

# Circumstances of Temptations

## Introduction

In our last couple of lessons in this series we looked at the *process* of *preparation* that God uses to prepare us to fulfill His *purpose*. God works according to His promises, which are all conditional. We participate in the process of making the promises real, experiential in our lives. When we begin to try to walk in the promise, we encounter a problem placed before us by the Lord. Associated with this problem is a principle that we need to learn in order to enter into the provision of the promise.

### 2 Peter 1:4-8 NASB

- (4) For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.
- (5) Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge,
- (6) and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness,
- (7) and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.
- (8) For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We saw in our previous lessons how necessary this process is because it produces some things in us. All of the things produced by the process are required if we want to be useful and fruitful in the true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Hebrews 6:11-12 NASB

- (11) And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,
- (12) so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

We must show diligence and full assurance of hope because it is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises. The process requires time. We have to patiently endure as we allow the process to run its course in our lives.

The end goal, as we have seen, is love, *agape*—God's kind of love. This type of love has to grow in us. It is a fruit and not a gift and as such requires time. This is a necessary component to our walk with the Lord because Galatians 5:6 tells us, "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.*"

## Cycles and Seasons

Love is the power behind faith. Things done through faith that does not come from love is worthless. That is what Paul meant in I Corinthians 13:1-3. An example of how this works is like the relationship between an automobile and gasoline. It doesn't matter how pretty, comfortable, elaborate or powerful the car is—it doesn't go anywhere without gasoline. Likewise, faith requires love before it can do anything that has value—that fulfills its purpose.

As we saw in earlier lessons, the process that we are discussing begins with faith and ends with love, which causes more faith to operate, which begins the process again. It is a repetitive cycle that continues to increase. Another way of saying this is that it is like a tree with roots in faith. The tree grows and produces fruit, which falls and fertilizes the roots causing the tree to grow bigger and produce more fruit which falls and fertilizes the roots, etc.

At the end of I Corinthians 13 Paul says that there are three that abide or remain—faith, hope and love but the greatest is love. This process is producing in us three things that will remain always with us. They are characteristics of the Kingdom of God and as such are unshakable—they will remain.

## Temptations of Jesus

At the end of Matthew chapter three Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan. As He comes up out of the water the Spirit descends upon Him like a dove and God speaks from Heaven confirming Jesus as His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. Then chapter four begins with a strange verse when you consider what had just happened.

### Matthew 4:1 NASB

(1) Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

In the original Greek, the word for “led” used here is a very strong word. It could easily be translated as “driven”. That is how strong of a word it is. It has in it the meaning of being driven in the same way that we would use a cattle prod to drive cattle. Jesus was pressed, driven, led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted by the devil.

There are some who want to say that Jesus was not really tempted—that He was God and could not be actually tempted, this was just an illustration for us. But they forget two things.

1. For temptation to be real there must be the possibility of failure. If it was not possible for Jesus to fail then the temptation meant nothing.
2. Paul tells us in Philippians that Jesus had emptied Himself of His attributes as God and took upon Himself the form and appearance of a man.<sup>1</sup> As a man, Jesus was tempted in all ways as

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:5-8

we are because the Scriptures tell us that He was and yet He did not sin.<sup>2</sup> He clearly chose not to yield to temptation.

Since Jesus is our pattern, we should expect that the Holy Spirit will do the same for us as He did for Jesus—drive us to a place of temptation.

## The First Temptation of Jesus

### Matthew 4:2-4 NASB

- (2) And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.
- (3) And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."
- (4) But He answered and said, "**It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'**"

After 40 days of fasting, Jesus would have been very hungry. As I understand it, because of some of the geologic aspects of the area, there are rocks that look like fresh baked loaves of bread. These are scattered throughout the wilderness landscape. If so, this would have contributed even more to the desire to eat.

So, this first temptation was to turn the stones that looked like bread into real bread loaves. The temptation was to use the power of God to satisfy one's personal needs. This is very true of us. Our first set of problems that come when we determine to follow the Lord deals with our physical needs. The old nature wants to satisfy self first.

In Jesus' answer to this temptation we see the first principle that we have to learn—we are to live by every word of God. In this problem we learn that we have to set priorities and that the Word of God has a higher priority than our physical needs.

Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing. The Father was not turning stones into bread; therefore, if Jesus turned the stones to bread it would be an unauthorized use of power. Jesus learned obedience by the things which He suffered.<sup>3</sup>

Remember in previous lessons, we discussed that there are three roots of the Adamic Nature—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.<sup>4</sup> In order to reverse the result of Adam's sin, as the Last Adam, our Lord would have to overcome temptation in all three of these areas. This first temptation corresponded to the lust of the flesh. Jesus overcame by putting the Word of God as a higher priority than the lust of the flesh—our physical needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 4:15 *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin”*

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 5:8 *“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”*

<sup>4</sup> I John 2:16; Genesis 3:6

## The Second Temptation of Jesus

### Matthew 4:5-7 NASB

- (5) Then the devil \*took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,  
 (6) and \*said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"  
 (7) Jesus said to him, "**On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'**"

The second temptation of Jesus corresponds to overcoming “the boastful pride of life”. Pride comes from proving ourselves to be something by the standards of others. The temptation was to jump off the pinnacle so that He could be proven to be the Son of God. Jesus did not need to prove anything to anybody, including the devil. He was secure in His identity—who He was. To have jumped off would have resulted in God having to send angels to catch Him because His death at this point would have been contrary to the purpose of the Father.

This test of God would have been another unauthorized use of the power of God. This would have been a miracle with no purpose other than proving that God was with Jesus and protecting Him. God does not do “useless miracles”. He does not just “show off” His power.

Many ministries today have fallen to this temptation. They promote useless miracles such as “gold or diamond dust falling from the air”, “feathers in the air”, “oil, blood, or crosses appearing on the hands or forehead” and other such nonsense. These “miracles” don't do anything except provide a “wow” factor for the minister.

For those who minister in this manner, the Lord gave us some sobering words:

### Matthew 7:21-23 NASB

- (21) "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter.***  
 (22) "**Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'**  
 (23) "**And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'**"

These are people who used unauthorized power for their own ends. The word translated “knew” in verse 23 also has the meaning of “approved”, “authorized”, “endorsed”. I believe, in this context, it should be translated as “authorized”. Jesus is contrasting those who practice lawlessness with those who do the will of the Father—those operating in obedience with authorization and those operating in self without authorization.

The principle that we are to learn in this temptation is that we can act in ways that through our pride will tempt the Lord our God. This is not acceptable.

## The Third Temptation of Jesus

### Matthew 4:8-10 NASB

- (8) Again, the devil \*took Him to a very high mountain and \*showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;
- (9) and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."
- (10) Then Jesus \*said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

In each temptation, the Enemy was using the Scriptures in such a way that Jesus could have justified giving in to the temptation if there had been anything in Him that responded from the natural perspective. Jesus had to always see what the Father was doing—He had to walk in the Spirit, operate from the perspective of the Spirit.

This temptation corresponds to overcoming the lust of the eyes. The Enemy showed Jesus the kingdoms of this world, resplendent in all of their glory. Jesus didn't question the power of the Enemy to do what he said. The Scriptures call the devil the god of this world<sup>5</sup> and tells us that the whole world lies in his power.<sup>6</sup>

The temptation that the devil was offering was for Jesus to take a shortcut to the fulfillment of God's purpose. It is the Father's intention for the kingdoms of this world to become the Kingdom of His dear Son. Jesus was to be established as Lord and as King of the Kingdom of God. However, in God's plan the path to King of the Kingdom required Jesus to go through the cross. The Enemy was offering the fulfillment of the goal without the necessity of the cross—a less painful shortcut.

Ministries face this temptation today when they try to fulfill God's plan and purpose, His calling, without going through the cross. Resurrection life is required not natural life. The end *never* justifies the means in God's eyes. The *way* we get there is just as important, maybe more so, than just getting there.

The principle that we are to learn from this is that we serve what we worship—what we give ourselves to fully. We are only to worship God. Him only then will we serve.

## The Arena of Temptation

The purpose of temptation is to put us to the test—to expose our heart and its motivations. Jesus had to be tested in the same manner that Adam was tested. Jesus overcame the three areas that failed in Adam. We too, if we want to be overcomers must overcome in these same three areas. We have Jesus as our pattern. We have the principles explicitly stated for us. We just need to apply them to our problems in order to get through the temptation. Our approval comes from overcoming the temptation,

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5 II Corinthians 4:4

6 I John 5:19

after which, we receive the blessing.

James 1:12 NASB

- (12) Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

Jesus went into the wilderness *full* of the Holy Spirit. He had just received the fullness of the Spirit after He was baptized by John. Now, after overcoming the temptations from the Enemy, Jesus returns in the *power* of the Spirit.

Luke 4:14 NASB

- (14) And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

Could it be that there is so little power among the people of God because so few have overcome temptation in the wilderness? We have rejoiced over being full of the Spirit but have neglected the process that will release the power of the Spirit through us.

The arena of temptation is the wilderness, when we are stressed and at our weakest in the natural. We need to remember that the devil tempted Jesus but it was the Holy Spirit who drove Him to the place of temptation.

James 1:13 NASB

- (13) Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

God doesn't tempt us. The devil does. However, God will put us in the place of temptation and allow the devil to make his presentation to us.

The Holy Spirit leads us into the right circumstances to put our heart to the test. Temptation in and of itself is neither good nor bad. It is our response to it that produces the result. We can have a positive or a negative result, just like a chemistry experiment that can do what it is supposed to or can blow up in your face.

## The Process of Temptation

James 1:14-16 NASB

- (14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.  
(15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.  
(16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

James gives us the details of how temptation works. He also says that we should not be deceived about

it, which says to me that we need to understand the procedure.

The elements of the temptation are our hearts and the circumstances. The process involves the interaction of these two elements. There are things in our hearts that we don't know are there. Jeremiah called the heart desperately wicked and deceitful.<sup>7</sup> The Lord puts us into circumstances where the contents of our hearts can be exposed and dealt with. To us these appear to be bad circumstances but from the Lord's viewpoint they are good.

If there is lust in our heart then the Lord will put us into a place where the Enemy can entice the lust in our heart. Enticement is a seduction. If lust is in the heart then the circumstances will seduce us. Our lust responds to the situation and sin is conceived. If the sin is allowed to come to term then death will be the result.

There are two possible outcomes—life and death. It is our choice by how we react. We can respond from our soul life or from our spiritual life. The goal is to change the things in our heart so that all things that can be tempted are eliminated. We enter into glorious freedom in the Lord. When the devil attacks there is nothing in us for him to grab onto. We walk in victory.

## The Circumstances of Temptation

It is in the circumstances that we learn the principles that apply to the problem. We have to embrace the circumstances of the problem if we are going to get through the wilderness. It is in this place that we learn how to change.

Our soulish thinking wants to escape the circumstances. We resist what God is doing in us. The moment that we start resisting, we get depressed. The circumstances cause depression because things aren't going the way that we want them to go. Depression leads to frustration because we can't change the circumstances. Then, resentment sets in because we begin to resent anything and everything associated with the circumstances. Next comes bitterness—toward God and toward the circumstances. Finally, rebellion is manifested. If we don't break this cycle it will repeat in an ever increasing spiral. Eventually, strongholds are established in our minds that are empowered by the Enemy. Once that happens, we become enslaved to the stronghold.

If at any point in this process we think we can escape, we will try because we think that if we can change our circumstances we will solve the problem. However, all we do is give the problem a new environment, a change of scenery. It is still the same problem just displayed in a new form of circumstances.

As long as we keep escaping the problem we will never change. If we never change we never get out of the wilderness. We will become bleached bones in the wilderness. We become useless to God. Second Peter 1:8 tells us that if the qualities produced by God's process are real in us and increasing, they will make us to be useful and fruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord.

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<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 17:9 *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"* NKJV

The converse of that is that if these qualities are not in us nor are increasing then we will be useless and fruitless in the knowledge of the Lord

Let us embrace what the Lord is doing in us and let us change that we might become productive in the Kingdom of God.