

as in Christ's temptation encounter, against the insinuations, suggestions, and solicitations of our adversary the Devil.

The Temptation Of Jesus Christ

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. 2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. 3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. 4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. 5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. 8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; 9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. 11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him” (Matt. 4:1-11).

Just as the first Adam, the natural head of the race stood a probation in the garden of Eden (Gen.3:1-7), so the last Adam (I Cor. 15:45) must pass through a period of testing that the eminent quality of His Divine Sonship might be demonstrated, His acceptability as a suitable sacrifice for the sin of the world revealed (I Pet.1:18), and the experience of suffering temptation felt with a view to His sympathetic High Priestly ministry (Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 7:26) in behalf of those He came to redeem. Since Christ, in His Humanity, has engaged in spiritual combat with the god of this world and been tempted at all points, without succumbing to the solicitations of the evil one, He stands ready and well able to assist us in our spiritual struggle against sin and Satan.

Moreover, His experience of overcoming the wicked one, in His delight to fulfill the will of the Father, provides us with a pattern for successful warfare. We find in each of His three major temptations principles that should inform our skirmishes with the minions of darkness.

The Temptation To Act Independently Of The Father

“And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:3,4).

Following forty days and nights of fasting in the solitary howling wilderness, Jesus became immensely hungry. Satan saw this condition of bodily need as a moment of opportunity to tempt Jesus to satisfy a natural and normal appetite by an unauthorized, miraculous act. Under such circumstances, converting desert stones into nourishing loaves to prove His Divine Sonship, or Deity, at the instigation of Satan would have constituted an act of treacherous disobedience. Christ, however, recognized in the proposition a subtle attempt to get Jesus to act at Satan's bidding, thus divorcing Him from utter dependence upon the Father and His dictates in the performance of supernatural acts. In His Humanity, Jesus' suitability as a sacrifice in behalf of the sins of His people (Matt. 1:21) hinged upon a perfect and explicit obedience to the Father (Heb. 10:7-9). Time and again Jesus affirmed that His purpose in entering this world was to do the will of the Father and not His own human will (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; Matt. 26:39). To take one step extraneous to the Father's will in such an independent act would have disqualified

Him as a human sacrifice. Moreover, the united testimony of Old Testament, Levitical, sacrificial ceremony pointed to the need of a spotless and blameless sacrifice as its fulfillment (IPet. 1:18,19). A Messianic career marred by one act of disobedience would have constituted Jesus a sinner (perish the thought!), and would have rendered Him incapable of standing in the place of a lost world as the sinners' sinless substitute.

It was by Jesus Christ's perfect obedience to God's law that He was and is able to stand as the great Head of a redeemed class of mankind, for whom He functions as a spiritual representative, and upon whom He bestows His very own righteousness:

“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:18,19).

If Christ had yielded to Satan's proposition, He would have disqualified Himself from the redemptive roles of suitable sacrifice, spiritual representative, and redemptive Head. The prospect for Atonement would have vanished and a world held hostage by the usurper Satan would have perished, without hope of forgiveness or redemption! The consequences would have been unimaginable. So very much hinged upon Christ's complete subjection to the Father's will and careful compliance with His purpose.

While the enemy of our souls is not omniscient, it is quite possible that he recognized at least some of the far-reaching consequences which would ensue if he could manage to confuse the God-man and compromise His human integrity. Of course as God, Christ would never have consented, but in His genuine Humanity, the temptation would be real, and the enemy would be convinced of a possibility of success.

Christ's duel with the devil was therefore no mere meaningless procedural, and the aftermath of the outcome would be staggering.

On a lesser level, the outcome of our spiritual struggle against the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12) is fraught with spiritual significance. Satan walks around as a roaring lion seeking to prevent our experience with the Holy Spirit (cf. the Spirit's descent upon Jesus at His baptism-Luke 3:21,22), and if he fails in this attempt, He will seek to abort our spiritual mission by thwarting the fulfillment of God's will in our lives (Matt. 7:21 ff.) and rendering us utterly ineffective (II Tim. 2:24-26). On the other hand, if we through the Spirit's power, subject our wills to the Father's and resist the devil as he comes to us through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I Jn. 2:15-17), Satan will flee and God's will shall be wrought (James 4:7). When the enemy came in like a flood seeking to win the will of Jesus, confuse His mind, and coax Him down a pathway of independence from the Father, our Lord countered His suggestion with a vocal citation of Holy Scripture. He cited Deuteronomy (Deut. 8:3), as He did in all three of His final temptations in the wilderness. Perhaps this Book had become the special object of His meditations as He underwent a wilderness experience of testing as did the children of Israel, though for completely different reasons.

Jesus rebuffed the enemy's proposition with the weighty words of Scripture, *“But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”* (Matt. 4:4), thus indicating His willingness to wait for the Father's directive Word before taking matters into His own hands. The Father did indeed feed Him in this wilderness setting by sending angels which served His physical needs: *“Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him”* (Matt.4:11).

The verb translated “ministered” (διακονέω), means to serve in some capacity, or to wait at table, giving food and drink to guests. It seems obvious that the angels, who came at God’s Word of command, had received a charge to relieve Jesus’ bodily necessities in the desert. Thus, by waiting on the Lord to supply His need, Jesus witnessed God’s faithfulness to provide nourishment in a barren, arid wasteland (cf. Deut. 8:15,16).

The Temptation To Act Presumptuously To Impress Others

“Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matt. 4:5-7).

Next, the Tempter becomes even more subtle in his attempt to best the Son of God. Since Satan detected Christ’s complete reliance upon Scripture in waging spiritual war, he sought to distort the intended meaning of Scripture in order to provoke Jesus to act presumptuously upon a promise of God. The seductive appeal lay in the miraculous proof that would be provided for His claim to be the Son of God, and the obvious impression that would be made upon the nation He sought to convince of this claim. What could be more logical and natural than a supernatural public display that would further the cause of His Messianic career! Jesus, however, recognized the ruse behind Satan’s reasoning, and counterbalanced the enemy’s appeal to Scripture with another passage in Deuteronomy 6:16 which forbade acting in such a way as to test God’s character, patience, or faithfulness to His promise. God will indeed confirm His Word of Promise with supernatural signs in His own time and in His own way, but to intentionally engage in reckless behavior in an attempt to force His rescue, is to act presumptuously and in temptation of God.

Satan employs the same stratagem against the members of Christ’s household when He wrests

the meaning of Scripture and bids them zealously leap in the performance of some spiritual stunt to impress the world or their religious peers with their own faith and piety. People that follow subjective “leadings” to do the bizarre and irrational; Christians who “force” a witness in the most unnatural and unnerving way, instead of simply letting their light shine before men (Matt. 5:13,14); ministers who attempt to twist God’s arm to perform the supernatural before a congregation in order to impress the people with their “anointing,” when it is not within His purpose to do so; doctrinal extremes that fail to take into account the counterweight of other passages that would balance one’s perspective—in all such instances we may detect the activity of the Tempter, who seeks to wrest God’s very own Word to the destruction of His people (II Pet. 3:16). The subtlety of Satan’s approach in this second temptation argues for the need of a thoroughgoing knowledge of the Scriptures as over against a mere cursory understanding that would leave us vulnerable to the Tempter’s wiles. Jesus thus overcame this second thrust of the archenemy with the wariness of a full-fledged discernment provided by the whole counsel of God (Heb. 5:13,14; Acts 20:27). Yes, we must even learn to counter Satan’s deceptive *use of Scripture* with the rejoinder: “It is written again” (Matt. 5:7).

The Temptation To Seek Promotion At The Expense Of Compromise

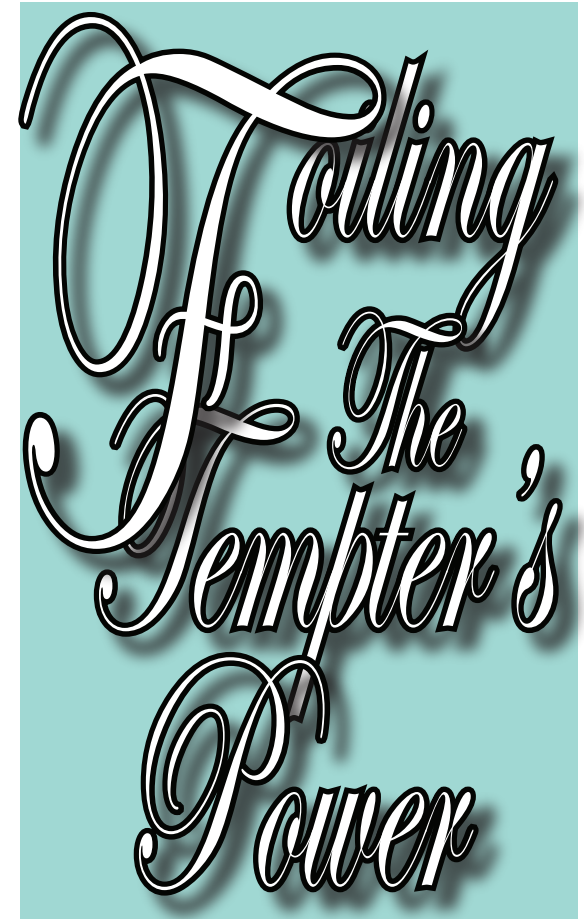
“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” (Matt. 4:8-11).

This final temptation of Satan is daring, blatant and horrid. Seeing that his previous attempts have found no handle in the heart of the Son of God (Jn. 14:30), he tempts Him in a more direct manner and on an higher order with princely possession, knowing no doubt that the Son of God was destined to

be the Heir of the world (Ps. 2:7-9; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 11:15). Having whisked Him to a high mountain, he sought to entice Him with a grand, visual tour of the many kingdoms of the world. In a point of time (έν στιγμή χρόνου-Luke 4:5), he paraded before the disinterested eyes of the Son of Man scenes of earthy splendor—no doubt majestic thrones, splendid crowns, courtyards, royal gardens, military might, the exquisite architecture of princely palaces, towering fortresses, and the gorgeous apparel of court attendants met the eye of the God-man. He was told that all would be His—IF He would fall before the usurper, the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4) and worship the Devil. Christ, with undazzled self-possession, repelled the suggestion with holy disgust, commanding Satan to be gone, and again wielding the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) by stating, “*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*” (from Deut. 6:13).

Christ’s victory over the Adversary’s third proposal provides deep insight into the Devil’s devices (II Cor. 2:11), and stands as a word of warning for every saint to whom promotion, power, prominence, and position, are offered at the expense of compromise. Satan’s bold advance against Jesus represents an entire class of temptations that befall believers—job advancement at the cost of moral compromise; material acquisition at the expense of spiritual priorities (Matt. 6:24); acquiring religious position and prominence as the result of compromising the truth of God’s Word (Gal. 5:11); the prospect of some temporal enjoyment at the price of forfeiting heavenly rewards (Heb. 12:16); or, the suggestion that “the end sanctifies the means” in ethical decision-making. As long as religious professors remain in love with the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I Jn. 2:15-17), and stand impressed with the sights and sounds of a sinful world, they will never be able to overcome the Tempter. Let us resolve to worship and serve God ONLY, placing His interests above all temporal concerns, and remaining blind to the visual imagery projected by the enemy. Then, and only then, will we be empowered to foil the Tempter’s power, and see his fiery darts fall at our feet as they did at the feet of our Master.

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The temptation account of our Lord Jesus Christ provides much insight into Satan’s devices deployed to overthrow the saints, and is a source of great encouragement that the least saint has at his disposal and in his spiritual arsenal weapons that are well able to foil Satan’s every attempt. We will seek, by God’s grace, to highlight pertinent aspects of Christ’s victorious encounter with Satan and draw conclusions that will aid us in our warfare against the powers of darkness. As the enemy comes in like a flood (Isa. 59:19) in these latter days, the Spirit of the Lord is still raising up a mighty standard,