

ILLUSTRATED MESSAGE SERIES BY PASTOR RICHARD BASED ON  
THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS BY C.S.LEWIS

The Screwtape Letters ~ Letter 9 ~ Tempted in the Trough (Low) Times  
November 22nd, 2020

Before reading the following overview of this Letter, please click on the link above to read the book and for today's Illustrated Message, please read **Letter 9**.

Screwtape says; *“In the first place I have always found that the Trough periods of the human undulation provide excellent opportunity for all sensual temptations, particularly those of sex. The health and spirits which you want to use in producing lust can also, alas, be very easily used for work or play or thought or innocuous merriment. The attack has a much better chance of success when the man's whole inner world is drab and cold and empty.”*

Cold, drab and empty can pretty well describe our world today, can't it. Whether it's entertainers, musicians, actors, businesses and even churches that have been affected and every career in the world, have been given a very grim prognosis of the future. It's a very disparaging trough to be in today.

If you were to honestly examine times in your life when you have been tempted the most to commit sexual sin, be it fornication (sex before marriage), or adultery, it was probably in a (low) trough time that it happened, when your inner world was cold, drab and empty.

It's a dangerous place to be, but for the Christian who rises up in times like these by using the word of God, not being subject to the temptation, but is delivered from it by God's grace. What 'appears' to be drab, cold and empty doesn't have to stay that way because God will give you strength, grace, and understanding of His word during these times. It goes beyond sexual sins, but anything that gives you pleasure in life. Remember, God gives the pleasures in this life to enjoy, but He also sets perimeters for them. Sex in itself isn't sin, wine in itself isn't sin, food in itself isn't sin, but when it's used in excess or outside God's commands, then it becomes sin.

Easton's Bible Dictionary describes adultery as this; *“Conjugal infidelity. An adulterer was a man who had illicit intercourse with a married or a betrothed woman, and such a woman was an adulteress. Intercourse between a married man and an unmarried woman was fornication. Adultery was regarded as a great social wrong, as well as a great sin.”*

But Jesus raised the bar and said the following in **Matthew 5:27-30** about adultery, that it goes beyond the act and is adultery when meditated on in the heart; *“27 ‘You have heard that it was said [a]to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to [b]sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to [c]sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”*

If what Jesus is saying here is the truth, and it is, it should motivate any Christian to submit themselves unto God's word and resist the temptation of sexual sin, be it in the heart and mind or acting it out and physically committing it. Jesus raised the bar on sexual sin and makes it very clear that adultery can be committed in a person's heart and mind without having actually physically done it.

Paul raised the bar on sexual sin and states that, “every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” Not all sin is on the same scale as we read. Sexual sin is against your own body which, if you're a Christian, is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

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Paul says this in **1 Corinthians 6:15-20**; *“15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body [a]and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

It’s important to keep in perspective that as Christians our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and it belongs to God and not to us. Sex is to be in the confounds of marriage and any sex outside of marriage, be it in heart or in action is sin and needs to be repented of when committed.

Screwtape says; *“Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden.”*

The devil can’t create pleasure. He can only take the existing pleasure that God meant for you to enjoy within the Biblical confounds, and pervert and twist them.

When the serpent tempted Eve in the garden of Eden, he said the following to her in **Genesis 3:1-5**; *“3 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” 2 And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ” 4 Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”*

Demons are always trying to get Christians to doubt or question the boundaries that God has given them thru the Ten Commandments, to get them to be lawbreakers, and ultimately backslide from their faith and commitment to Christ. He wants them to see their religious experience as just a phase in life that is no longer needed.

This is why I don’t believe in eternal security (once saved always saved), but I firmly believe that it’s not how you start your Christian life by being born again that totally determines your salvation, but rather how you finished your Christian life at your time of death that determines your salvation.

**Hebrews 6:4-6** says; *“4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 [a]if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”*

Could this be part of the great falling away when you see Christians who appeared to be so strong in the Lord, now backslidden? They had the ‘appearance’ of having built their beautiful spiritual house on the solid rock yet when the trough time came, their house collapsed because it was built on sand. They may have been operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit but now they’re no longer in church. It shows that man still has a will, and if during a trough period when the devil is buffeting them, they made bad decisions, and now God has put them to open shame. It’s very grievous to see Christians who you thought would never fall away, have fallen away.

Jesus says in **Matthew 7:21-23**; “21 *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

We know that Jesus knows them, because He knows all those who are His when they become born again, but if they continually and consciously practice lawlessness, God will say on that day, He never knew them. But God is looking for repentance if you know you’ve broken His law.

The word of God does not conform itself to what may appear to be a permanent trough you’re in today, whether you are an isolated, depressed Christian, that by your own will are trying work your way out of the trough, or if you are an optimistic, outgoing Christian, that believes the trough (low) times, aren’t so bad in comparison to the peaks (high) times, that the devil has lied to you about them being overrated and excessive in feel good religious sentiments.

A Christian’s life is to be conformed to the word of God, regardless of how the devil has lied to them about the low times and the peak times in life. It’s only the work of the Holy Spirit, thru the word of God, that will keep them on a straight and narrow road, not believing his lies when he says; “did God really say that or did He really mean this when He said it?” False doctrines are built on lies like this.

Screwtape says; “*Talk to him about "moderation in all things". If you can once get him to the point of thinking that "religion is all very well up to a point", you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all--and more amusing.*”

The lukewarm Christian’s moderate religion, will ultimately cost them their salvation. We read in **Revelation 3:14-16** where Jesus is talking to the lukewarm church; “14 *“And to the [a]angel of the church [b]of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither [c]cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”*”

Screwtape here is wanting Wormwood to convince the Patient to have moderation in all things. He doesn’t want him to get so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly good. Have you heard that before? It’s a very telling lie of the devil. Sadly, Christians are buying into the ‘moderation lifestyle in Christian life’ lie. The devil doesn’t want Christians to totally sell out for Jesus, to deny themselves, to take up their cross and follow Him, but to find a happy medium in Christianity....lies, lies, lies!

[Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Revelation 3:14-16](#) says; “2. *A severe punishment threatened: I will spue thee out of my mouth. As lukewarm water turns the stomach, and provokes to a vomit, lukewarm professors turn the heart of Christ against them. He is sick of them, and cannot long bear them. They may call their lukewarmness charity, meekness, moderation, and a largeness of soul; it is nauseous to Christ, and makes those so that allow themselves in it. They shall be rejected, and finally rejected; for far be it from the holy Jesus to return to that which has been thus rejected.*”

It sounds heavy, but we see that Jesus is going to vomit the lukewarm Christian out of His mouth. He sees them as a lawbreaker and lawless. You don’t want to hear those words on judgement day. In the apostacy that is taking place today, there will be many that Jesus will say this to because they’ve become lukewarm, have fallen away, having built their house on perishable sand. It is evident that the devil has lied and deceived many Christians to give up their faith, to purposely turn away from it getting them to believe that it was just a phase in their life or that it was a crutch for a time that they don’t need any more.

Again we read in **Hebrews 6:4-6**; “4 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 [a]if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”*

We must also remember this important truth; **God will not turn a deaf ear to a truly repentant man or woman.**

If Christians settle for a lukewarm, moderate religious life, it will either lead them to backslide, seeing it as a religious phase that is no longer needed, or they will die in that state, and be vomited out of God’s mouth on the day of judgement.

We must remember that these temptations and lies come most heavily in the trough periods in one’s life. But there too you know that when you’re weak, God’s grace is there to give you strength to stand, and having done everything, you stand firm, building your house on the word and not on the sand. Then you can leave the troughs and enjoy the peaks of life.

Like Paul says in **Philippians 4:12-13**; “<sup>12</sup> *I know how to [a]be abased, and I know how to [b]abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through [c]Christ who strengthens me.”*

When you meditate on God’s word, read it every day, it will give you the strength, wisdom and understanding during the trough seasons in your life. **Psalms 1:2-3** says; “<sup>2</sup> *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he [b]meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He shall be like a tree planted by the [c]rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”*

Screwtape says; “*Keep his mind off the plain antithesis between True and False. Nice shadowy expressions--"It was a phase"--"I've been through all that"-- and don't forget the blessed word "Adolescent."*

How many Christians have believed these lies and see their religious experience as just a phase in life that was good for them then but they have now grown up to stand on own in the trough (low) times. They may even believe the lie that they have more peace now that they’ve gotten out of that Christian phase of life, that they have ‘apparently’ less trouble regarding their faith from co-workers, jobs, friends, family etc. What a lie of the devil to convince people that they’re better off now than when they were a Christian – he comes only to steal, kill and destroy. The devil will then bring new friends and co-workers, maybe a new job, home, car or wardrobe, etc...now that you’re not questioning the truth and are believing the lies, now that you’ve left the faith. Why wouldn’t the devil ‘bless’ you as you’re now in his kingdom.

Jesus says in **Mark 8:36**; “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*

Just look around you from when you became a Christian, and do a count of the Christians who you have known or known of, that are either now lukewarm or have totally backslid from their Christian faith. There is a great falling away which was prophesied about in the Bible that is happening right now.

**2 Peter 2:20-22** says; “<sup>20</sup> *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. <sup>21</sup> For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. <sup>22</sup> But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”*

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This expressly talks about Christians falling away, going back to their sin after they had been washed in the blood of Jesus. The devil is the master deceiver to get people and Christians to believe in the mirage, in the lie, in the anti-Christ agenda, but the Lord is reminding you today, that you're not subject to the trough, but the trough is subject to the Holy Spirit in you. Meditate on God's word and His grace will be sufficient to see you through. It all comes back to walking by faith in God's word. It's like the eye of the storm being the most peaceful place, that's what the word of God is to us in the midst of the trough and stormy times in our lives.

For teaching on the Holy Spirit, please go to the [Holy Spirit Power Series](#) on our website.