

no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22; cf. Leviticus 17:11). Our Saviour had to die a cursed and bloody death. To simply just cancel the punishment of sin would belittle God’s justice; instead it has been fully honoured by Christ fully satisfying the demands of God’s law. Divine mercy would spare the offender, but divine justice demands the punishment of his sins. For us to be given a righteous standing before God, our Saviour had to suffer the punishment on man’s behalf as the ransom that would satisfy the demands of God’s justice (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21).

That Saviour has to be spotless and unblemished, i.e. sinless. Who is sinless but God? But God, by virtue of His being, cannot die; and being a Spirit, has no blood! The only way to redeem us from our sins is for God the Son to become man Himself, in order that He might be “made under the law” (cf. Galatians 4:4–5a) to obey it, and that He could suffer its death-penalty. Oh, the “mystery of godliness”—He has to be “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16), namely the Second Person of the Triune Godhead (1 Peter 1:18–20; cf. Ephesians 1:4–7)!

Divine love has not made the Law of none effect—it has not disregarded it, but has fully met its demand and rendered it honourable. God is abundant in mercy, but He is also just “and will not at all acquit the wicked” (Nahum 1:3). Oh, how glorious is the Christian Gospel! It provides the only solution to how a holy and merciful God can forgive our sins without making light of sin. Dear Christians, our sins are cancelled with an infinite price—the price of the blood of Christ. So, may we never minimise the ‘sinfulness’ of sin! ■

Guard Your Mind with all Diligence



“**U**nto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Titus 1:15).

Nothing damages the conscience more than the habit of indulging in evil thoughts. Once begun, the habit can take root easily and become quickly established in one’s mindset. Then it becomes all too easy to give in and succumb to temptation. This sin of the mind is one which does not have to wait for an opportunity; the

mind can sin anytime, anywhere, under any circumstance.

Be Aware of Danger of Sinful Thought-Life

Evil thoughts underlie and lay the groundwork for all other sins. Jesus has warned us, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile

the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:18–19).

As the saying goes, “Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.” Allowing our minds to wander into all kinds of thoughts, especially sinful imaginations, is dangerous. Such wild, uncontrolled deliberations of the mind will soon evoke strong passions and sensual desires, thus leading one to work out the fulfilment of one’s lust.

The inward corruption is as serious as the outward actions of sins. So Jesus advised that we should look into our hearts and maintain a pure religion within. One may not have carried out the actual act of putting another person to death, but he is deemed guilty of “committing murder” when he harbours feelings of hatred towards another. As Jesus had admonished, “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ... whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matthew 5:22)! Likewise, a man may not have an illicit relationship with a woman (who is not his wife), but as Jesus decidedly pronounced, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28)! Instructively, though the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus’ day viewed themselves as righteous, they were denounced by Jesus as wicked through and through because of their evil intents and thoughts. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:27–28). Hence, Scripture declares, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7a)!

Beware of Sinful Activities of Mind

That being the case, shouldn’t we be mindful of what goes on in our thoughts or deliberations? As “an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations” (Proverbs 6:18a) is an abomination unto the LORD, we ought to steer clear of the following sinful tendencies of the mind:

The Sin of “Remembering”

One way our minds engage in sin is by cherishing the memories of past sins. A case in point is highlighted in Ezekiel 23:19. Concerning Israel, the prophet Ezekiel said, “Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.” Israel had the habit of looking back into the past experiences of Egypt from where God had delivered them, and then of falling back into those sins again and again.

Is this not also true in the experience of many Christians of our time? Satan will take all the “rubbish” out of your past, and try to drag it back

into your mind so that you relive it in your mind. Once you implant a lurid image in your thoughts, you cannot dispel it easily. It will reside in the mind as a potential temptation. That is why pornography and many of the television shows and cinema movies are so spiritually destructive. They have a way of getting back to one's mind and tempting one to sin.

The Sin of “Scheming”

A second way the mind sins is by plotting sins of the future. Scripture constantly warns us against this kind of sinful mental activity, as in Psalm 36:4—“He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil.” Here the psalmist describes the contemplation of a wicked man's mind. While he lies on his bed, he allows his mind to devise wicked activities and thus places himself in a morally dangerous and explosive situation. And when such scheming minds come together, they “encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily” (Psalm 64:5) to cause harm to others. “They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep” (Psalm 64:6). In other words, their deep thoughts are downright evil!

God condemns such scheming minds because “[d]eceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil” (Proverbs 12:20a). Isaiah 32:6–7 gives us further understanding about the deception that lurks around a person who schemes wicked things in his mind. “For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart

will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right.” Beware of this mental sin of scheming, for the Lord hates a heart that schemes evil!

The Sin of “Imagining”

The third kind of sin that takes place in the mind is purely imaginary sin. People fantasise about sins they long to commit. They imagine what it would be like to indulge in their favourite lusts, or wreak revenge on a despised enemy, or hurt someone they hate. They act out a robbery in the mind, or fantasise having an illicit relationship, or visualise killing someone.

Once you implant a lurid image in your thoughts, you cannot dispel it easily. It will reside in the mind as a potential temptation.

Are such sins disastrous? Yes, they defile us and lead us to commit sin (cf. Matthew 5:28). James 1:15 says, “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Don't forget that the destruction of the world by flood during Noah's time (according to Genesis 6:5) was because “GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Strengthen Your Mind against Sinful Thoughts

Undeniably, the mind is the battlefield where spiritual victory or defeat is decided. As such, we do well to strengthen our minds by taking heed of the following pointers:

Pray for a clean heart.

Like David we must pray for a “clean heart”. “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). Prayers for good conscience are our “front-line” spiritual defence.

Always join self-reflection with the reading of God's Word.

When you read the Bible or hear sermons, reflect on yourself, comparing

your own ways with what you read or hear. Ponder what agreement or disagreement there is between the Word and your ways. When you read the Scriptures, ask yourself: “Do I live according to this rule?” or “Do I live in any way contrary to it?” In other words, be not hearers of the Word only. “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25; cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

Ask whether you do things that are generally avoided by mature Christians.

Always question your desires and actions. You might have found a way to justify your thought or practice as lawful, and you may not see any evil in it. But if the thing is generally condemned or avoided by godly people, it certainly looks suspicious. Be mindful of godly Christians' advice and example. “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you” (2 Thessalonians 3:7; cf. Philippians 3:17), the apostle Paul exhorts us.

Examine whether others' faults are in you.

Too many people are ready to speak of others' faults when they have the very same shortcomings themselves. It seems to be commonplace for proud men to accuse others of pride. Equally common is the fact of dishonest men

complaining about being wronged by others! We can readily see what a hateful thing pride is in others, or how evil malice can be in others, or how pernicious others' faults can be. Though we can easily see such imperfections in others, yet when we look at ourselves, somehow a "curtain" of deceit obscures our sins. Remember Jesus' admonition: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? ... Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5).

Consider what others may say of you.

We should especially listen to what our spiritually mature friends say about us. It is foolhardy, as well as unchristian, to take offence and become resentful when we are told of our faults. We should rejoice that we are corrected and made aware of our particular fault/s. This biblical mindset will stand us in good stead. Truly, "Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:5-6; cf. Psalm 141:5).

Ask whether you will be found ready for death and Christ's return.

Ask yourself solemnly whether you are doing anything now that might trouble you on your deathbed or at the

coming of Christ. Be sober-minded in examining your faith and guard against indulgence. "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares ... Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:34, 36; cf. 1 John 3:2-3).

Conclusion

Dear Christian, there is no greater danger than the sin that hides within us, which we cherish secretly (or even openly). Sin is the Christian's greatest problem. Robert McCheyne said of the sin within: "The seeds of all my sins are in my heart (read "mind"), and perhaps the more dangerous that I do not see them." Little wonder that Scripture admonishes us in Proverbs 4:23—"Keep (i.e. guard) thy heart (or mind) with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life"! ■

God's Remedy for the Problem of Temptation

Christians have more enemies than any other on earth. Even the invisible forces of the demonic world are working against Christians through temptations and trials. The devil, the unbelieving world, and even our own sinful flesh are engaged in an unrelenting war against us. As a result, we Christians must "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15). We must "[t]ake heed therefore unto [ourselves]" (Acts 20:28a) as we live in this fallen world, still in our fallen state (i.e. in the flesh), "considering [ourselves], lest [we] also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1b).

Not Immune to Temptation

What is temptation? The word "temptation" means an incitement or solicitation to do wrong. So, any attempt to get us to commit sin is to be understood as a temptation.

Temptation is malicious because of its ultimate goal, which is to lure us into disobedience and wickedness. But it must be noted that temptation

will not always appear to be that evil. Oftentimes, it will put on a harmless and even "good" appearance. It may even appeal to our hearts as necessary and good. Every care will be taken by the devil to make it look like a thing that we should not miss—for its beauty, pleasure and possibilities. Generally, the temptation will be attractive and desirable in the eyes of unsuspecting Christians. Indeed, you might have been devoted to the Lord for many years, yet temptation can still assail you. Even our Lord Jesus was not spared from the attack of temptation, but His vigilance spared Him from falling into temptation. There is also no telling how exactly (in what "shape" and "size") the temptation would come. Temptation can come even through food—the devil tried to tempt Jesus with the thought of food (cf. Matthew 4:1-3; Luke 4:1-3)!

However, our gracious Lord grants us extraordinary help and protection. We are given divine remedies in the Scriptures, that we may be overcomers of our temptations. May we not be wise in our own eyes and devise our own ways to deal with temptations that come our way, but "order [our] steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion

over [us]” (Psalm 119:133). Wisdom and knowledge from God’s Word will provide us with discretion and understanding that shall preserve and keep us from falling into evil through temptation (cf. Proverbs 2:10–12, 16).

Be Watchful All the Time

God’s matchless wisdom counsels us that we must be always watchful. In 1 Peter 5:8, the apostle Peter exhorted, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”. Dear Christian, we must be fully alert, knowing that temptation can assail us any time. The threat of temptation is always real. We Christians shall never have a reason to call off our vigilance. The devil, like a lion on the prowl, surrounds us with his many temptations.

Every day we wake up to face some temptations. Certain days can be more evil than others. Just because we have very little temptation on one day does not mean we should be lax in our vigilance, for it will not be the same on the next day. As far as temptation is concerned, no two days are the same. We’d better expect the next day to be worse than yesterday and today. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5:16 that “the days are evil”. For the same reason, Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:13, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” The “evil day” is a day of extraordinary temptations that can spell destruction to our Christian walk.

So we must always be “combat-ready” with the spiritual armour on us, that we may not be caught unawares.

Be vigilant, every day, every hour, every moment. Be vigilant at home, at school, at work, at play. Be on guard in the church, in the prayer room, in the fellowship gathering, even in the Bible college. You can never tell where temptation is going to spring up on you. Be watchful also in the streets and in the market! Whether you are journeying, or visiting relatives and friends, or resting at home, temptation can come knocking on the “door” of your heart. It will pick its best opportunity and place. It will also disguise itself and come by means of many channels. Temptation can come to you through leaders and members of the church alike, as well as relatives and friends, colleagues and strangers. It can come through various media, like newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, internet, etc. Advertisements on buses, and at bus interchanges or railway stations are very often sensual and full of temptations. Shopping centres and recreational centres are also places of temptations for unwary Christians. Even if you sit alone in the safety of your room, temptation can enter your heart. So, God’s Word says to “be watchful”. “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night ... But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8).

Watchfulness against temptation means that we must be alert to identify the lure of sin. We cannot afford to be ignorant about what our temptations are. The apostle Paul gives us a very

necessary advice in 2 Corinthians 2:11. He wrote, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” We must be wary of the deceptive tactics of the devil. Be watchful in every way, lest we be ensnared. We need to know what may be the devil’s hidden bait in many of those things that catch our attention. That being the case, it behoves us to know how to identify whether a thing is a temptation, especially when it is so well camouflaged. Our watchfulness must thus be enhanced with another divine remedy that we have in the Scriptures.

Accept Only That Which is God's Will

In Ephesians 5:6–16, believers are exhorted to keep themselves away from the works of darkness. In the same passage, we are told how to do that—by “proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (v. 10). Otherwise, we will become partakers of the works of darkness (cf. vv. 7, 11). This counsel is repeated many times in the Bible, including 1 Thessalonians 5:21–22, which says: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

We are plainly and firmly told by Scripture that we can’t just embrace any philosophy or any way of life without exercising godly knowledge and judgment.

Our passions, our partnerships, our close affiliations all must be tested and approved according to godly knowledge. If we have a commitment to accept only that which is permitted in the Scriptures, we can overcome the evil temptations that come our way. In order to be vigilant to avoid potential temptations, and be discerning in the face of actual temptations, we need to grow in the knowledge of God’s Word. Knowing God’s truth and holiness through His Word will greatly enable us in determining and accepting only that which is in line with God’s will. Indeed, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11; cf. 119:9).



Be Prayerful All the Time

Our Lord had warned Peter, James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41; cf. Mark 14:38). We must constantly pray to the Lord for power to escape the temptation. When we identify a temptation, we must pray for God's strength to overcome it. Jesus has taught us to pray, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13a).

We cannot overcome temptation by relying on our past experience of overcoming temptation. The devil is a cunning enemy. He will have new devices to defeat us. Therefore, to be victorious each time when we are tempted, we need greater wisdom and power than that which we possess in

ourselves. This divine help is only a prayer away. So, pray without ceasing. Do not be self-relying. Be not casual, or light-hearted when temptation comes. Rather, be serious, be prayerful.

Conclusion

There will always be a way of escape (given from God) with every temptation that comes our way. The Word of God declares unto us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” The Word of His grace gives us sufficient ways of escape from the many temptations (and also troubles) that we face. Therefore, may we eagerly study God's Word and embrace the truths therein, that we may be able to live victoriously in the day of our battle against temptation. ■

BIBLE TRIVIA DEUTERONOMY 1-3

SARAH YONG

As the children of Israel camped in the plains of Moab before entering the Promised Land, Moses called upon them to recollect God's leading thus far.

Fill in each blank below with a suitable word taken from the respective Scripture verse indicated. Next, transfer your answers (to be written vertically down) onto the crossword that follows on page 31, according to its corresponding number. You will then notice a hidden message revealed by reading horizontally across this crossword. What is the message?

The children of Israel were to go in and possess the land which the LORD 1) _____ [1:8] unto their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which would be given unto them and to their seed after them. The LORD had multiplied them, and, behold, they had become as the stars of 2) _____ [1:10] for multitude. The LORD had also said unto them, 3) “_____ [1:21] not, neither be discouraged.” The Israelites were also reminded, “For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he 4) _____ [2:7] thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years ... thou hast lacked nothing.” In fact, the LORD had 5) _____ [2:33] their enemy before them. Therefore they were not to fear any enemy, for the LORD shall 6) _____ [3:22] for them.

The children of Israel were further reminded through Moses' beseeching of the LORD: “for what 7) _____ [3:24] is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?” They, as a people, would be led by Joshua, who “shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to 8) _____ [3:28] the land”.



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HUDSON TAYLOR (1832-1905) PART XIV

Retold by Jenny Lok
Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

Retold from:

- "To China With Love" by Hudson Taylor, published by Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor—God's Man in China" by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, published by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor and Maria, Pioneers in China" by J. C. Pollock, published by Kingsway Publications Ltd, the United Kingdom
- "God's Adventurer" by Phyllis Thompson, published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship (IHQ) Ltd, Singapore

"It's here at last!" Hudson's heart was beating fast as he held the much-awaited letter from Maria's uncle, Mr Tarn. After more than four months of waiting, it had finally arrived in December 1857. Mr Tarn mentioned in his letter that he had made inquiries to the Chinese Evangelisation Society (CES) about Hudson (who last had his medical training in London supported by the society). The CES readily gave an excellent report of Hudson, which convinced Mr Tarn that he was a God-fearing and promising young missionary who was fully worthy of Maria. Mr Tarn was doubtless pleased to give Hudson and Maria his blessings.

Both Hudson and Maria were ecstatic at the wonderful news and extremely thankful to God. They were shortly engaged, much to the delight of their missionary friends in China as well as loved ones from afar. Days before their

marriage, out of concern for Maria's well-being, Hudson spoke to her, saying, "I cannot hold you to your promise if you would rather draw back. You see how difficult our life may be at times..."

"Have you forgotten?" Maria answered. "I was left an orphan in a far-off land at a tender age. God has been my Father all these years. Do you think I shall be afraid to trust Him now?" Maria's reply drove away any remaining fear and anxiety in Hudson. Their eventual wedding on 20 January 1858 was truly a glorious day of brilliant sunshine; rays of warmth and hope reached into every nook and cranny, not least into the very souls of Hudson and Maria. Dressed in plain Chinese clothes, Hudson did not cease beaming from ear to ear while Maria looked absolutely radiant in a simple gown of grey silk, with a veil over her face. Indeed, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22), and Hudson, for one, knew how true that was!

After the wedding, the couple settled into a rented attic above the chapel in Bridge Road, Ningpo. Daily, Hudson was active in preaching and teaching God's Word alongside Mr Jones, as well as attending to the medical needs of the natives who lived around them. Maria, on the other hand, ministered to the Chinese people, particularly the poor whom they invited to their home. On top of that, she also assisted in keeping the accounts, writing letters and organising the other helpers. With more and more people desiring to know the Gospel, the missionaries were kept very busy. They were duly rewarded as many souls were



won to the Lord, among whom was a painter named Wang Lae-djun who later proved to be an excellent and faithful helper to Hudson in his mission work.

On 31 July 1859, a baby girl was born to Hudson and Maria—amid a major heat wave and intense anti-foreign feelings in China. Maria had, by God’s mercy, survived a near-death situation in early February, prior to giving birth. So it was with much gratitude and thanksgiving to God that they named their daughter Grace. However, their joy soon turned into sorrow when they learned that Dr Parker’s wife had suddenly died. Faced with four motherless children, Dr Parker made the painful decision to return to Scotland, intending to leave the dispensary to Hudson and close the hospital. To his co-worker, Dr Parker was most apologetic when he said, “Hudson, I am afraid that I have to burden you with the care of the dispensary for the time being. Right now, I have left sufficient money for the present month to cover all expenses and the salaries of the Chinese helpers. I suppose you may have to close the hospital, for I cannot expect you to shoulder such a great responsibility for both.”

“Dr Parker, my wife and I have prayed about this matter. We trust God to help us take on the task of managing both the dispensary and hospital. May His grace be with you,” Hudson replied with a reassuring smile.

Alas, the demands of missionary duties and medical work finally took their toll on Hudson, particularly so when he contracted tuberculosis. The only way to recuperate from this dangerous disease was to make a trip home to England. To their great joy and comfort, the young painter Wang volunteered to accompany the Taylors who were feeling very weak bodily. By the time they left China for England in late June 1860 (with Grace, almost a year old), the Taylors were assured that the hospital and dispensary would be in relatively good hands of the many dedicated converts and helpers, supported by a generous contribution of funds from Mr Berger, his good friend and an ever-ready supporter of his work in China.

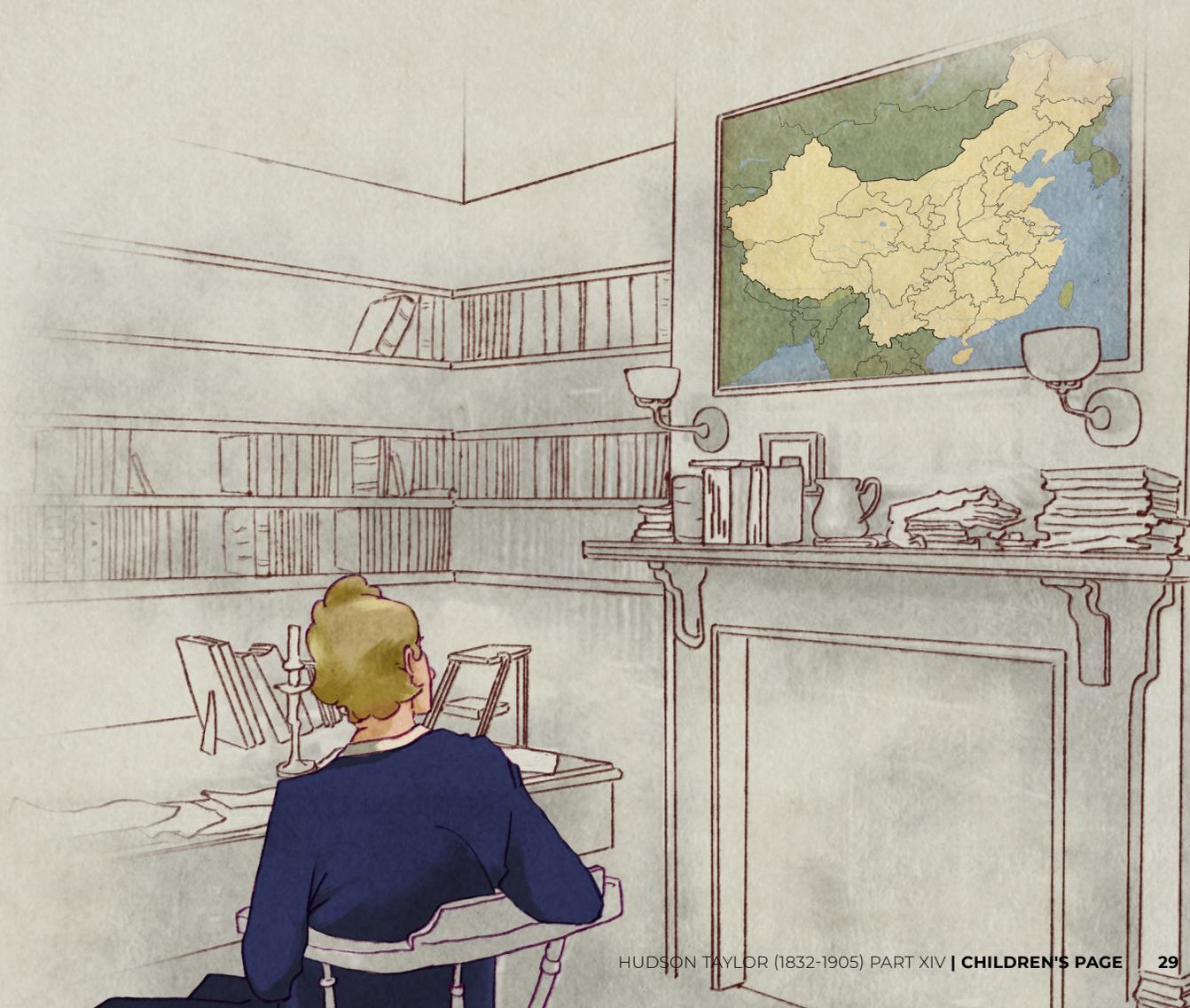
Back in England, Hudson was saddened to realise that he could not return to China within a short time. His health was in such a severe state that he needed perhaps a few years to be fully restored. In such times of disappointment and great distress, he took comfort in Isaiah 55:8–9,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Every day, Hudson’s eyes would be focused on the large map of China in his study room. Though miles away, his heart was burdened by the thought that millions in the inland region would perish because there was no one to preach the Gospel to them. “How can I best serve China while in England?” Hudson pondered over the matter and prayerfully committed it to the Lord. A plan began to form in his mind. Firstly, he would edit a hymnal and revise the Ningpo

New Testament (NT) in the colloquial (everyday) language of Ningpo. Using the Roman letters to represent the Ningpo dialect, he aimed to make the NT more easily understood and read by the millions in China. For this work, he would be aided by his friend Mr Gough, his helper Wang Lae-djun, and his wife Maria. Secondly, as advised by the London Hospital, he had also decided to complete his medical studies in midwifery as well as the Diploma for membership of the Royal College of Surgeons. Thirdly, his earnest quest was for committed labourers willing to serve in China. Hudson believed that this could only be possible “by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving” to God (Philippians 4:6), and thus he presented two petitions before Him: that He might “thrust forth labourers and bring about the deepening of the spiritual life of the church, so that men should be unable to stay at home”.

As always, Hudson clung onto God’s promise in Matthew 6:33—“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” He was not disappointed, for a total of five workers left England



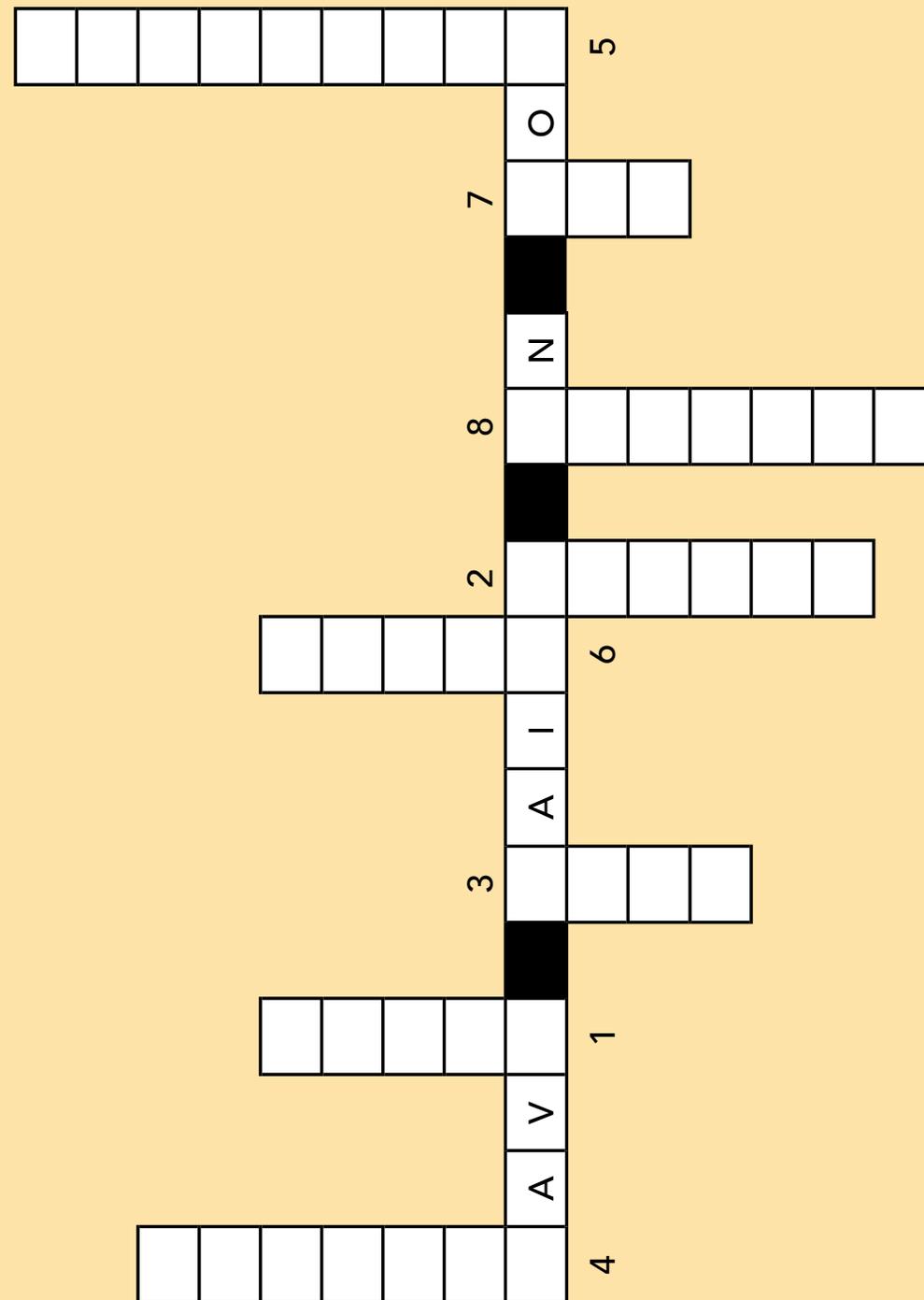
for China separately in 1862, 1864 and 1865. Hudson’s desire and conviction to evangelise inland China grew stronger by the day. Providentially, in 1865, while out on the sands of Brighton on 25 June, all his fears and doubts of forming a China Inland Mission left him. In humility, he yielded to God and cried with unspoken relief: “Thou, Lord, shalt have all the burden! At Thy bidding, as Thy servant, I go forward, leaving the results with Thee.” With the founding of the China Inland Mission (CIM) settled, Hudson and Maria continued their work on the pamphlet entitled, “China’s Spiritual Need and Claims”. Both prayed through every single paragraph they co-wrote. When it was done and published, the response was overwhelming, with many rising to the call to be trained in evangelistic work.

Hudson was amazed beyond words! His cry to God on 25 June 1865 at Brighton beach (on the south coast of England)—“Oh, for 24 willing skilful labourers; two for each of the 11 provinces and two for Mongolia!”—was readily granted by 1866. In addition to the eight missionaries already in China, another 16 of them, together with the Taylors (including their four children) were scheduled to begin their journey to China on board the ship “Lammermuir” on 26 May 1866.

When the missionary team reached Shanghai in September that year, Hudson wasted no time in preparing his co-workers to enter and evangelise the interior of China. Both men and women had to don Chinese clothes. The men were also expected to shave the front portion of their head and wear the queue, which was actually “a waist-long braided pigtail”. The new missionaries might have found the Chinese attire strange and inconvenient, but Hudson was convicted that if they wished to raise up Chinese Christians who would eventually be leaders and pastors of their own churches, they would do well to heed his advice: “Let us in everything (that is) not sinful become Chinese, that we may by all means ‘save some’ (cf. Romans 11:14)”.

For the next few years, the mission work grew and gradually, the CIM managed to make inroads into the province of Chekiang from their base in Hangchow and Ningpo. This did not happen overnight. In fact, prior to entering inland China, Hudson and Maria went through great trials in their efforts to help the missionaries unite as one body, and work together for the Gospel’s sake. In Maria’s letter to Mrs Berger, wife of Hudson’s good friend in England, she requested prayer for the missionary team: “Do pray for us very much, for we do so need God’s preserving grace in the present time. We have come to fight Satan in his very stronghold and he will not let us alone. What folly were ours, were we here in our own strength! But our God will not fail nor forsake us ...”

(To be continued)



(Fill in the crossword above with the answers from page 25.)

Answers to Bible Trivia—Numbers 35
(Vol. 22, Iss. 3, pp. 28–29)

Part A: 1) cities; 2) thousand; 3) refuge; 4) forty-eight; 5) possession; 6) dwell
Part B: mystery word—“inheritance”



What Are You Listening To?

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