

DEALING WITH THE DEVIL

The devil does his best to make sin look attractive! He appeals to immediate gratification versus long-term ramifications. He appeals to the ego and makes it all about YOU versus humble obedience to God. He even sought to use this strategy with Jesus. “I” is in the middle of PR “I” DE and in the middle of S “I” N. This is what the devil is all about!

Matthew 4:3 (NKJV)

3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

Another title for the devil is “the tempter.” This is what he does. He entices people to sin (cf. 1 Thess. 3:5). He can’t force people to sin but he can solicit. He can tempt! And he is good at what he does.

In the context of Jesus being very hungry the tempter came to Jesus and said, **“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”**

The word **“If”** here is better understood as **“Since”**. **“Since You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”** God the Father had just declared that Jesus was His **“beloved Son”** in whom He was well pleased at His baptism (Mt. 3:17). The devil didn’t challenge this premise, but subtly tried to get Jesus to act on it INDEPENDENTLY of God the Father as a means of alleviating His hunger pain.

There is overlap, but the three basic categories of sin mentioned in 1 John 2:16 seem to correspond to Satan’s temptation strategy with the fall of mankind in Genesis 3 as well as to his temptation of Christ.

1 John 2:16 (NKJV)

16 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.

Temptation to bodily desires

Gen. 3:6 – “good for food”

Matt. 4:3 – “stones become bread”

1 Jn. 2:16 – “the lust of the flesh”

Bodily desires are not necessarily wrong in and of themselves. The issue is this: Is it according to the will and Word of God?

Of course, the devil didn't mention the fact that this action would be self-willed and not according to the direction of the Father – and therefore SIN! He is a master at subtle manipulation.

Humanly speaking, the thought of bread, I am sure, was intensely inviting at this point. Jesus did have the power to turn stones into bread! But in His role of SERVANT, He was only to take orders from the Father. Who would He listen to? The devil or God the Father? That was the test! This is always the test! Whose voice are we going to listen to?

This first temptation had to do with appetite, the kind of sins we commonly associate with human desire or bodily lusts. If it appeals to making the flesh feel good, we feel the pull to do it, contrary to what God has said - and right there is the temptation! The world lives by the motto: "***If it feels good, do it.***" But godliness responds by saying, "***I only want to do the will of God. I am not going by my feelings, but rather by the Word of God.***" This is what Jesus did!

Matthew 4:4 (NKJV)

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.' "

Jesus responded by quoting from Deut. 8:3 which recounts a context in which God humbled Israel and evaluated their obedience and whether or not they would depend on Him.

Deuteronomy 8:3 (NKJV)

3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

God taught Israel that they needed to DEPEND upon Him. They needed to depend upon His Word which is what faith is all about! Jesus in refuting the devil's temptation to act independently of God quoted this verse which in context emphasizes DEPENDENCE upon God's promise of provision (cf. Jn. 4:34).

Note the phrase "***bread alone***". Jesus is saying that life is not merely about physical things; rather, it's about relying upon God. And reliance upon God is based on the WORD of God! Throughout the Bible, trust/faith/belief (whatever word you want to use) is always linked to God's Word. God

wants us to walk in dependence upon Him, and this dependence is grounded in His Word.

In the case of each temptation, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy which is a book associated with Israel's wilderness experience and the lessons that God taught them in that context (cf. Deut. 8:3; 6:13, 16; 10:20). By application this world is a wilderness and in our wilderness wanderings we need to constantly depend upon God – to trust in His Word.

Before God, this is the great issue in living. This is how He wants us to LIVE – by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!

“Just as God gave the Israelites manna in a supernatural way (Dt 8:3), so also man must rely on God for spiritual feeding.” – ***NIV Study Bible***

Yet, I would note that while God supernaturally provided the manna, every day the Israelites had to go out and collect it. God's provision does not do away with human responsibility in the process. Yes, God supernaturally is the teacher and thus nourishes our souls with the Word, yet we have to put the time and effort into being in the Word.

Note, Jesus' quote begins by emphasizing “***Man***” – “*Man shall not live by bread alone.*”

“The various tests were directed against the human nature of Jesus, and he resisted in that realm. However, the perfect union of the divine and human natures in his person made the outcome certain, for God can never sin. But this in no way lessened the force of the attack.”

– ***Wycliffe Bible Commentary***