

“CAN THE DEVIL MAKE US DO SINFUL THINGS?”
Proverbs 7:6-10, 25-26, I Corinthians 10:6-13, Matthew 4:1-13
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Contrary to the message of many popular television preachers, the Bible does not promise health and prosperity. What we are promised is that we are engaged in a spiritual battle. Perhaps it would be better stated as we are involved in an all-out war. Satan is actively involved in carrying out His sinister strategy to separate us from our Heavenly Father. He has been aggressively tempting people to turn away from God since the first woman listened to his lies in the Garden of Eden. The interesting thing is that after all these years Satan is still using the same methods. He tempted Eve in the garden, Jesus in the wilderness and he actively tempts us in our daily lives.

His temptations generally come in one of three areas: 1) physical needs and desires, 2) possessions and power and 3) pride.

In our Gospel text today we see Satan and Jesus going head-to-head. Satan is offering Jesus a crown without a cross, and a kingdom without human suffering. We need to notice that Satan is not trying to distract Jesus from His mission, but merely offering Him a shortcut. He is basically telling Jesus that there is an easier way to accomplish God’s plan. None of what Satan offers is within the boundaries of God’s will. Just as in the battle presented in our text, the stakes in our battle with Satan are high. As we look at our text for today, we will discover valuable lessons for winning the battle against temptation.

Can The Devil Make Us Do Sinful Things?

Back in the 1970s, comedian Flip Wilson hosted his own TV show. Flip would dress up in women’s clothes and act as if he were a woman named Geraldine. Every time Geraldine’s husband accused her of doing something wrong, her excuse was always “It wasn’t me. The Devil made me do it.” Many people believe he has the power to “make” us do things. Is that how temptation works? Can he “make” us do anything we don’t want to do?

Back in 1971, Gerald Mayo was a 22 year old inmate at Western Penitentiary in Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania. He filed a lawsuit before the U. S. District Court of Pennsylvania. Mayo claimed that Satan had on numerous occasions caused him misery and unwarranted threats against his will. Mayo said Satan had placed deliberate obstacles in his path and caused his downfall. Mayo said Satan had deprived him of his constitutional rights.

Well, was Gerald Mayo right? The devil doesn't have any power over us that we don't allow him to have. However, the devil can be very persuasive. The closer we are walking with Jesus, the harder the devil will work to get us off track.

In Matthew 4, Jesus had just been baptized. He saw the Holy Spirit descend on Him. He heard His Heavenly Father say, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17)

What happened next? Matthew chapter 4 tells us the devil tempted Jesus 3 times. And how did Jesus handle these temptations? The three temptations Jesus faced can be applied to temptations we face today. *"Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.'* *"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'"* (Matthew 4:3-4). This was the appeal to physical needs. Jesus was hungry. The devil tempted Him to make the stones become bread.

"Then the devil took Him up into Jerusalem, the Holy City, set Him on the pinnacle of the Temple" 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."' Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matt. 4:5-7). There was the temptation to take a short cut.

Jesus knew what He needed to do to fulfill the Father's plan. He had to go to Jerusalem, suffer, and be crucified. The devil tempted Jesus to bypass all of that with a display of God's power that would firmly establish Jesus as the Son of God. *"Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me' 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" (Matt. 4:8-10). The devil tempted Jesus with power. The devil said he would give Jesus the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship him.

That brings out an interesting truth. The devil does have more power than most people believe. Jesus never disputed that the worldly kingdoms were the devil's to give. Nevertheless, Jesus responded to all 3 of the devil's temptations by quoting God's word. Since the best defense against temptation is the Word of God, He resisted all those temptations.

So what can we learn from Jesus' response to temptation from Satan?

God allows the devil to tempt us for a reason. Matthew 4:1 says Jesus was led *"by the Spirit"* into the desert to be tempted by the devil. James 1:13 says, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."*

So why would the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness so that He could be tempted? James 1:2-4 has the answer. *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* So, God is going to do what it takes to produce a stronger faith in us.

What is an area of your life where you are being tempted right now? Is it better to ask God to remove the temptation or to ask God to help you resist the temptation? Not every temptation can be easily resisted, but God does provide a way of escape for every temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13 say *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."* So when you are tempted, pray for God to remove the temptation. If the temptation isn't removed, then pray for God's help in resisting it. Can you do that?

Psalm 119:11 says, *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!"* Ephesians 6:17 tells us, *"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word*

of God.” So the Bible is your weapon against the devil!

When we resist, the devil flees and the Holy Spirit strengthens us. Matthew 4:11 says the Devil then left Jesus. Then angels came and attended Him.

The Gospel of Luke also tells us about the temptation of Jesus. There’s one verse in Luke’s account that is very important. Luke 4:13 says, “*Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.*” What does that tell us?

When we resist his temptation, the devil will not leave us alone for very long. Yes, James 4:7 says, “*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” That doesn’t say the devil stays away for the rest of your life! Rather, he picks on us when we are feeling weak, but he runs away when we show the first sign of strength. He knows there are plenty of easier targets than a Christian who stands up to him with God’s Word!

Romans 8:26 says, “*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*” The Holy Spirit will help us in our weakness. After His temptation, Jesus had the angels come to strengthen Him. We have the same promise from God.

So, how did Gerald Mayo’s lawsuit against the devil turn out? In his decision, Judge Gerald J. Weber first noted that the jurisdictional situation was unclear. No previous cases had been brought by or against Satan, so no official precedent existed. However, there was an “unofficial account of a trial.”

He was referring to the 1937 novel by Stephen Vincent Benet “The Devil and Daniel Webster.” The Devil had claimed in that story to be an American. Judge Weber suggested that he might have been, therefore he proved personal jurisdiction. The Court noted that Satan was a foreign prince, but if sued as a defendant, he might be able to claim sovereign immunity from suit. Judge Weber noted that the case was appropriate for class action status, but it was not clear that Mayo could properly represent the interests of the entire class.

Ultimately, though, the Court refused the request to proceed and noted that Mayo had not

included written instructions for how the U.S. Marshal Service could serve process on Satan.

Well, the devil will eventually be arrested. Revelation 20:1-3 tells us, *“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”* Perhaps that will not happen for some time.

Meanwhile, the devil is still free to tempt you and me! How do you resist temptation?

1) Know God’s Word and hide it in your heart. When you feel the desire to sin, ask God to remove the opportunity. We must be students of God’s Word.

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 when He says, *“Man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* Jesus was able to resist Satan based on His thorough knowledge of both the words and meaning of Scripture.

With all the different philosophies of life circulating in our world, we need to be students of God’s word to insure that we head down the right road. Being students of God’s Word will allow us to see the truth when Satan tries to twist God’s Word to accomplish his purpose.

2) When you have the opportunity to sin, ask God to take away the desire. God will always provide a way of escape. Temptation is inevitable, but not irresistible. We must be willing to faithfully serve God. Jesus’ ultimate choice throughout these temptations is obvious, *“Should I serve God or Satan?”*

We do very well when it comes to fending off the obvious attacks by Satan, however, the subtle ones are much more difficult to resist. Jesus showed that Satan often comes offering assistance, often justifying the means to the end or suggesting ways we can really do what we want. We need to stay true and faithful to God’s plan and faithfully serve Him.

Someone once told me, *“You cannot prevent the birds from flying over your head, but you can*

stop them from building a nest in your hair.” Have you allowed any temptations to settle into your mind? If so, begin to work on destroying those nests.

In December 1914, a huge fire destroyed Thomas Edison’s lab in West Orange, New Jersey. The fire wiped out more than two million dollars’ worth of equipment and destroyed the priceless records of his life’s work. Edison’s son Charles ran about frantically trying to find his father. Finally he found him standing near the fire, his face shown in the glow of the fire and his white hair was blowing in the cold winter wind. Charles said that when he saw his dad, his heart ached for him. He was no longer young and everything he had dreamed of and worked for in life in a moment had been reduced to charred rubble.

Surprisingly, Thomas Edison had different thoughts going through his mind. He told his son to find his mom and bring her to the edge of the fire. Edison smiled and said, “She will never see anything like this again.” The next morning walking about the rubble of so many of his hopes and dreams, the sixty-seven year old Edison exclaimed, “There is great value in disaster. All of our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew!”

God gives us the opportunity to start anew through His forgiveness of our failure against temptations. That is one opportunity that none of us should ignore. After all, the devil will eventually be arrested and punished. But in the meantime, be strong and knowledgeable of God’s Word. Amen