

TEMPTATION OF JESUS

When you think about it, the basic difference between people who are free and those who are enslaved is the number of choices they have. People who go to prison lose their freedom to choose in many areas of life. People who are free measure their freedom by the extent of their ability to choose. However, in all the freedom of choice that we have, we still have limits and our choices carry responsibilities. Now having said all of that, we have to admit there are certain things about which we have no choice. We cannot choose to have "no influence" on others. Our choice is what kind of influence will we have. We cannot choose to "not serve" something or someone. The choices of whom (or what) we will serve can be summarized into four subdivisions: God, the world, the flesh, or the devil. (In reality there are only two choices and that is God or Satan.) We may have many choices regarding *how* we serve. The ability to choose how we will serve the world, the flesh, or the devil deludes us into thinking that we have freedom even though we are actually enslaved to whatever we serve. The same argument can be made regarding worship. We will hold something or someone in highest regard or reverence. For some, this "someone" may be themselves.

We could make an argument that every temptation we experience is a **test** to determine whom (what) we will serve or whom (what) we will worship. We encounter temptation (or testing) every time we have choices to make. Many of our choices have already been "pre-programmed" and we respond automatically. We may call such automatic responses as "habits" or imprinting or even instinct. If our choices were programmed prior to our salvation (and many were), then we find our choices that are automatically made likely do not serve or honor God. The solution is to re-program ourselves -- this is what Paul was talking about when he advised Christian to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds."

The temptation that is constantly with us in life's choices was experienced by Jesus in His earthly life.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.
LUKE 4:1-2

Luke presents what was happening to Jesus in clear spiritual terms. We don't always (maybe hardly ever) recognize the spiritual significance of things that are going on around us and inside of us. Jesus had just officially begun the intense or overt phase of His earthly ministry. He had been ministering in man's behalf since sin entered the world, but that was in the heavenlies.

We know that Jesus was born of the Spirit from conception in Mary's womb. However, as he began His ministry He was baptized (with water) of John in the Jordan and was anointed (baptized) by/with the Holy Spirit from on high.

The first thing that happened at that point was not a "mountain-top experience" (elation, joy, celebration, and confidence) but a "wilderness experience" (struggle, doubt, and testing). When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they had a wilderness experience in which they learned that they could depend and rely upon God. God supplied their food, their water and their protection. So what was Jesus doing in the wilderness? He was proving that God is all we need in life! He was proving that God is sufficient. He was there forty days and ate nothing. During this time, he was tempted or tested by the devil.

Many times temptations are the strongest when we are at our weakest point. The person who is cold and without proper clothing is more likely to steal a coat than someone who is warmly dressed in a fine fur coat. A person who is starving is more likely to steal a piece of bread than someone who just finished an elegant Christmas dinner. Maybe this is why Jesus ate nothing for forty days: to show that no matter how hungry or how tired we are, God is sufficient.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" LUKE 4:3-4

At the baptism of Jesus, God's voice from heaven declared Him to be the Son of God. (God approved and affirmed Jesus before He was tested.) Later in the ministry of Jesus, He would declare Himself to be the Bread of Life. Now, as He was hungry and weak, the devil tempted Jesus to do things his (the devil's) way. The way of the devil is to think of self, first. There could be an appeal to helping others also, just think, if you could turn stone into bread how many hungry people you could feed. After all, this was the kind of Messiah the people were expecting.

Man is more than a physical body

Jesus' reply was not some great mystical proclamation; he simply used the words given to the nation of Israel through their prophets. These words were available to all who wished to know them. In refuting the temptation of the devil, Jesus voiced His agreement with and endorsement of the teachings of the Old Testament. Notice that Jesus did not say that we didn't need any bread, but that physical food is not sufficient for man to live a full life in response to his spiritual needs. Notice also that Jesus did not encourage us to treat the Word of God as a cafeteria menu where we can pick and choose what we will believe and what we will obey. We live by every word of God.

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" LUKE 4:5-8

(This is the third temptation according to the account in Matthew. Matthew's order seems better since it was after this temptation that Jesus told Satan to leave. The order used in Luke was according to moral order: body, world, spiritual.) Jesus Christ will reign on the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. This has been part of God's plan from the beginning. Therefore, what Satan was offering Jesus really belonged to Him already. So it was not having power over all the kingdoms of the world that was the error that Jesus rejected. What He rejected was the means or methods by which He would receive this dominion. If Jesus followed the plan of salvation, He would need to endure suffering and rejection – even death on the cross. If Jesus followed the plan of salvation, He would have to wait almost 2000 years before He would set up His own kingdom on earth. He could have had it all at that very moment by simply bowing down and worshipping the devil. Satan appeals to us and our desire to have power and he appeals to our impatience to have whatever, right now. By yielding to such temptations we adopt the devil's way and in effect exalt him to a position in our life that is rightly held only by God. Jesus recognized the deception and the trickery and reminded Satan of the demands by Almighty God that we are to **worship** none other than God Himself. We are to **serve** no one other than God Himself.

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. LUKE 4:9-13

Up to this point Satan had appealed to Jesus to become a social savior by feeding people. He had appealed to Him to become a political savior by governing the world. Now the appeal was to be a religious savior by demonstrating miraculous acts. Jumping off the pinnacle of the temple without getting hurt would really impress people. That act would rival what Elijah did in calling down fire from heaven. People would really be impressed; but, the real question is would they really be changed and delivered from slavery to sin. Not likely!

Being a great religious leader should not be the goal in the life of any minister. The goal should be to serve God and to minister His love and truth to other people for their benefit and to extend the Kingdom of God.

Jesus could see through the deception. Even though Satan could quote Scripture to make his case, the overall outcome of what he was tempting Jesus to do was not in keeping with the will and character of God. With God "image is NOT everything."

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. LUKE 4:14-15

(Matthew's account shows that this was immediately after the arrest of John the Baptist. John had fulfilled his mission.)

As we are obedient to the will of God and as we rely upon His word, we will find that the enabling power of the Spirit of God will operate in our lives. Our service to God and our ministry to other people will be effective and will bring glory to God unto Whom all glory and honor and power and praise belong.