

## SIGNS OF A MATURE CHURCH Pitfalls of Progress

Text: Ephesians 4:27

**Key Word:** Testing

**Key Thought:** Areas of Testing for Christians

### There Are a Number of Ways of Putting into Words the Problems we Face in Life.

\*\* Did you hear about the newest politically correct country golf club? They no longer refer to golfers as having a handicap. Instead they're "*stroke challenged*."

A boy was a bagger at a local supermarket. One day the store installed a machine for squeezing fresh orange juice. Intrigued, the young man asked if he could be allowed to work on the machine, but his request was denied.

The store manager explained it this way. "*Sorry kid, but baggers can't be juicers.*" \*\*

### Reader's Digest

In a study of Genesis 22:1, I found that the word, "*test, testing, or tested*" was not found in the KJV. Instead, it uses the word "*tempt, tempted, temptation and tempter.*" These words were used in both a positive and negative sense.

The negative sense was used in reference to the works of the devil to lead us into sin. Yet there is a positive sense to the word temptation or testing (NIV). It is the thought of "*being tried or proven.*" I will limit my thought today to the good sense of temptation.

I do believe that temptation (both positive or negative) will be directed to those who wish to progress in their Christian faith. **Progression brings pitfalls.** Any person who walks is a person who has the potential to stumble. It's very difficult to fall while sitting down in a rocking chair (showing movement) but going nowhere.

The Scriptures clearly indicate that a Christian, who decides to live a life pleasing to God, will be tested by God in order to be brought into complete maturity. Remember, that Jesus Christ is coming back for a **mature church**.

*"to present her to himself as a radiant church,  
without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but  
holy and blameless"*

*Ephesians 5:27*

## Where Will God Allow us to be Tested If We Choose to be Mature and Become His Bride?

### I. TEST OUR WILL (Jeremiah 11:20)

### II. TEST OUR WALK (James 1:12)

#### I. TEST OUR WILL (Jeremiah 11:20)

*"But, O Lord Almighty, you who judge righteously and test (triest - KJV) the heart and mind . . . "*

*Jeremiah 11:20*

Jeremiah suffered greatly for serving God. In Chapter 1 we have recorded the struggle that Jeremiah had in accepting his call to be a prophet.

*"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as prophet to the nations."*

*Jeremiah 1:5*

His calling was to . . .

*"uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow to build and to plant."*

*Jeremiah 1:10*

This calling was going to severely test the prophet. It would test whether his will was really in line with God's will. It would lead him into many assaults against his body, imprisonment, hunger and cold.

**Before God could test the men of Anathoth for their sinful actions, He would test his faithful servant, Jeremiah.** The prophet had to come to the point of completely giving his will over to God. Could it be that God is doing the same thing with His Church today? I believe He is allowing much to take place in our lives that we just don't understand YET!

The apostles faced the same kind of testing through the three years that they walked with Jesus so they could be properly prepared for the trials they would soon face. During the last supper Jesus offered words of comfort to His disciples.

*"You are those who have stood by me in my trials."*

*Luke 22:28*

## I. TEST OUR WILL (Jeremiah 11:20) (Contd.)

They had faced . . .

- a) strong opposition from religious leaders
- b) severe demands of those in need
- c) lack of food and housing
- d) punishment of the sun by day and the cold by night
- e) rejection by those who once loved them
- f) the Word of God eagerly heard, but seldom lived

It so tested the disciples that at the crucial point of decision, they all fled as Jesus predicted.

*"you will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered."*

*Mark 14:27*

*"Then everyone deserted him and fled."*

*Mark 14:50*

Let's not stand in judgement of them for theirs was a bitter testing of their faith and allegiance. It brought about a deep struggle and guilt. Fear overcame them. They returned like wounded dogs to lick their sores.

Remember that God had a purpose for the testing. It was not to destroy the early church. It was rather to bring the Church to a full maturity. I don't believe any of us would enjoy life if God made everything completely perfect. We all know the difference it makes when we can honestly say that we did our best even though the opposition seemed overwhelming at times.

\*\* A saintly deacon was once known to be the worst golfer in town. One day, he stepped up to the ball on the tee, closed his eyes - said a quick prayer - and swung his club. When he opened his eyes, he saw the ball soaring straight down the fairway. It landed and rolled as if drawn by a magnet, straight between the bunkers, across the green, and right up to the hole - where it hit the pin and dropped in: A hole in one!

The deacon watched all this quite calmly. Then he set another ball on the tee and said another short prayer: *"Thank you, Lord! Now, please Lord, this time let me do it myself!"* \*\*

Douglas Mantz  
*"Let There be Laughter"*  
p. 14

## I. TEST OUR WILL (Jeremiah 11:20)(Contd.)

Jeremiah wrote . . .

*"But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country."*

*Jeremiah 12:15*

Peter wrote . . .

*"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials (manifold temptation - KJV). 7. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (apocalypse; revelation; appearing; manifestation)."*

*I Peter 1:6,7*

Have you ever wondered why Jesus taught His disciples to pray . . . ?

*"and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"*

*Matthew 6:13*

This verse makes it clear that there are two types of temptations. One is from God and the other is from the devil. **One is to mature us. The other is to destroy us.** The one will lead us closer to God, while the other will drive us from Him. Satan cleverly tries to attack our will because he knows once he controls our will he can control the next part of our lives - - our walk!

## II. TEST OUR WALK (James 1:12)

*"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trials (endureth temptation - KJV), because when he has stood the test (he is tried - KJV), he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."*

*James 1:12*

## II. TEST OUR WALK (James 1:12)(Contd.)

The true test of our love for God comes through our perseverance to stand in times of trials and testings. We are a tri-part being - spirit, soul and body. **Neither our will nor our walk is tested until we surrender our spirit to Him.**

*"those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.*

*15. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba Father."*

*16. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

*17. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, **IF indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.**"*

*Romans 8:14-17*

The first major step that must happen to become a child of God is that the Spirit of God must witness to our dead spirit to make it alive unto God. Nothing significant can happen until we confess of our sins and become born again by the Spirit of God.

After our spirit is surrendered to God, our soul experiences tremendous changes. Our soul is really our life-breath.

1. Natural life of the body - Luke 12:22
2. Immaterial or invisible part of man - Matthew 10:28
3. Disembodied man - II Corinthians 5:1-4
4. Seat of our personality - Luke 9:24
5. Seat of our sentiment (feelings, desires) - Matthew 11:29
6. Seat of our will and purpose - Matthew 22:37
7. Seat of our appetite - Psalm 107:9

**Everything from our personality, feelings, desires, will, purpose and appetite undergoes a tremendous change once we are born again.** This causes an amazing changes to take place. It begins within us and works out for everyone to see. This is why we question a person's experience if we don't see a change in actions to follow.

## II. TEST OUR WALK (James 1:12)(Contd.)

*"Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars."*

*Luke 6:44*

This same truth applies in the spiritual realm. A Christian who has not changed their actions has not surrendered their soul to God and will soon lose the attachment they had with God's Spirit. The term used to explain this is **"a backslider."** A backslider has broken the relationship they once had with God's Holy Spirit. The devil uses this as an opportunity to regain his foothold. **If things don't change in a period of time, a person's personality, feelings, desires, will, purpose and appetite will instead be led by the devil and his cohorts.**

As a believer God will allow our will to be tested to help us mature. God uses the pathway of our surrendered spirit to work upon our soul. If our walk reflects more of a non-Christian's walk, the maturing process will become blocked. We must not only allow God to be our Savior but also our Lord. We can tell who we serve by how we walk, talk and dress. One way of walking visibly displays that we are the Virgin Bride of Christ, while the other is a clear contrast that we will be eternally doomed with Satan's group of rebellious souls.

Surrender not only your spirit, BUT let your soul be guided daily by God and your walk will indicate that you are continuing to mature as the Bride of Christ??

**\*\*\*** A rooky justice of peace in a small New England town was called upon to perform his first marriage ceremony. After he had the knot securely tied, the young couple continued to stand before him as if expecting some further rite.

Whereupon the justice of the peace, stammered out in a brave attempt to round off the ceremony with something of a religious overtone,

***"There, there, it's all over! Go and sin no more!"*** **\*\*\***

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Date: Sept 11/22

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: Sure Foundation - D

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*Mark 14:27; Mark 14:50; Jeremiah 12:15; I Peter 1:6,7; Matthew 6:13*

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