

HOW TO HANDLE TEMPTATION
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Mk.1:9 It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
¹² Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

Matt. ¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” ⁴ But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ ” ⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’

and,

‘In *their* hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’ ” ¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

One of the most fascinating stories in the New Testament is this story in Matthew, Mark and Luke, that tells us of our Master’s Temptation. While no doubt, Jesus the man, had many more temptations than just this series on The Mount of Temptation, this series of three temptations prove most significant because they came immediately after the victorious event of the baptism of Jesus by the Prophet John, when the heavens were torn apart, and the gentle Dove came down upon Jesus, and the Voice of God complimented His only Begotten Son for following all His will. Further, we know that this series of temptations was the will of God as well, for Mark tells us that the Spirit ‘drove Him’ to the temptation in the Judean wilderness, where He would fast and pray for forty days in preparation for the encounter with Satan to prove his metal as the true Messiah of God.

Perhaps the writer of Hebrews said it best, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb 4:15). Since Christ is our example, if we would know

how to handle temptation, we must know how Christ handled temptation. Therefore, this story is our story, and we must handle temptation His way.

I. THE FIRST TEMPTATION THAT SATAN LEVELLED AT JESUS WAS A CHALLENGE TO HIS PHYSICAL VULNERABILITY. Barclay talks about the stones in the wilderness area being in the shape of those loaves of bread that they still bake and sell in the Middle East. Satan perhaps pointed to these and said, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made into bread." J. Vernon McGee, in his Through the Bible Commentary, makes a good point when he writes, "*If you are* can be translated *since you are*." He continues: "The tempter knows the condition to be true and will tempt Jesus regarding the nature of His messianic mission." Either translation is correct, but each carries a little different meaning. I do believe the tempter was trying to subvert the great experience at Jesus' baptism, and trying to get Him to doubt, in His weakened humanity, His Deity as God's Son. Jesus refused to allow His incredible hunger and his human weakness to force Him to go against the will of the Father and perform a miracle to satisfy Himself.

Every human being has legitimate needs, appetites that must be satisfied. We can and must meet these needs in order to survive. These appetites are good; but we are vulnerable. When we misuse our appetites we are putting the physical above the spiritual.

Satan knows our physical weaknesses. Some of us put food before God. Others put alcohol before God. Others put cigarettes before God. Others put drugs, both legal and illegal, before God. Others put sex before God. Whatever physical activity that we put before God is sin. We cannot allow our physical appetites to control us; we must control them. Satan knows our physical weaknesses and he uses these weaknesses to tempt us, just as He used the weakness of hunger to tempt Jesus.

Over the years I have known at least a half dozen pastors who have fallen because of their sexual infidelity. How tragic that one who leads others should himself fall because of inherent weakness that he has allowed to stand in the way of his profession. Yet, rather than being judgmental of such failure, we should be more aware that 'our adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.' These men, who we thought were the best of men, are not the worst of men, just men. But they failed to 'watch and pray' as Jesus commanded the disciples to do in the Garden of Gethsemane. Their failure, which resulted in their losing their ministry and their influence, was, in the first instance, a failure of taking seriously the 'wiles' of the devil. He knows our weaknesses and he attacks us in our weaknesses. He always provides the right opportunity, the right place, the right person, and the right occasion that will lure us into his trap. (1 Cor 10:12 KJV) Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Again, James reminds us, "But 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).

So, then, how do we overcome these temptations of the flesh? We overcome by looking to Jesus who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." And, we are vigilant, knowing how Satan tempts us. But, above all, we must do as Jesus did and say, "It is written..."(Deut. 8:3). That is, we must resist him in the Spirit of God and with the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. Billy Graham's son-in-law told of Graham

going to a church and being told by a deacon that one of the members of the church had been excommunicated because he had gotten drunk. Billy asked him what he did with those who broke the rest of that commandment. “What do you mean,” asked the self righteous deacon? Graham explained, “The Bible says, ‘Be not drunk with wine; but be filled with the Spirit.’ What do you do to those who are not filled with the Spirit?”

II. OUR NEXT VULNERABILITY IS OUR PREDISPOSITION TO TEST GOD. One commentator said that the 1st temptation was physical, the 2nd temptation was spiritual, and the 3rd temptation was psychological. In one sense this is certainly a spiritual temptation. It goes like this: “Jesus, since you are the Son of God, since you are so spiritual, your Father won’t let anything happen to you. So just jump off the pinnacle of this temple and the angels will not let anything happen to you.” Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God...’” (Deut 6:16).

Jesus knew that He was the Suffering Servant spoken about in Isaiah 53. Therefore, He refused to take the easy path of popularity. This temptation was to leap from the pinnacle of the Temple of that Holy City, either into the temple area, or perhaps into the deep Kidron Valley. Had He survived such an exploit, the crowds would have immediately proclaimed Him the Messiah, and He would not have to suffer at all, but His life would have been instead one of adulation and praise. In Rabbinical literature there was a reference that the Messiah would be known by his leaping from the walls of the temple.

This subtle temptation comes at us in two directions. In the first place, the Bible tells us that Eve and Adam tested God when they ate of the forbidden fruit. God had said, “In the day that you eat of that tree, you will surely die.” Satan’s temptation was, “You will surely not die. Instead you will become as God, knowing good and evil.” Instead of trusting God, they ate the fruit and tempted or tested God. With them the entire human race committed sin and tasted death. They tested God and found that God’s Word is sure. We often do what is against God’s will to see if we can bend His will to ours, He will not bend His will to our sinful will. He alone is God. Satan is a liar. The tree does not make us like Him. (Isa 55:8 KJV) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. (Isa 55:9 KJV) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

This comes also in another direction. We say to God, “If you will bend your will to me, I will bend my will and be obedient to you.” I often see people who really do not think a great deal about God until they face a difficult situation. Sometimes this is good, for some people do come to faith in God as a result of recognizing the weakness of their humanity. Often, however, people try to make deals with God. “Now Lord, if you will just heal me I will spend the rest of my life serving you.” The tragedy is that even if they do just that, they have given most of their lives to the devil, and the few remaining they will give to God.

This temptation causes the faithful Christian to stumble. They get some dire illness, and they cry out to God, “O Lord, you know I’ve been your faithful servant. Just heal me, and I’ll be even more faithful.” What they are really saying is, “If you will bend your will toward me, I will bend my will toward you.” We’re human; He is God. We are in no position to bargain with Him. Rather, like Jesus, we should say, “Even if I must

suffer and bleed and die young, I will not take a shortcut and try to bargain with my Father for an easier fate. Not my will but thy will be done.” Of course, like Jesus too, we will ask that the cup pass from us. We’re only human. But we must also say with Jesus, “Thy will be done.” Again, we handle temptation by realizing how He was tempted, and how He responded.

III. FINALLY, WE ARE VULNERABLE THROUGH OUR LUST FOR POWER TO COMPROMISE OUR VALUES. That is to say, we are too willing to compromise with evil to achieve our goals.

We must somehow survive this political season in which we find ourselves. The news is so redundant that it is not news, with the same old same old over and over again. Moreover, the talking heads running for the privilege of being the most powerful human being on planet earth are busy tearing one another apart, and exalting themselves to the highest heavens. Well—maybe it is not that bad. Someone needs to be president. But the problem is always the same. What compromises with evil have they made? Have they danced with the devil? Have they fallen at his feet in worship? The problem is that we really don’t know. Perhaps we never will. But power and compromise are a part of the same fabric.

For that reason Satan transported Jesus to the highest mountain and displayed to Him the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and said to Jesus, “If you will just fall down and worship me, all this shall be yours. I have power over them, and can give them to whomever I chose.” Satan lied. (Psa 24:1 KJV) “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”

But whenever we compromise for the sake of personal gain we are in danger of dancing with the devil. The temptation is getting something for nothing. The Bible teaches us that whatever we get we must work for. Nothing comes without some cost. That is just it! We fail to look for the hidden cost. Compromise is just so easy. Just fall down and do it. Worship the devil. Buy now, but be sure you will pay and pay dearly later.

Here is a young man starting out on his journey in life. He compromises to get ahead. Those compromises appear to him to be small, but, after a while they lead to greater and greater compromises until he finds himself facing some very serious problems. Maybe the first compromises are in putting his work ahead of his family time. Or it may be he is putting his personal convictions aside and following the crowd. Or it might be he is forgetting that he must nourish his soul with prayer, and bible study, and church attendance. These are such simple things. But simple compromises can cause us to lose our families, to lose our faith, to lose our purity, to lose our souls. “And what would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?” When Jesus asked that question, He asked it from His own real experience of this temptation, perhaps.

One is reminded of Cardinal Woolsey, who in Shakespeare’s play, Henry VIII, when near death, cried out, “Oh Cromwell, Cromwell, had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my King, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies.”

Compromise may look like a toy snake until it turns around and bites you and squirts its deadly poison into your soul.

A friend of mine once said, "Never sacrifice the eternal upon the altar of the temporal." Sir Winston Churchill was saying the same thing when he said, "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never give in."

We see then that Jesus gave us the example that we must certainly follow. (1 Cor 10:13 KJV) 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.

(Heb 2:18 KJV) For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

The way we handle temptation is to recognize our vulnerability, and with the help of Jesus, and with the knowledge of the Word of God, we can be so full of the Holy Spirit that we will follow the will of our Heavenly Father just as His other Son did.