

The Temptation of Christ

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

The accounts of Matthew and Luke vary in the temptation of Christ:

- There were more than the three temptations mentioned (Luke 4:2).
- Matthew records the temptations in *historical* order. Luke records them in *theological* order based on 1 John 2:16: “*Lust of the flesh* (vs. 3-4), *the lust of the eyes* (vs. 5-8), and *the pride of life*” (vs. 9-12). [Cf. Gen. 3:1-6].

➡ **Parallel** of the tempting of the First and Second Adam:

- Adam was tempted in a beautiful garden with plenty of food. Jesus was tempted in a barren wilderness without any food.
- Adam tempted with a companion. Jesus was tempted alone.
- Adam was tempted in a perfect environment. Jesus was tempted in a adverse environment.

Christ’s victory in the wilderness proves **a person cannot blame his sin on his environment, or on his company.**

WHY WAS JESUS TEMPTED? Jesus was “*led by the Spirit*” to be tempted to prove His unquestioned eternal right He already had as Israel’s Messiah, the King.

1. Because we need a High Priest who knows how we feel— *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).
2. Because we need One who can help us in our temptations— *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren... For in that he himself suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.* (Heb. 2:17-18).

COULD JESUS SIN? Some teach it would be impossible for Jesus to sin since He is God and “*God cannot be tempted with evil*” (James 1:13). But if He could not sin, what was the point in the temptation—Would it have been a *real test*?

On the other hand, if Jesus could sin, then what becomes of His deity.

➡ The answer lies in the consideration of three things:

1) **Two kinds of temptation:** (1) A test, like that of Abraham (Gen. 22).
 (2) An enticement to do evil. The temptation of Christ would be a test. The temptation was to prove Christ's holy character, not pollute it.

2) **Christ's two-fold nature.** He is all God and all Man all at the same time—The God-Man. As God, He could not sin, but as Man He could be tempted to sin, yet He choose not to sin. "His deity trumped His humanity." [NOTE: Dr. Dave Reese points out: "The whole matter of Christ's unique temptation cannot be applied DOCTRINALLY to our temptations. Due to Christ's incarnation, His humanity cannot be completely equal or totally encompass ours."]

3) **The doctrine of "peccability"**—This doctrine deals with when the sin actually occurs. Five steps involved in the sin process:

1. **Presentation**—A person is presented with the object of temptation
2. **Perception**—He is illuminated whether it is right or wrong.
3. **Pondering**—He considers whether or not he should do it (Will I get caught? What are the consequences? Is it worth the risk?)
4. **Persuasion**—He decides refuse or proceed.
5. **Performance**—He commits the act.

Where in these steps does sin occur? Temptation is in the first two steps. Sin actually begins in the heart of man before the act of sin is committed outwardly (Mt. 5:28; 1 John 3:15). Sin occurs when a person begins to ponder the pros and cons of what is being offered. As soon as a man knows what is being offered is wrong, there should be NO pondering!

In the case of Christ's temptation, the process never went past the first step. Jesus needed no illumination as to the wiles of the devil. He quickly refused each of Satan's temptations by answering, "*It is written...*"

Three theologians debated "**Could Jesus Sin?**"

1. One said, "Jesus was not able to sin."
2. Another said, "Jesus was able to sin."
3. The third said, "Jesus was able not to sin." Amen!

I. The TIMING. When did the temptation take place?

- “*And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan...*” (Mk. 1:12-13).
- A. At the point of PLEASING God. Jesus was just baptized... anointed with the Spirit... and approved of God the Father, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*”
- After the **baptism** in the water came the **battle** in the wilderness.
 - After the **dove** came the **devil**.
 - After the **approval** of heaven came the **assault** of hell.
- As soon as you begin to follow Jesus you can expect Satan to attack and try to stop you.
- B. At the point of PHYSICAL weakness.

“*Afterward an hungred*” (v. 2). According to physiologists, when someone fasts over an extended of time, he loses his appetite after a few days. His hunger pains return when he is on the verge starvation. Christ demonstrated **God’s power is made perfect in weakness**.

II. The TEMPTER (vs. 1, 3).

- Devil is a person. Jesus treated him as a person.
- A. His CHARACTER. Called “*the tempter*” because that is what he does. He cannot make you sin, but he will TEMPT you to sin.
- B. His COMING (v. 3—“*...the tempter came to him...*”).
1. You can count on Satan to come and tempt you (1 Pet. 5:8).

“*...Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved*” (Luke 8:12). “*...his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat...*” (Mt. 13:25). “*...the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them*” (Job 1:6).

 2. He will come at your most vulnerable and weakest point, like he did to Christ. He knows your weakest link.

3. He will often come when you are alone. Jesus was alone in the wilderness. Solitude is the place where victories are won or lost. What you do in private is who you are in public. What you do when no one else knows, God knows.

C. His CUNNING.

➤ We are not ignorant of the devil's devices. He has a whole bag of tricks. Here are two of his most effective tactics:

1. **Cast** doubt upon God (*"IF..."* vs. 3, 6, 9). Satan is the author of questioning God (Cf. Gen. 3:1; Job 1:9).
 - a) Doubt God's *provision* (v. 3). Satan will try to make us question whether we can trust God's to provide. "Why are you hungry? Where is God's provision He promised in Philippians 4:19?"
 - b) Doubt God's *protection* (vs. 5-6). Satan says, "Jump! Or don't you believe God will protect you?"
 - c) Doubt God's *promise* (vs. 8-9). "God's promise You will sit on David's throne? Ha! Who knows when (or if) it will be fulfilled. Fall down, and You can sit on it now!"
2. **Challenge** God's Word (v. 3—*"IF thou be the Son of God"*). This challenge came both in the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry and at the end (Mt. 27:40).
 - a) Satan challenged Christ to prove His deity by performing a miracle. Christ did not have to prove anything to Satan. God already confirmed Christ's deity at His baptism (3:17).
 - b) We believe God on the basis of what He says in His Word. The Word of God is all the confirmation we ever need.

III. The TESTING.

➤ Satan tempts us in these three areas:

- 1) v. 3—**Distrust** God and do it yourself.
- 2) v. 6—**Presume** on God and force Him to do something for you.
- 3) v. 9—**Abandon** God and let Satan do something for you.

A. Test involving the WILL of God (vs. 3-4).

1. Nothing in Satan's temptations were innately evil: Eating bread; Trusting God to protect you; Reigning over kingdoms. The wrongness was in the timing and motive.

Satan's most subtle temptations are not to commit of some overt sin (fornication; murder; stealing). Satan's most effective temptations are to tempt you to do a good thing at the wrong time, in the wrong way, or outside the will of God. Nothing wrong with marriage, unless it is outside God's will.

➡ Nothing sinful about eating bread, as long as you do it in the will of God. A prophet of Judah learned this lesson the hard way (1 Kings 13:7-9, 15-24).

2. The evil in the temptation was for Christ to satisfy His hunger at the **wrong moment** (not God's time) and with a **wrong motive** (to grant Satan's request). BASICALLY, Satan was tempting Jesus to act independently of the will of God (cf. John 5:30).

B. Test involving the WORD of God (vs. 5-7).

➡ **If Satan cannot defeat you in one area, he will attack another area.**

➡ Satan disguises his temptation in a religious setting (v. 5).

1. Jesus answers each of Satan's temptations with Scripture. Jesus knew the Scriptures. If you don't know the Scripture, you will fall for Satan's temptations every time.
2. v. 6—The devil misquotes Psalm 91:11—Omitted "*in all thy ways.*"
 - The "new Bibles" remove the last six words in Luke 4:4!
 - a) Satan perverts God's Word by *omitting* something... *adding* something to it... or *twisting* it out of context.
 - b) Satan seeks to turn us from God's ways to go our own way (Ex. 32:8; Judg. 2:17; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:12).

C. Test involving the WORSHIP of God (vs. 8-9).

➡ Satan has always desired to be worshipped (Isa. 14:14)

1. The kingdoms of this world currently belong to Satan (John 12:31; Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4).
2. They became the domain of Satan when Adam forfeited them to Satan when he sinned (Luke 4:6 cf. Gen. 1:26-28; Rom. 13:1; John 19:10-11).
3. Satan is offering Jesus a “shortcut”—an “easy” path—to the throne without regard to God’s timing and bypass the CROSS. Satan offered Christ what He will eventually receive (Rev. 11:15). “Don’t wait! You can reign NOW without the cross.”

➔ **Summarizing the three temptations:**

1. Satisfy a legitimate appetite by illegitimate means.
2. Produce spiritual results by unspiritual means.
3. Obtain a lawful heritage by unlawful means.

IV. The TRIUMPH.

- A. The SPEEDY refusal. There was no arguing or pondering (Eve’s mistake). Christ’s refusal was swift and decisive.
- B. The SCRIPTURE response.
 1. Jesus used “*the sword of the Spirit*” (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).
 2. Ps. 119:11—The key word is “*heart*,” not head. The Bible is not a book of “magical phrases” to be recited to get us out of trouble. Scripture must be internalized. The only way the Word of God will work outside of us is by it first working inside us (1 Thess. 2:13).
 3. Many Christians think simply quoting Scripture will drive Satan away. But Satan can quote Scripture. The power is in submitting to God’s Word (James 4:7), not in speaking it.
- C. The SATANIC retreat (v. 11).

SUMMATION: How to deal with temptation: The way Jesus responded to temptation is the way we are to respond to it.

BOTTOM LINE: When faced with temptation: (1) Submit to God. (2) SAY NO to Satan... (3) Give Him a Scripture reason—“*It is written!*”