

Temptation – No Person is above it

By Melvin E Barnett

When it comes to temptation no one is immune, and I mean NO ONE. Even Jesus Himself was tempted as He finished His forty day fast in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1). As much as many of us would like to skip temptation all together and focus on good, sanctified living without all of the interruptions of this life, God apparently had other ideas. Personally, I hate temptation because the more mature you grow in the Lord the greater the temptations are to overcome.

As stated earlier, even Jesus wasn't immune to temptation as many may think. Fact is, for anyone who thinks Jesus led a great life except for His last few days should read Isaiah chapter 53. Perhaps some may develop a whole new perspective of our Lord. You and I serve a Savior that really understands the common struggles of man. Jesus was well acquainted with the problems you and I face each and every day, including the subject of temptation.

Matthew 4:1-11 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. ²And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. ³And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. ⁴But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. ⁵Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, ⁶And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. ⁷Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. ⁸Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; ⁹And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. ¹⁰Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. ¹¹Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Very carefully tucked away in this passage is a key point to understanding temptation. Notice that when Jesus was hungry, the tempter (Devil) appeared with a solution for His desire. Nothing, as well as no person, is sacred to the Devil; he could care less who and what you are. Satan is interested in your destruction. (John 10:10a The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy:).

Destruction is the agenda for all temptation. Desire (a longing) is the bait for all temptation. Without a desire, whether it is good or evil, physical, emotional, mental, social, etc., it must be present for temptation to take root. Jesus was first tempted with food, a necessary item for physical survival. The temptation wasn't gluttony -- all you can eat desserts, fried foods, high carb and fatty treats -- but bread alone. Jesus was hungry, an honest, genuine physical condition he was suffering from due to a lack of food. In other words, he wasn't being tempted by another man's wife, or to cheat, steal or lie, but to quench an urgent, physical need to avoid starvation.

Jesus' next temptation came with a declaration of Scripture by the Devil himself. Key point: Temptation may be very fuzzy and hard to characterize without good discernment from the Lord. For example, I know a minister who believes that if a bank teller gives you back too much money that God has just sown a blessing into your life and that you have no right, nor reason, to return the money. Rather you should accept it as a blessing.

Personally, I see this as a clear accident on the part of the teller, void of all spiritual blessing, and a perfect temptation to steal money that doesn't belong to you. I further see this as a clear weakness and an opportunity to bring a lot of financial embarrassment to the church.

Next the Devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and told him it would all be His, if Jesus would just fall down and worship him. Key point: Don't trade what you already possess. Jesus, of all people has full dominion and title of the earth. The Devil was lying and trying to manipulate our Lord into receiving what He already owned if He would just bow down and worship. Even though Satan was tempting the Son of Man, if you remember in the first few verses of John we see that Jesus, being the Word, created ALL things (John 1:1-5).

Sadly, many temptations come in this form today. For example, a man is tempted to cheat on his wife with another woman. He is lured into believing that he can start over and have a new family and set a new course for his life. He forgets, most often, that he already had these things. Perhaps the reason life is so difficult is that he had his mind up to doing evil. He certainly needs to think about getting a second job to pay for two wives and child support.

Temptation is summed up into three categories: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. 1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. Again, the tempter must entice his victim with a desire, or the whole scheme will dissolve. In James the writer demonstrates the method of temptation that the devil uses and characterizes each step along the way.

Ja 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: ¹⁴But every man is tempted (Greek: to test), when he is drawn away of his own lust (Greek: a longing), and enticed. ¹⁵Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Key points: God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt any man. God gets a lot of blame, but here we see that He is not to blame for temptation after all. This passage puts it very clear: God DOES NOT tempt people. He does not test people by dangling sin before their eyes to see how they will react. God is not in the "Gotcha" business. He is for our victorious battle over ALL temptation from the Devil. Unfortunately, there are a lot of good people that earnestly believe that God is always up to testing to see if we will stumble. If you think about it, what kind of a sick person would do such a thing? Rom 8:31b ... If God be for us, who can be against us?

Key Point: Every man is tempted (to test) when he is drawn away, by what? "His own lust". So... the devil comes along and baits you with what you "long" for and you immediately start to debate (see Romans 7:15-21) with self. Self seeks to indulge the flesh while the spirit seeks to mortify (Colossians 3:5-10; Romans 8:13-15) your members and replace the void with the fruits of the spirit rather than the works of the flesh.

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Key Point: James 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived (Greek: seize), it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Your lust has literally seized you; you have become immobilized by that which you have longed for. Not to get bogged down into Greek words, but an illumination of God's Word amplifies meaning and adds to the miracle of what we know as the Bible. Therefore, the word "bringeth" that is used twice in our text has two separate meanings based on where it is used. The first time bringeth is used it means to breed forth, generate; and the second use means to produce. In other words, when you are seized by your longing, you breed forth sin, and sin produces death.

Fortunately, God understands the power of temptation and has went before us in all situations and made a safe passage through ALL possible temptation. Interestingly enough, God lets us know that we are not special, that one temptation we repeatedly have to deal with is actually common to others. We aren't the first, nor will we be the last, to be faced with "cow tipping" our neighbors herd. This study wouldn't be complete without the beautiful promise found in 1 Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

The previous passage brings me to our last Scripture, Isaiah 54:17a "No weapon (Hebrew: prepared) that is formed (Hebrew: mold, fashion) against thee shall prosper;..." Many people ask themselves everyday, "Why does the Devil always pick my weakness to attack?" Your answer is in the understanding of the above scripture. When we break down "weapon" it is more than just a means to destroy; rather, it is a device that has been prepared against you. The scripture goes on to use "formed against"; this device has been molded and/or fashioned for you. Let's clarify this passage even more. Satan has devised a custom-made snare that works in conjunction with what you long for to destroy you. Except, God says it shall not prosper. This is a sure fact. The enemy's plans will fail if we stand firm and resist him (James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.)

I guess temptation can be summarized by saying, "You can't stop a buzzard from flying over your head, but you can sure stop him from building a nest in your hair". We all have a weakness, and Satan will attempt to exploit our weakness the rest of our lives. We have to stand and remember that no matter how difficult it is to say no, God has made a way of escape. My friend, find the door and run like you have never ran before to avoid falling into temptation.

Psalms 11:1 In the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? ²For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.

Please send reviews and comments to: melvin@melvinbarnett.com Remember to download your free E-book for a limited time.