

Temptation to Quit

I. Jesus was tempted in all points and was without sin. (God has a meaningful message for us all, and at the center is His determination to reveal His Glory in us. In New Testament Christianity, God reveals His glory in the believer, by changing our nature, or our character, *from* that of depraved humanity *to* that of His only begotten Son, Who is Jesus. We know that Jesus was both Son of God, and Son of Man. We are tempted, at times, to think that Jesus could resist temptations because He was God; but that thought is not consistent with the Biblical account. It is true that Jesus had the ability to use His divinity to overcome the temptations, but the devil tempted His humanity, not his divinity. The devil tempts our humanity too, and sometimes, but not often, we remember that we are *new creatures in Christ* and that we must fight the temptations as children of God.)

A. Jesus was born without sin, and had to remain sinless. (When we are born, our souls are dead from sin. Our spirits are alive—that is where personality and psychology come from. But the Human soul died in the Garden of Eden, and must be re-born, by our faith in Christ, so that we may live, forever, in Heaven, with our Heavenly Father. All people are born this way, but Jesus was different. Jesus was the Son of God, not of Joseph, and so Jesus had a different, a *sinless* character, even at birth. Jesus had to remain sinless, because the penalty for sin is death. If Jesus ever committed a sin, then death would have been fair and just for Him; if He remained sinless, then His death on the Cross was unfair and unjust. This was how God could raise Jesus from the dead, and our faith in the Atonement in the sacrificial death of Christ, is how God can raise us from the dead too.)

B. The temptations in Luke Chapter Four are strongest of similar varieties. (Let us note first that a temptation is only a temptation if it is possible for us to sin by the action with which we are tempted. For example, none of us is tempted to sleep late instead of going to church if we go to sleep early on Saturday evening and wake up early on Sunday morning. The temptation to sleep instead of going to church comes after we stay awake too late the night before. Likewise, if Jesus had not been hungry, there would have been no

temptation to make bread from stones. By this we know that Jesus was really a person, and that as a man, He made a conscious decision to serve the glory of God and not indulge the temptations of flesh. So, with what are other people tempted? The three temptations we see in Luke 4 are very strong examples of certain categories of sins. Could Jesus change stones into bread? Sure He could. He was hungry enough to think about doing it too, and that was the opportunity for the temptation. Yet there are other things that tempt people to indulge their carnal desires instead of glorifying God by righteous conduct. Probably none of us has ever fasted for 40 days, so we have never been as hungry as Jesus was; but there are surely other carnal desires with which Christians are tempted to compromise holiness with worldliness. For Jesus, the strongest of all carnal desires, at that moment anyway, would have been to eat something; and the lesson is that if Jesus could resist the temptation to eat, after 40 days of fasting, then you or I can resist temptations to sleep late on Sunday mornings, or to waste energy keeping our homes warmer than we need to keep them, or taking extra dessert after dinner when we aren't even hungry, for example. We don't resist the temptations very well. We think that Jesus had an advantage in being God, but He didn't use it. The thought is only our excuse for indulging our sensual pleasures.)

II. Jesus prayed and fasted in an exercise of spiritual discipline. (There are two words in that sentence that seem to be anathema in the contemporary church: "exercise" and "discipline". When we put those words together it is like challenging ourselves, and the liberals in contemporary churches, with subjection to a higher authority, Who turns out to be the strictest Authority we will ever meet. We like to think of exercise as something that makes us skinny or physically strong, but even if we have enough discipline for push-ups or sit-ups or jogging, our spirits are still very lazy. We resist exercising sufficient discipline to become spiritually strong, and we rebel actively against its imposition by someone else. This is the human nature that is still in us; it is not the nature of the Son of God.)

A. The temptation to eat is like a temptation to quit. (We showed how the temptation to change stones into bread was a strong temptation for Jesus, and that we are usually un-

able to resist much less severe temptations, for lack of spiritual discipline; but let us consider what the alternative was, for Jesus. He could have just quit; forgot about the redemption of humanity, refused to sacrifice His life to atone for our sins, and just gone back to Heaven and kept on being God; He could have brought the world to an end and let all the sinners burn in hell for eternity; and what difference would it have made to God? Jesus decided that the inconvenience of fasting, and the agony of crucifixion were prices He was willing to pay in order to accomplish the Will of God, which was to reveal His own glory: the Redemption of humanity from sin and the filling of Heaven with the born-again souls of people, people who could *not* join God in Heaven unless Jesus did the things that were necessary to put His life in us. Are we ever tempted to quit? I am: every Sunday about 11:00 A.M. and every Sunday afternoon at about 3:00 P.M., I'm tempted to just quit, to go back to Missouri and sit on my back porch and watch the flies copulate until Jesus comes back to earth. Then every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I go Songnae and try to teach science and history to kids who don't want to learn; then the other days, I meet classes filled to about 1/5 capacity and wonder if God really *wants* me to try to evangelize unbelievers in the context of language lessons—if He does, then *where are they*? This is my temptation to quit. God would still be God, the righteous would still inherit eternal life in Heaven, and sinners would still burn forever in Hell, whether I am here or not; but I stay because of my faith in what God *can* do, and because I know that if I quit, I would surely endure the wrath of God for the rest of my life, maybe for all of eternity as well.)

B. We need spiritual discipline in order to achieve Christian maturity. (So where do we get the discipline we need, in order to reach maturity? We get it the same way we get any other kind of discipline: by learning. That is the real meaning of discipline anyway, to learn something. We confuse the definitions of discipline and punishment because it is usually necessary to punish a child in order to teach him to change some inappropriate attitude or behavior. God knows how to do that with His children, too; but discipline can mean simply *teaching*, and if we learn the lessons God wants to teach us then we change,

because learning means changing. As we have said many times, the lesson is Jesus. Our textbook is the Bible. Our teacher is the Holy Spirit. We need some discipline to attend the lessons, and we need some discipline to pay attention to the teacher, and to do our homework, just like kids in government schools do. Now let us note that the proper interaction between a teacher and a student is directed study—the teacher tells the student what to do and the student obeys the teacher, and the result is learning. So what is the proper interaction between the Holy Spirit and the believer? The Bible calls it *sanctification*; but the process of sanctification, on our side anyway, is a lot like the way we describe the teacher-student dynamic. The Holy Spirit tells us what to do, and we obey, and the result is our maturing in faith until we all come to the perfection which is Jesus. Also, note that the academic student exhibits his obedience in diligent study; believers exhibit our obedience in diligent prayer: the Bible tells us to *pray without ceasing*; and as we noted at our prayer summit, nothing happens, in the absence of prayer. We cannot jump from purity to power, or jump backwards from praise to prayer. The only sequence that accomplishes spiritual maturity is purification by our regeneration as children of God, prayer in the Holy Spirit, power in the life of the believer to overcome the material world, and praise for God, from our lips, and from everyone else who sees His glory in us, too.)

C. We achieve maturity by the action of the Word of God on our spirits. (You will notice that Jesus resisted the temptation to quit His fast, and by extension, to surrender the Battle for Redemption, by quoting scripture: *Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.* Let us note that we need to be very familiar with scripture in order to employ that tactic when we are tempted. But more significantly, Jesus understood that *every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God* is more important to our lives than the food we eat. Our humanistic minds want to ask, *How can that be?* –and we will only have a good answer to that question *after* we have reached a certain level of spiritual maturity, which, as we just pointed out, requires a lot of praying on the part of the born-again child of God. The *how* of it is probably easier to explain than

to understand, and easier to understand than to personalize. We *think* that the food we eat keeps us alive, and if we don't eat then we will die. We *need* to think that we would have no life at all, if God had not spoken, that is, *God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul* (Genesis 2:7). That living soul died because of the sin of Adam and Eve; but it is made alive again by the Word of God: *ye are clean by the word which I have spoken unto you* (John 13:10); and again, *the letter of the law killeth, but the spirit maketh alive* (2 Corinthians 3:6). Now note that in the case of Jesus, He made a decision and was not going to back up from it. He came into this world for the specific purpose of living a sinless life and then dying in sacrificial atonement for the sins of all humanity. With some prayerful reflection, we *might* understand the love of God, as in John 3:16—*for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*. Our understanding of this is always filtered through our humanistic intelligence; but for Jesus, there was never any question about what He must do, or whether He would endure everything that was necessary to make it happen. He came to *give His life as a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28). We might, as we say, understand that the Word of God is more important than material food; but Jesus personalized the principle, and the result was our Salvation.)

III. No one else would have known it if Jesus had cheated. (How could anyone know? Jesus was alone there in the desert. Our source of information is Luke, who must have got the story second-hand, from someone else who heard Jesus tell it. So how can we know that Jesus reported the episode honestly, or that there were no later embellishments as the story was passed on? And to personalize this a little better, how will anyone know the results of our own temptations, and spiritual victories or defeats? Our human pride makes us want to look good in front of other people; do we suppose that Jesus was tempted with pride, too? Remember that the temptation to eat was a temptation to indulge passion, and exaggerating our accomplishments and bragging, are other human passions.)

A. We, also, are tempted to pretend things that aren't true. (We need not look far to

find children pretending to be things they aren't. Such fantasies are normal, maybe even mentally healthy; but in a child, there is no attempt to deceive, and the pretending might even help them sort out behaviors and skill sets that will be helpful in later life. We cannot excuse adult pretenders quite so easily. Adults pretend that things are true when they are not for the specific purpose of deception: to make themselves look good, or better than they are anyway, in front of other people. Sometimes adults even pretend that others are worse than they really are, so that the pretender can look good by comparison. Such pretensions should never arise in church work. We must be honest about ourselves, in front of God, and with our brothers and sisters too. Suspicions about motives are not conducive to confidence about character, which is a necessary part of teaching and learning (or, as we pointed out a few moments ago, of discipline and spiritual growth). So then, are there church members, who pretend to be good Christians during church meetings, and then leave the meetings and return to worldly lifestyles? Such hypocrisy is no longer necessary in the contemporary church: now they just bring their worldliness into the church meetings and pretend that they are praising and worshipping God by it. What a reproach to the Body of Christ! Let us stand in front of God in honest humility, and in front of other believers in honest meekness. That is only hard if we try to pretend that we are more important than we really are. If we put Jesus up front and in center, and ourselves back and behind, then our humanism cannot take control of our church meetings, or of anything else in our lives either. We can testify to our spiritual victories honestly. We need to learn to be more like Jesus, and less like the braggarts; *God resists the proud and giveth grace to the humble.*)

B. Pretensions are designed to deceive people. (Let us examine our spiritual progress honestly then, in front of God. Do we really wake up early and pray and read the Bible? Do we really take advantage of every opportunity to challenge unbelievers to repent sin and convert to the Christian faith? Do we really make conscious decisions to live holy and righteous lives in the present material world? Is our church membership and attendance truly an act of love for God instead of an exercise in image enhancement? And when we

have the opportunity to stand in front of people in the name of Jesus, teaching Sunday School or leading a group activity, do we use that opportunity to magnify the glory of God, or is it merely a gratification— or inflation— of an individual ego? Now there are two points to raise in regard to this: If we could score 100% on a test with those kinds of questions then we would be justified in saying that we are growing *in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, and if we could get a perfect score on that examination then our Heavenly Father would be ready to trust us with bigger, and more important responsibilities. The fact is that most of our scores are nowhere near 100%, or even a passing grade; we need to study again and take the test again. Those who only pretend to be more holy, more spiritual than they really are, fool no one but themselves and other hypocrites. They don't fool the Holy Spirit, who is the Teacher, or any "advanced students" who have actually passed tests over such trivial matters. The second point is rather obvious. The contemporary church lives by pretensions. They are excellent examples of apostasy and hypocrisy, but not of righteousness or holiness. They certainly have a spirit among them: but it is not the Holy Spirit of the Living God. Humanism thrives on political correctness, entertainment, cultural pluralism, and mutual self-affirmations; and Jesus is nowhere near any of that foolishness, nor will He ever be part of it. Neither should true believers be: we are only *tempted to pretend* that irreverent noise is praise for God! Now why should we call the noise irreverent? It is because the noise makers have no respect for the Word of God. They only stay in the meetings long enough to make the noise; when it is time to listen to the sermon, they disappear, to make noise in someone else's meeting, or to practice making noise for the next time. If you want to test this definition for irreverent noise, just make the drummers and dancers and guitar players sit in the congregation and listen to a sermon, without taking their normal place on the platform.)

C. Unspiritual people are easy victims of deceptions. (This is because the human soul can only live when the Spirit of God makes it alive. We were created in the image of God and so we have a collective longing to animate our souls with *a* spirit. We need *a* spirit,

and the first spirit we meet is called “ego”. The devil is ready and willing to bloat the carcass of the dead human soul with all the things the humanistic spirit thrives on, and our egoism prods us along in pursuit of them. We live in a world where secular humanism and materialism pretend to be our friends; and in many cases, even in churches, they are the only spirits people have opportunity to embrace. When the Gospel comes to us, we have to decide if we will continue to feed the humanistic spirit on materialism, or kill it off, so to speak, by feeding the Spirit of God, newly introduced into our souls, with the Bread of Life (which is the Word of God) and the Living Water, Who is Jesus. That is both the most exciting and the most dangerous point in our (or anyone’s) spiritual life. If we handle it right, a newly born-again believer will start to grow and mature in their faith; if we mishandle it, they go the other way. Then sadly, once one has rejected the Gospel, their humanistic spirit shows them even more reasons to remain, intransigently, in their sin. That person is easily deceived by a cult, or by a hypocrite, because the Holy Spirit is not present in his or her life to reveal Truth to them. For this, the Bible tells us, *study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). The worst of all deceptions is the lie that the grace of God brings an indulgence of the sins that the members of the contemporary churches refuse to repent and forsake; that God loves them in spite of their idolatries and indulgences of carnal pleasures and will let them into Heaven for the sake of His love. They have it all backwards: *the grace of God that bringeth Salvation hath appeared unto all men ...*(in the life and work of Jesus, not in the irreverence of contemporary church “services) *teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present generation ...*(not, teaching us to bring worldliness into church and expect God to sanctify it because of our faith that He will do so). May God help *us* get it right!

IV. We are tempted to indulge many passions. (Jesus was tempted to indulge one very strong passion. As we shall see, when it didn’t work, the devil tried a different tactic. The devil tries different tactics on us, too, and if he can’t compromise our testimony in one sin,

there are a lot of other points at which we are vulnerable. Let us note that Jesus fasted successfully for 40 days *before* any other temptations began. He was most vulnerable to the temptation to eat when He was hungriest. The point is that Jesus was hungry *because* He successfully resisted the temptation to eat for 40 days. This turns out to be the most vulnerable time for us, too. We are most vulnerable to temptations to sin after we have just successfully resisted a temptation to commit a different sin. The devil doesn't sleep; we get tired, we get hungry, we get lonely, and every condition we *get* provides the devil with another opportunity to tempt us to sin in a different way. Our only hope is for Jesus, Who defeated Satan at all points, will resist temptations for us, and help us to stand against evil. We only know that Jesus will help us *after* we read the Bible and pray. This is why the first, and most powerful temptation for most of us, is to do almost anything else *except* Bible study and prayer; and it is why we are told to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Then, if we actually overcome the temptation to be spiritually lazy, we have to be ready for the next problem at a moment's notice. It is hard for us; but it is easy for Jesus.)

A. Human intelligence seeks for gratification of curiosity. (Our intelligence was a gift from God, and one expression of intelligence is curiosity. So where is the problem? It is that evil is a perversion of something good. Hunger is natural and so appetite is good; eating too much or eating things that are no good for us because they taste good is a perversion of appetite. Preparations for the future are natural results of an intelligent assessment of our circumstances; greed is a perversion of preparation. Curiosity is normal, so learning about the world around us is natural; skepticism is also normal, although not always justified; but humanism insists upon immediate skepticism, and then perverts skepticism into a rejection of any proposal that threatens to subject us to God's moral authority. In the specific context of today's scripture, we are naturally curious as to how Jesus could resist temptation; and our human reasoning is ready with an answer: either the story is not true; or He cheated and didn't tell anyone; or He cheated by using His divinity; and our humanistic logic rebels against the answer that Luke 4:1-4 is real, historical truth. This

rebellion is a perversion of skepticism, which serves to defend our egos against *Be ye perfect, as the Father in Heaven is perfect* (Matthew 5:48). *We* complain that perfection is impossible, therefore God should excuse our imperfection and let us off without resisting temptation to, for example, love Him with *less than all* my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Well, God is prepared to *let us off*, so to speak, but not so easily. Letting us off cost Jesus a lot of misery, and we have to repent and believe. Then our humanity rises up again to say that it isn't fair; that we should have *to do* something to earn the grace of God. Thus the Christian religion vacillates between liberalism and legalism, but never quite sees *The Way, the Truth, and the Life* Who is Jesus. Again we say, God put intelligence in us, and curiosity is an expression of intelligence; but rejecting truth because it makes our humanistic egos uncomfortable and then constructing logical sounding arguments to justify our rejection of Truth is a perversion of intelligence, falsely called philosophy.)

B. Everyone needs to feel love, acceptance, respect, and appreciation. (These are some other passions that we like to indulge, usually in the company of an attractive specimen of an opposite gender. So let us note again that procreation is normal and natural; philandery and lechery are perversions of normal sexual desires. A temptation is only a temptation if it is possible to commit a sin; and we are most vulnerable to temptations after we have just successfully resisted a different variety of them. We may think that Christians should be able to help one another avoid temptations of passion, but the help is limited by the immediacy of fellowship, and by the degree of our determination to resist temptations that arise, even if the help *is* available. (Now *you* please resist the temptation to tell me that I should get married: married people are tempted to commit adultery, especially after a divorce, just the same as unmarried people are tempted to commit fornication.) Also, in many cases, people are more interested in using one another for indulging their own passions than in helping one other resist temptations. So we see that even “counseling” can be perverted for the advantage of the “counselor”—who could very easily be in greater need of counseling than his client, and less willing to admit it. So we ask again, could

emotional needs have caused Jesus to invent these stories about His successful resistance to temptations? Our human intelligence wants to insist that it is possible; the Spirit of God in us insists that Jesus was victorious in spirit and in flesh. That leaves us, once again, at a critical juncture: of either believing what we read in the Bible or questioning it (with *unspiritual* motives); and the proposition that we need Jesus, in every moment.)

C. Perversions are corruptions of character by human depravity. (Depravity makes us want to quit when things get hard. Depravity makes us want to create illusions about our successes, and to disguise our failures as unavoidable human errors. Depravity makes us want to see Jesus as a good man of high moral caliber who fell afoul of religious authorities and government incompetency. Human depravity is the result of the absence of the Spirit of God in us, ever since the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, but that was not part of the character of Jesus. Jesus was made of different stuff. Jesus was God. So the devil can tempt us to indulge any of a variety of passions and then excuse our sin with philosophy or psychology. Then if he fails to trip us up on one point, he need only wait until we are feeling especially spiritual about our victory and then tempt us with something else. We will be vulnerable to the next temptation because we will be full of ourselves and empty of God. That didn't work with Jesus. Whereas in our spiritual depravity, we seek gratification of our passions, in the incarnation of deity, Jesus sought the fruition of the Will of God. We are satisfied, then, that in His humanity, Jesus resisted temptation to indulge His human passions, in any form, in any context, and *that* is His example for us. It is hard enough even to understand the challenge; it is harder still to personalize it. In fact it is *impossible* if Jesus is not in us, resisting temptations to indulge passions (like skepticism) for us, and living a righteous and holy life in us, and for us. We have to make that possible for Him by giving ourselves to Him completely. The result will be the glory of God in our lives, and by extension, in our Church. Jesus didn't quit when it got hard; neither can we.)

V. So, How can we know that Jesus successfully resisted temptations? (We hope that by now this question is irrelevant. We can know by the Biblical record, which should satisfy

any sincere believer. And we cannot jump from this point to the ultimatum that we also must resist temptation successfully, or perish as impenitent sinners. We turn then to *how* we can successfully resist temptations *too*; and the answer is that if we operate on our own steam, in our own spiritual strength, that we cannot. Yet all sincere believers understand that Heaven is holy, and that we cannot enter Heaven if we are not just as holy as Jesus is. So we arrive at the operations of faith. The Christian faith is that God made it possible for us to live forever in Heaven with Him. We have to be born again. We accomplish the spiritual rebirth by repenting and forsaking sins. The Holy Spirit puts new life from Christ in us, and the action of the Word of God starts making us conscious of how unrighteous we are in spite of all our pretending. Now if we are conscious of our depravity, then we are also conscious of our choice: to make a conscious decision to obey the Word of God: *thou shalt have no other gods before me... thou shalt not covet...* and etc. The Holy Spirit, Who put new life from God in us, starts helping us make better decisions. We will notice that sometimes we even get it right. This is because Jesus is living in us, making the right decisions for us now. How did He get there? His Holy Spirit has begun displacing and replacing the humanistic spirit in us, and our thoughts and actions are different as a result. Can we not make better decisions, avoid temptations, and so forth, on our own? No, of course not. We do not even understand the problem of depravity, or that it is a problem for us, except by the action of the Word of God on our thoughts (and as surely as spirits live in words, the Holy Spirit lives in the Word of God.) In the context of this scripture then, the Word of God began acting upon the thoughts of Jesus long before the devil came along to tempt Him to turn stones into bread. Jesus had been living on the Bread of Life, which is the Word of God, since before Creation began; He *was* the Word of God. Our questions about the veracity of this story arise from our perverted curiosity. The Truth in the Word of God exists quite independently of our willingness to believe it, and amen!)

A. Disbelief is a perversion of skepticism. (As we have seen, skepticism works a little bit like a reality check on what we are told. The opposite of skepticism is credulity, or, to

believe everything we hear, no matter how fantastic it sounds. A little skepticism in our interpersonal relationships is a healthy thing then, but when we are dealing with the Word of God we need to be more child-like with our faith. The obvious danger to our spirituality is that the devil can pervert our skepticism into an intellectual rejection of everything we hear, especially in the Word of God, on the premise that it is so difficult to understand and that we don't like to believe what we don't understand. Then of course, even if we believe, we have to try to personalize the message of the scripture so that we can appropriate the Grace of God for our own benefit. The devil would like nothing better than to prevent that from happening, and he will use every trick he can invent to keep us from hearing the Word of God, because *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*)

B. The Resurrection of Christ proved that Jesus resisted sin successfully. (The end of the story then, is the same as its beginning. Jesus lived a sinless life, and so death had no claim on Him. If Jesus had been guilty of any sin at any point, then His death on the Cross would have been just another death of another sinner; and conversely, if Jesus had been only a man who lived a good moral life then His righteousness would have saved Him, but only Him, from death. 1 Corinthians 15:14 tells us, *if Christ be not raised then our preaching is vain and your faith is vain.* We have faith that God forgives sins and puts the eternal life of Christ in believers, and that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us for service in God's eternal Kingdom. All of this is possible for just two reasons: Jesus resisted every temptation for every sin; and He didn't quit, give up and go back to Heaven and leave humanity to eternal perdition just because the cost of Redemption was inconvenient, or required more spiritual discipline than He was willing to exhibit. Jesus did not give up on our Salvation; He did the Will of God and atoned for our sins by dying on that Cross. God does not give up on us either, when we whimper and whine about how hard it is to live holy and godly; instead the Holy Spirit helps us to overcome temptations and to mature spiritually. Let us resolve, then, not to give up either; to get serious about being *doers of His Word and not hearers only*, and to get busy with our lessons. Our homework is to learn Jesus.)