

It Is Written...

You've been tempted today, haven't you.

Some of you are thinking about this and some are nodding your heads rather emphatically. Being tempted does not make you a sinner – you were already born that way. What you do with temptation, however, is critical.

In researching for this topic, it's just amazing how many methods, gimmicks and sure-fire ways of overcoming myriad temptations have been espoused over the years. And overcoming is indeed so important that Jesus mentioned it to all seven of the churches of Revelation chapters two and three. Confessing your faults, accountability partners, boundaries and safeguards are all good, but interestingly enough, there is little attention by comparison given to a key point and one that Jesus Himself illustrated for us in Matt 4:1-11. Let's study it.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (v1) When you consider this, it's really radical. Jesus, the Son of God, had to be tested. And it was the Holy Spirit who led Him into the desert. Our first observation here is that if Christ Himself had to deal with temptation, you and I should not think we're exempt.

The scripture says, *For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.* (Heb 2:18) And,

though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (Heb 5:8) *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.* (Heb 4:15) Because He went through it, He learned obedience to our Father and He can now help us.

Unlike Jesus, however, the Holy Spirit doesn't lead us into temptation. The Word of God tells us, *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.* (Jam 1:13,14) Jesus had no sin nature. We do.

Indeed we do. And it is that same nature that can not only lead us by the nose so to speak to that dark den of temptation but also leads us to think we've got to get ourselves out. As if Jesus will just shake His head and turn away until we 'clean up our act', we can hang our heads in defeat, because we eventually know we can't overcome on our own. So many have believed the lie of condemnation and have not recognized the loving, forgiving arms of our Savior outstretched and within our grasp if we will only look up to Him, not ourselves.

Temptation is humbling, isn't it. Just when you're thinking how 'well' you're doing spiritually (ha) along comes the tempter. And even when you do the right thing, you realize you're vulnerable. Whether it's lust or anger or selfishness, we've all got 'buttons' and he knows how to push them.

Temptation is also a bitter learning experience. Yielding to it brings both immediate and sometimes longer term consequences. Praise God, Jesus never yielded.

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (v2,3)

If you've fasted, you know the first three days are brutal – you get really hungry. Then, it seems to taper off. The next time you start getting real hungry, it's because you are starving to death literally. The body starts cannibalizing itself. If you don't eat soon, you will die. This is the point at which Jesus faced this temptation.

Now, Jesus could have easily done exactly what the devil suggested but He chose to put His trust in God's provision. He rejected the devil's advice to take matters into His own hands, 'to look out for No. 1' so to speak. It would have been logical – He had the power and the need. Most counselors would have told Him not to be so fanatical, so extreme about trusting God. Nevertheless, it was the Holy Spirit who led Him into the wilderness to face the danger and hunger; so He chose to wait on the Lord God. Yet, the basis of His decision wasn't a matter of stubbornness – it was based upon something He knew to be a rock solid fact.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (v4)

End of the temptation. However, noting His reference to the Word, the enemy tried something else.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

'He will command his angels concerning you,

and they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" (v5,6)

The apostle John summarized for us the essence of sin in man (what is "in the world") when he wrote that it was associated with the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). You see that the devil appealed to the first one in his first temptation. Here, in this second attempt he appealed to pride.

Again, it was 'logical' for Jesus to make a display of His power. He had it, why not use it? He was the Messiah, after all. And implied was the devil's trying to twist Christ's obvious trust in God. It was like he was daring, "OK, you have a radical trust in God. Prove it to everyone. Let everyone see your trust in the scriptures and your divine powers." Interesting, that His own flesh brothers later used the same instigation (John 7:3-5).

But Jesus declined. *Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* (v7)

The devil can quote scripture. Yet he failed to finish quoting it for the passage continues -- *You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you*

shall trample underfoot. (Psa 91) – which are obvious references to Christ’s crushing underfoot of Satan.

Yet, Jesus presented other scripture. In other words, He showed that it was wrong to isolate a verse and present it out of context. He looked to the whole of scripture, the whole counsel of God.

And He could have put on the display; after all, He later walked on water. But Jesus later said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do;* (John 5:19). If the Father didn’t say jump, He wouldn’t jump. But if the Father said, “Go walk on the waves to your disciples.” He’d do it.

To the lust of the flesh, Jesus responded with trust in God’s provision. To the pride of life, He responded with submission to God’s direction. Time for round three...

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." (v8,9)

The lust of the eye – men want what they see. And after all, this was what it was all about – right? Earthly rule, earthly power, earthly splendor? The devil offered Him the whole earthly enchilada. For what? A little bow. What a deal. Ruling the whole world is exactly what the Jewish Messiah is expected to do – right?? It was like the devil was saying, “You don’t have to do it God’s way. After all, that involves so much trouble and time. Do it my way. You can have it all now for just a little compromise.”

Doing it God’s way can indeed seem like a ‘long hard road’.

Asaph, the psalmist, wrote,
*I was envious of the boastful,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

For there are no pangs in their death,

*But their strength is firm.
They are not in trouble as other men,*

Nor are they plagued like other men.

Therefore pride serves as their necklace;

Violence covers them like a garment.

*Their eyes bulge with abundance;
They have more than heart could wish.*

They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression;

They speak loftily...

Behold, these are the ungodly who are always at ease;

They increase in riches...

When I thought how to understand this,

It was too painful for me—

Until I went into the sanctuary of God;

Then I understood their end.

(Psa 73:3-8,12,16,17)

Yes, with God’s means, you reach God’s ends – eternal life. With Satan’s means you get Satan’s ends – eternal death. Regardless of the difficulty, God’s plan is the only plan that’s good for His children.

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.(v10,11)

For the third and final time Jesus responded, “It is written...”.

‘Marvelous’ you may think, ‘how Jesus knew the Word and quoted it accurately to the devil.’ But this wasn’t what decided the day.

Jesus didn’t simply know the Word of God; it wasn’t that He had studied it diligently; it wasn’t that He could quote it or even that He kept it in context. That was basic and academic. What made the difference was something else far, far more powerful.

He was submitted to it, all of it.

And this is more explosive than you may at first consider -- the incarnate Word of God submitted to the written Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God and yet He submitted Himself to the written scripture. The Bible says that He has been given the “name which is above every name” (Phi 2:9) yet it also says of the Lord, “...You have magnified your Word above all Your Name.” (Psa 138:2)

Here’s the rub – many of us ignore the written Word of God and wonder why we submit to temptation. Many hold only to select portions of the scripture as if God is bound by each and every sentence in isolation. You must take the whole of His Word in context or you’re headed for bitter disappointment. Many of us know the Word and can even quote it, witness with it, minister it to other brothers or sisters, yet we aren’t truly submitted to it. Like having a prescription of a vital medicine and only reading the label, submitting to the authority of the written Word is different than knowing it. Good grief, even the devil knows it.

There was a Baptist pastor named Peter Miller, from a small town in Pennsylvania who lived during the

American Revolution. There was also another man who lived there named Michael Wittman, an evil-minded sort who did all that he could to oppose and humiliate the pastor. He made his life miserable. One day Michael Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to die. At first, Peter Miller thought, "Well, thank goodness the Lord took care of that guy. I didn’t know how much more I could take!" But then he remembered the part of the Bible from Matthew 5 which said "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." And he was like, "Oops! I guess I blew that one, Lord." And he decided to travel seventy miles on foot to Philadelphia to plead for the life of the traitor. He approached General George Washington with the request.

Washington said, "No, Peter. I cannot grant you the life of your friend."

The old preacher said, "My friend? This guy’s not my friend. "He’s the bitterest enemy I have!"

"Washington said, "What? You’ve walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts things in a different light. I’ll grant your pardon." And he did.

Peter took Michael Wittman back home - no longer an enemy. But a friend. By his act of love, he demonstrated the difference between merely knowing the word of God and being submitted to it.

May each and every one of us who truly love the Lord overcome temptation and live victoriously by sincerely submitting to the scripture, the written Word of God.