

The word “tempt” (*peirazo*) occurs in the Bible in two very different senses, depending on whether God or Satan happens to be doing the tempting. Generally the word denotes an effort to induce a person to do wrong, and when Satan is the author of the act this is universally its meaning.

Not so, however, when it relates to God. When He is the author of the act it denotes simply a test or trial, the object of which is always good. In Genesis 22:1 we read: “And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham” (KJV). Now in the popular sense of this term God did not tempt Abraham---i.e., lay before him inducements to sin. God, in fact, is incapable of so doing. What He did was simply subject Abraham to a great trial (the offering of Isaac) with a view to testing whether his regard for divine authority rose above his love for Isaac. The object of this test or temptation was eminently good.

But, someone objects, doesn’t the Bible say that God does not tempt anyone? Indeed it does (see Jas.1:13), but James is speaking of inducement to sin, not a mere test or trial for holy reasons. To keep this distinction in mind will help to avoid confusion with respect to temptation.

However, in this study, temptation clearly takes the form of inducement to sin since Satan is the agent or author of the act and the commission of sin is clearly its objective.

Let us now notice what the Lord’s temptations reveal. Our study is from Matthew 4:1-11.

The Source of Temptation

Our text says Jesus was “tempted by the devil” (vs. 1). Verse 3 also speaks of him as “the tempter.” This is in accord with the facts revealed about Satan in many other passages of scripture.

In his very first appearance in the Bible---Genesis 3---he is found in this role as he successfully tempts and seduces Eve into sin.

The devil’s association with sin is put thusly by John: “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 Jno.3:8).

In three verses in Ephesians Paul speaks of him as “the spirit who works in the sons of disobedience,” says that we should not “give place to the devil,” and tells us to “put on the whole armor of God, that (we) may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (2:2; 4:27; 6:11). Paul also speaks of “the snare of the devil” in 1 Timothy 3:7.

But the most graphic passage descriptive of Satan’s role as tempter and the source of temptation is found in 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Language consists of word pictures, and what a vivid and moving picture this is!

If this doesn’t impress us with this role of the devil as our great spiritual adversary and the threat that he imposes, then nothing can. And he even sought to seduce the Lord!

The Nature of Temptation

In 1 John 2:15,16 we read: “Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world---the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life---is not of the Father but is of the world.”

Note that John mentions three avenues which all temptation employs with a view to seducing man to sin. We see this born out in the first temptation when Eve “saw that the tree was good for food (the lust of the flesh), that it was pleasant to the eyes (the lust of the eyes) and a tree desirable to make one wise (the pride of life)” (Genesis 3:6).

Again the this threefold nature of temptation is demonstrated when Satan confronts Jesus. In seeking to get our hungering Lord to “command that these stones become bread” (vs.3) he employed the lust of the flesh. In “showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (vs.8) he appealed to appearances or the lust of the eyes. And in taunting Him to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple “if You are the Son of God” (vss.5,6) he appealed to the pride of life.

The Power of the Written Word

In each of the Lord’s responses to Satan’s temptations (vss.4,7,10) He appeals to what “is written,” i.e., the inspired scriptures.

Nearly all acknowledge the power of the immediate or oral expression of God This was demonstrated in the creation of the world. The Psalmist was referring to that event when he said: “For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa.33:9). The power of God’s spoken word was further demonstrated at Sinai when He spoke the 10 commandments to the people with its subsequent effect upon them (Exod.20).

Yet all need to understand that the written word of God is just as powerful as is the spoken word. It suffers no diminution of potency when it takes written form! Neither did time erode its power, for two of the quotations cited by Jesus were written some 1500 years earlier.

In spite of this, men tend to minimize the written word. The rich man in torment made this mistake (Lk.16:27-31). Those who insist on the necessity of a direct working of the Holy Spirit in conversion similarly err.

John said in his gospel account of the life and deeds of Jesus Christ, that “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (Jno.20:31). Paul said that “all Scripture (this word refers to inspired writing---FV) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim.3:16,17).

The written word is both powerful and self-sufficient. May we never forget this!

The Humanity of Jesus

A fourth revelation of the Lord’s temptations is His human nature. The New Testament sets forth the

uniquely dual nature of the Christ---He is both human and divine! It is His humanity that we will first observe.

The fact that He could be tempted is itself a proof of His human nature. James tells us that “God cannot be tempted by evil” (Jas.1:13), but Jesus was tempted. Some reason that the temptations of Jesus were mere trials, not inducements to sin, because God cannot sin. That is missing the point! It is His humanity on display here. God cannot die, but Jesus did. God cannot be tempted to sin, but Jesus was! The writer of Hebrews could not have made it any plainer when he said: “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).

Note how His capacity to sympathize is stressed due to His temptation experiences which were designed to exploit His “weaknesses.” Due to His humanity He had human weaknesses just as we all do, and having suffered temptation as all men do He is able to understand! It is not just the theoretical knowledge of deity, but also the experiential knowledge of humanity that uniquely qualifies Jesus to serve as our High Priest!

The Divinity of Jesus

Finally we see in the temptations the revelation of His divine nature. Paradoxically that which reveals His humanity also demonstrates His divinity! This is seen in the outcome mentioned in the passage noted above---Hebrews 4:15---“yet without sin.” Not only did He thwart Satan in the wilderness, but throughout His entire life. Luke 4:13 indicates that the devil did not cease his efforts to lead Jesus astray. Yet in spite of his repeated efforts, Jesus did not succumb to temptation. Only of Him among all men who ever lived could it be said, “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1Pet.2:22).

Strangely some cite the temptations of Jesus and His perfect resistance as proof that men may live sinless lives. Again that is missing the point, and to

so conclude produces needless frustration and perhaps even total despair.

The Bible teaches emphatically the universality of sin, inclusive of Christians. See Romans 3:10,12,23. And John says explicitly to Christians, including himself, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jno.1:8).

But Jesus never sinned! Coincidental? Surely not. He is the sinless Son of God, without blemish and without spot, because He is more than man---He is God! Some object that if His divinity had anything to do with His sinless perfection then He is not our example. But He is! He is our perfect example---our ideal---from whom we should draw inspiration and encouragement.

This relationship of the imperfect to the perfect may be illustrated by anyone who possesses superior talent---a golfer, singer, etc. By emulating such I can experience significant improvement, though I will never reach the level of the other. So it is with Christ, who left “us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Pet.2:21). May we learn from the temptations Jesus endured and seek to so follow.

WEST ALLEN CHURCH OF CHRIST

1414 West Exchange Pkwy.
Allen, TX 75013

Visitors are always welcome!

WHAT JESUS’

TEMPTATIONS

REVEAL

by
Foy Vinson

**“was in all points tempted as we are,
yet without sin” (Heb.4:15).**