



"Temptation": Who's in Control?

Matthew 3:13- 4:11

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Matthew 3:13- 4:11 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" 15 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. 16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to

Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

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.

"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

"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." Heb 2:18

It is easy to wonder why Jesus...a perfect and sinless man, and literally God incarnate, would have any need of baptism. The baptism that John was conducting there in the Jordan river was a practice of 'baptism of repentance' and Jesus literally had nothing to repent of. To understand this aspect of His life, one must understand the purpose and significance of the coming of Christ to begin with. Why He came, why He came as He did, where He came to, etc. One important fact herein is the humanity of Christ and thus His identification with us sinners...with mankind and our condition and therefore our plight.

Therefore at least part of the reason the sinless Jesus was baptized that day was to identify with us and to *lead*. To be an example for all of us to follow. Again, this is not a case of WWJD... “*What Would Jesus Do*”, but rather *What DID Jesus Do?* In this picture, the whole of the trinity...all of triune God, was represented. God the Son was baptized, God the Spirit descended upon Jesus, and God the Father spoke from Heaven.

It has been said...with much credibility, that Jesus was not baptized “to become the Son of God,” but rather because He ***already was*** and the act of baptism therefore was testimony of such. Just as we are not baptized to “become a son of God” but rather “because we *already are*, and testify of such an experience and transition through the act of baptism.” One thing is readily accepted here, and that is the fact that the act of Christ’s baptism signaled the beginning of His earthly ministry. The “forerunner”...John the Baptist, would herein publically recognize Jesus as the Messiah. It was the symbolic “passing of the torch.”

After identifying with man in the act of His baptism, Jesus would now identify with them in suffering under temptation. No one will be able to stand before our creator on that day and claim innocence or exemption from judgment on the grounds that the judge doesn’t understand what it was like here on earth and therefore we should not be held accountable or appraised by someone that was essentially ‘out of the loop.’ No doubt the issue is an enigma! No question that the whole matter is hard to wrap our heads around! But the fact is, He went through it just as we have. He knows our pain...

There is much doctrinal debate over the next logical question in this event. And that is ***could*** He have sinned? If He was without the ***ability*** to sin, then why the show? Would not Satan... “*Lucifer fallen from heaven*,” (Isa 14:12) have known that innate aspect of Christ? If so, if it was impossible for Jesus to have sinned, was He truly “all man” as well as “all God” as we understand Him to be? Because we are men, and we can sin! But you might claim here that we are *fallen* man, and Jesus was not 'fallen.' That is true, but Adam had the ability to sin *before* he fell...he certainly proved that!

The stance that Jesus could *not* have sinned because He was God is called “impeccability.” I do not pretend to grasp the nuances of this phenomena. But no place in scripture says that I must understand it to make it truth! Factually, there are a lot of things about God that I cannot explain, but never does that change God or the facts about Him. And frankly, when I think that I HAVE figured it all out, that’s when honestly I am in some serious trouble! I may come to a greater understanding some day...and you can as always pray for me on that account, but I believe that Jesus WAS fully man and that in the strictest answer to the question, He *could* have sinned.

He was the “second Adam” who obeyed all the law of God, unlike the first. Jesus had what Augustine called the “*posse peccare*” and the “*posse non peccare*”...that is the ability to sin and the ability to not sin. The first Adam sinned, Jesus did not. Satan did everything in his power to break Jesus that day in the wilderness. If it was impossible, then why would Satan waste His time? For the event only ultimately served to highlight the power of deity over the demonic, something I would think Satan would be anxious to avoid. If Christ had not become incarnate, He never would have been tempted. For no one can tempt God. But Jesus *did* become incarnate. He ***became a man***.

On the other side of this is the fact that the Holy Spirit uniquely and powerfully ministered to Jesus throughout His earthly life...including this event of wilderness testing. The reality is, for a person to fall to sin there must be a *desire* to sin, for which Jesus had none. His life was one marked by a “zeal for righteousness.” Jesus once stated that “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.*” (John 4:34).

Man had the ability to sin from the garden. And Jesus was not only all God but all man. However, man fell in the garden, and in His corrupted state he now *desired* sin, but Jesus was an “unfallen” man. Yet make no mistake...when Jesus finally went to the cross...three years from this point in history, He knew very well for what He was dying. He...as God and man, knew the desperate state and anguish of mankind. He knew that we were broken, as a society, a culture, and each of us personally!

Thus, one could take the position that Jesus did not sin because He had no taste for sin...no desire to act in such a manner. And while I agree with that idea, one must wonder why. It strikes me that His success in this wasn't so much a matter of *defense* as it was a practical *offense*. Meaning His success in the field of temptation battle was through the action of great love toward God and profound filling and response to the Holy Spirit, not ‘gritted-teeth’ effort...locking the doors to sin, wearing blinders and avoiding dangerous spiritual scenarios. However, let us be clear about this: He *was* hungry in the wilderness and he *did* want food! He *was* afraid in the garden the night before the cross! These are aspects of *humanity*. The same ones as we have today.

The original language lends to the idea of a “testing” occurring here as much as a *temptation*. That may seem inconsequential to you, but it should paint a more accurate picture of just what temptation is for us as it was for Jesus. All temptation is in reality a *testing*. However, the results of such testing does not “enlighten” our Creator whatsoever. He knows what you got. He knows what you are made of and He doesn't need to try you out to find the truth. He knows you better than you will *ever* know yourself.

Hence the testing is for *you* and maybe for the spiritual entities that are involved in your life ...*from both sides!* How often we would have a honestly different evaluation of ourselves if only we would pay attention to our “test scores!” It's astonishing to me to see folks repeatedly in “*crash and burn*” mode and yet still think they are spiritual giants! God is *trying* to communicate but if our pride blinds us to such overt billboards of truth, well...what can we say?

The text says "when the tempter came." For it is not a matter of *if* but rather *when* he comes! Could Jesus... in all three of these "temptations" ...have physically done any of them? Yes. He could have turned the stones to bread...*he turned water to wine, did He not?* Could He have jumped from the temple pinnacle and been rescued by angels? Oh yes! Could He have fallen and worshipped Satan? You and I are men, could we? Of course.

It strikes me that all of these temptations...like all such testings in this life, are ultimately a desire to take matters into our own hands. Attempting to do what is not the express will of God. All temptation has in it the innate aspect of temptation to circumvent the will and plan of God and to take control of the field of play just as Adam did in the beginning. In many ways, the specifics of any individual temptation is inconsequential. Ultimately it comes down to His way or ours.

One could easily argue that it could do no real harm to turn the stones to bread. I mean, He had the power and He was legitimately hungry! This is how we fall you see. We *reason*. We say to ourselves...*well, come on...who does it really hurt? And I frankly have a special reason to have to act in this manner and I certainly have the power to act on this issue. What does it really matter?* Adam and Eve fell to this: *Hmmm...did God really specifically say...?*

Truthfully, man can reason themselves into just about any scenario no matter how preposterous it may really be. Oh not just the small stuff, but adultery, lies, even violence and murder! Not because God said such was ok, but because we *reasoned* that we have a special pass. We *reason* that because we had the power and ability to act in such a manner that such was therefore a-ok .

But Jesus did not do this. Because above all desire and even perceived *need*, He wanted to please His Father. That "need" trumped all the rest. But we generally succumb to self want and self power.

I have witnessed some astonishing displays of sin because a person desired to intervene and he or she had the power to do so, thus they acted accordingly. And in many many of these cases they has never been regret or repentance, even as they sit in a pew somewhere on Sunday mornings.

This is why Jesus cannot be just your Savior. He must be your *LORD*. He must be the first and the last word in your life in all matters. He must actually be in control. Salvation...*real salvation*, brings Lordship into your life. For salvation is essentially a personal surrender. Salvation is relinquishing control. Jesus did not sin because He "did not have the ability." ***He did not sin because He was not calling the shots***. His desire was supremely to please the Father. In John 8:29 Jesus said "*...the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.*"

It is here that is the real field of battle. It is here where we must focus. It is not on the individual skirmishes. Not on a case-by-case situation. Many of us attempt to handle temptation in that manner. One at a time as single missiles from the enemy, instead of winning the war...instead of total offensive action. If we overcome the enemy, then the individual trials do not deter us. Our pursuit must be to fall in love with God more and more.

When we love the Father, we do not attempt to "reason" through sinful action, because in all matters we "do those things which please Him." We do not try to handle things ourselves. We do not try to decide what is best for us, or what is ok for us. We decide *before the temptation* that God decides everything. Only love motivates that kind of thinking. Only love acquiesces to such a control...

Jesus answered Satan in the end saying "only God will you serve." This was the period at the end of the sentence. This finished the battle. Because essentially Satan was in essence going after the wrong 'person.' Christ wasn't making His decisions...*God the Father was*.

For Christ, there was no other choice, no other option. It didn't matter what he *could* do, or even what He might have *wanted* to do. The only thing that mattered was what God *directed Him to do*. Because for Jesus, God the Father was in control. God was calling the shots. Because anything else was sin. No matter why. No matter the outcome. No matter if He could handle it Himself. For God the Father cannot sin. If He is calling the shots, neither do we.