

Temptations Are the Training Ground for Meekness

Galatians 5:23; Luke 4:1-13

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What Christian does not know the struggle and pull of temptation from within and without, leading one to do that which one knows to be contrary to the holy and good commandments of God, leading one into the same sins he/she has fallen into many times before, and bringing one to the same passionate cry of Paul (Romans 7:24)? At times we are even tempted to give up trying to overcome that sin because the temptation seems so strong. And that is exactly what Satan would have you to believe—namely, it can't be overcome. But Satan is a liar, for the power of sin in the life of a Christian has been broken (just as surely as Christ has been raised from the dead), so that we are no longer bound to give in to those besetting temptations (Romans 6:14). Yes, the struggle and battle continue in the life of a Christian, but that very battle is an indication of Christ's life within us. And the empty tomb is the evidence of your victory, dear Christian, that empty tomb we celebrate, not once a year, but every Lord's Day.

But what if our temptations were not simply the occasion of our falling into sin, but rather became the training ground for learning and growing meekness in our lives? Would not our holy battle against temptation be one in which we would all the more be ready to fight the good fight of faith? As the meekness of Jesus was manifested in overcoming His temptations, so shall meekness and surrender to Christ be in overcoming our temptations. Jesus declared (from the previous sermon): "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). That is what we will be doing today—we will be learning how Christ faced His temptations and manifested His meekness in taking the yoke of His Father upon Him. The main points of the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Meekness of Christ and the Temptation to Love Earthly Comfort; (2) The Meekness of Christ and the Temptation to Love Earthly Power; (3) The Meekness of Christ and the Temptation to Love Earthly Applause.

I. The Meekness of Christ and the Temptation to Love Earthly Comfort (Luke 4:1-4).

A. Christ was ordained at the Jordan River by John the Baptist to the ministry to which God had called Him. Christ's ordination was confirmed both by the spoken words of God ("This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased") and was testified to by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him in the form of a dove. The joy and blessing of that great event was very soon to be met with the direct attack and temptation by the devil in a time of great physical weakness within the Lord Jesus (Luke 4:1 cp. Matthew 3:13-17).

1. After the high point of His ordination, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be without food for 40 days and in that desperately weak condition to face the direct attack and temptation of Satan.

2. Just as God's adopted son, Israel, was led into the wilderness for 40 years without the comfortable food they enjoyed in Egypt and there faced temptations to disbelieve and doubt God's promise, God's provision, God's love, and God's wisdom (which temptations Israel of old miserably failed to overcome), so God's Only Begotten Son, Jesus, endured temptations in the wilderness for 40 days (and fasted without the nourishment of food altogether). Whereas Israel of old failed, Jesus Christ overcame. And He overcame these temptations for you who trust alone in Christ alone for your eternal salvation that you might follow in His meekness in overcoming the temptations you face every day. He overcame for you, in order that you too might be an overcomer through Him. Dear child of God, you do not have to follow in the footsteps of Israel of old, you are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you.

B. Now let us consider this first temptation of Satan more closely—a temptation for Christ to indulge His earthly comfort and appetites immediately.

1. Jesus had been declared by the Father to be God’s beloved Son at His ordination. Satan now comes tempting Christ with these words, “If thou be the Son of God....” It is not because Satan doubted or questioned that Christ was the Son of God that He brought this temptation to Christ, for the very grammatical form of the conditional sentence used here in Luke 4:3 supposes or assumes Christ to be the Son of God (“If you are the Son of God and you are”, or “Since you are the Son of God”). Thus, Satan knowing who Christ is (knowing that Christ is his Creator), seeks to ensnare Him by tempting Him to prove His deity and satisfy His hunger by taking the easy way out—turning stones into bread.

a. Consider here the craftiness of Satan. Satan tempts Christ in a way which appears to promote a worthy goal—namely, to satisfy His hunger. Now there is no sin in meeting our earthly needs (like food, clothing, or shelter) or even in enjoying the comfort of God’s blessings in this life, as long as these needs or comforts are obtained by lawful means approved by God, and are sincerely desired for God’s glory.

b. The problem with this temptation is that it was His Father’s will that Christ fast these 40 days, and it was the devil’s will that Christ yield to the temptation to satisfy His hunger at precisely the time that the devil wanted—immediately (that Christ take the easy way out). After all, Satan might argue that the end of satisfying Christ’s hunger was to preserve life (the Sixth Commandment). However, the means and timing were all wrong—at Satan’s suggestion and immediately (contrary to the yoke of His Father’s will).

c. In like manner, we may lawfully seek to satisfy the needs (and even the comforts) that we have in this life, but we may not do so by the unlawful means of covetousness, compromise of the truth, theft, lying, cheating, or violence. Nor may we seek to satisfy these needs or comforts immediately and merely for our own glory without considering the greater end of God’s glory and our neighbor’s good. Dear ones, the ends do not justify the means—we are not to do evil that good may come (Romans 3:8).

2. The meekness of Christ is here revealed in His response to Satan. Jesus does not cast off the yoke of His Father (in order to take the easy and comfortable path), but wears that yoke in meekness, humility, and submission to the will of His Father. Jesus uses the Scripture against Satan’s temptation: Luke 4:4 (this is an appeal to Deuteronomy 8:3). If the Scripture was sufficient for the Son of God to do battle with the enemy, how much more it is sufficient for us? How we must fill our minds everyday with God’s Word and use it in our prayers, if we are to overcome the temptations of Satan. Without the Word of Christ in our hearts and upon our lips, we are helpless before the enemy. If we would have the enemy flee from us, we must resist him with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (memorize Scripture in order to face particular temptations that beset you and place Scripture verses upon your fridge and upon your walls to remind you).

a. Just as Israel in the wilderness fell into the temptation to disbelieve and doubt the love, the faithfulness, and wisdom of God in providing for their food and nourishment, so the devil seeks to tempt the Lord Jesus with the same temptation. “See how your Father cares for you, His only begotten Son? He allows you to hunger. If God is your Father, He is not a loving Father and certainly does not care for you. You must take steps immediately to provide for yourself.”

b. This is no doubt one of the most effective lures of Satan in the lives of Christians—“Look what God has withheld from you.” This is how Satan came to Eve—“God has withheld one tree from you that is so pleasing to the eyes and a tree to make you wise.” Rather than focusing our attention upon all that God has so graciously and freely provided for us in this life and in heaven to come, Satan turns our desires to what we do not have and yet desire to have (and to have today if not yesterday—no waiting, otherwise God is not faithful).

c. How we are herein rebuked for all our covetousness and anxiety in regard to the

needs of this life. We do not live by food, clothing, shelter, or anything else in this life, but by the promises of a faithful God who cannot lie (Matthew 6:33; Matthew 7:11; Philippians 4:19). Dear ones, have you come to the realization that your greatest need in life is not food, clothing, shelter, a family, an education, a career, or protection from danger, but rather your greatest need in life is Jesus Christ? Man does not live by mere bread alone, for God preserves His children by His sovereign, loving word and promises to them. It is the fruit of meekness that takes the yoke of Christ and humbly submits to God's will and looks in faith to the promises of God. It is fear that says, "I must have it now, and by the shortest and easiest way possible, lest I be without or be uncomfortable."

II. The Meekness of Christ and the Temptation to Love Earthly Power (Luke 4:5-8).

A. The location in the second temptation now moves from the wilderness to a high mountain from whence Satan shows to Christ the powerful kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. It was no doubt a better presentation of the mighty kingdoms of the world than any video documentary you have ever seen. Satan was delegated the power from God to give such a vision and demonstration, for Satan is called the "god of this world" (in 2 Corinthians 4:4) and is called "the prince of this world" (in John 12:31), which are expressions of that delegated power from God that he wickedly exercises over the hearts and the kingdoms of men. This power he offers *immediately* to Christ to exercise if Jesus will simply bow before him. He offers to Christ a delegated authority when Christ as the Son of God possesses absolute authority.

1. But the temptation to Christ was once again to cast off the yoke of meekness in obedience to the Father's will. "No need to be falsely accused, rejected by the Jews, hated by the Romans, beaten, mocked, crowned with thorns, crucified—no need to bear the wrath of God. No need at all to endure any of that, because you can have the power that you deserve right now without the suffering of the cross. All you have to do is to bow down and worship me, and it is all yours. Take the easy way, the shortcut to the place of power and authority."

2. How many men and women have sold their souls to Satan (as it were) in order to reach the goal of earthly power, promotion, or success? Just a little compromise here or there and it can be yours (laughing at filthy jokes and using profane language in order to fit in with the crowd, working/studying on the Sabbath to please a boss, family, or friends, becoming more like the world around you than being salt and light that distinguishes you from the world).

a. There are few temptations that intoxicate a man more than the temptation for power and control (and I speak not concerning just the political leaders and financial leaders of the world who manipulate wars and economic depressions so as to gain power and control), but how many struggles in churches and in families are over the issues of power and control as well. Men abuse their authority thinking they can gain an advantage in ruling their families, and women usurp authority thinking they can control the family in a direction that is more to their liking.

b. Oh, the misery and heartache of those who would seek leadership in the Church of Jesus Christ for the power, reputation, and prestige they believe they will obtain (and the division they bring into the Church). Dear ones, Christ has delegated His authority to church officers, but it is a ministerial authority not an absolute authority. It is an authority that is used in love for the truth of Jesus Christ and for the edification of others. It is not an authority that demands at the top of one's voice, but an authority demonstrated through loving service, even to the point of washing the feet of those who are led or dying for those who are led (Matthew 20:28).

B. Christ responds to this second temptation by taking up the yoke of meekness once again in submission to the will of the Father. Jesus will not seek the easy way out (regardless of what He must suffer) in

order to inherit as Mediator the kingdoms of this world. Jesus battles Satan's temptation (in Luke 4:8) once again from Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:13). Though Israel, God's adopted son, fell into idolatry, nevertheless, Christ, God's only begotten Son resisted idolatry and fulfilled all righteousness for His people.

1. Dear ones, idolatry in our hearts is the root of all other sins. For we are led away from Christ whenever we set our will, our desires, our goals, our dreams, our family, our needs, or our comforts, before Christ and the yoke of His revealed will which He calls us to bear in meekness. Perhaps the temptation that Satan brings your way is not so blatant as it was with Christ, but nevertheless you are tempted daily with following the idols of your own heart over Christ and His will.

2. Dear ones, you are tempted that if you will cast off the yoke of Christ and rather follow your own dreams, your own pleasures, your own accomplishments, your own successes, your craving for power, riches, and fame, you can just skip over the hardships, the trials, and heavy cost of bearing the yoke of Christ in meekness and submission to His will. You can get what you want without having to go the way of the cross. But that is simply the lie of Satan. What you get in taking that so-called "easy" way is misery, vanity, and futility, even if you reach some of your goals. For the pleasures of this life are fleeting and empty without Christ. All is vain without Christ. I read recently of an elderly woman who wrote her own obituary before dying of cancer. In it she wrote, "I was born, I blinked, and it was over." For the Christian who takes Christ's yoke of meekness and humbly submits to it in the way of the cross, life is not over; life is just beginning for all eternity.

III. The Meekness of Christ and the Temptation to Love Earthly Applause (Luke 4:9-13).

A. The setting once again changes in the third temptation from the wilderness to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. Once again Satan comes to Christ with this temptation: "If thou be the Son of God." And once again it is not because the devil doubted that Christ was the Son of God, but since Christ was the Son of God, the devil wanted Him to prove His deity before the world according to his own wicked suggestion.

1. Why was Christ tempted to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple? There was not a more public place to do so, nor a more sacred place to do so. A public place was desired for this temptation so as to draw the attention of many people, and a sacred place was desired so as to draw the attention of a religious people to the miraculous preservation of Christ in order to set Christ's ministry off with the applause of adoring multitudes of worshippers.

2. Here was the bait in the temptation. "Since you are the Son of God, let me help you make your ministry as successful as possible in terms of people following you. Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple and let the angels bring you safely to the ground. That should impress the people to no end."

3. Here is the temptation for we who are ministers or elders or for those who desire to become ministers or elders: a desire for the office in order to be in the spotlight, in order to draw attention to ourselves, in order to hear the applause of men who congratulate us for our knowledge, for our oratorical skills, and for our loyal supporters. In such cases, the Lord's Day service becomes more like an entertainer's night show than a worship service, and the audience for whom the worship is performed is no longer the Triune God, but is rather the fans and spectators who sit in the seats. The temptation for the minister is to grab for the status of a rock star, a sports star, or a movie star.

4. And it is not only we ministers and elders that are tempted in such ways, but Christians in general as well. This temptation is so subtle. It comes when you are more concerned about what people will think about you, than what they will think about Christ and His truth. When you are motivated to do what you do because of the praise you will receive from man than the glory you will bring to Christ. When you are more afraid of offending people than you are of offending God. When friendship and communion with the world is more important to you than is friendship and communion with Christ. When approval from family and friends weighs heavier in your decisions than does approval from God and His "well done thou good and faithful

servant". Satan tempted Christ to take His eyes off of God's glory (which is the chief end of man) and to place His eyes upon the praise and approval of man.

5. Satan quotes Psalm 91:11-12 in tempting Christ to sin (Luke 4:10-11). Dear ones, let us learn from this that Satan can use Scripture (misinterpreted or misapplied) and can use those who quote Scripture to lead us astray. For Satan comes as an angel of light and his ministers transform themselves into ministers of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:13-14). How will you know them? Jesus said that you will know them by their fruit in Matthew 7:16 (i.e. by the fruit of their doctrine and by the fruit of the Spirit in their character and life).

B. And for the third time (in Luke 4:12), the Lord Jesus responds to Satan's temptation with the words of Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:16).

1. Once again, the words of Christ make it clear that He is not going to follow the clever devices of Satan to fulfill His ministry. It is the way of the cross alone. It is the Father's yoke alone. It is through meekness alone, and not through the pride of self-exaltation that Christ would fulfill His work. And so it must be for all true Christians who take the yoke of Christ, and bear it willingly and humbly, regardless of the hardship, pain, and rejection received from others that it may bring.

2. I like Calvin comments on what it is to tempt God.

God is tempted in many ways: but in this passage, the word tempt denotes the neglect of those means which he puts into our hands. Those who leave the means which God recommends, and resolve to make trial of his power and might, act as absurdly as if one were to cut off a man's arms and hands, and then order him to work.

Thus, we tempt God when we (as it were) expect God will save us if we jump off a cliff. Or we expect Him to deliver us from sexual sin when we continue to place ourselves in front of pornography. Or we expect Him to pay our rent when we have squandered our money on foolishness and brought ourselves into huge debt. We are to expect God to deliver us when we use the godly means He gives to us and flee to His promises, but not when we cast ourselves into the fire and presume He will keep us from being consumed by it.

3. When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Jesus for a season (Luke 4:13). But note that these temptations were the occasion of Christ being filled with the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14). The Lord Jesus lost nothing by the temptation, and gained much by it, and so will you as you are joined to Christ in His yoke (Hebrews 4:15-16). Dear ones, the fruit of meekness does not look for the easy and comfortable way out of temptation, but takes upon oneself the yoke of Christ in surrendering all to God, and therefore has nothing to lose, but everything to gain in God's approval and in His heavenly inheritance.

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