

With every year that passes, as a Christian, I've sorta hoped that resisting sin would get easier... And I don't know about you, but that hasn't been my experience.

As I've gotten older, I've become increasingly aware of my own sin and the temptations that plague my life. Maybe the reason might be that, as one gets closer to God, we become more aware of our **unholiness**.

But in times of temptation, some will be quick to say, "It's not my fault". "The Devil tempted me – (the old "the Devil made me do it" defence)... And that sometimes is the case, but in my experience, more often than not, the devil didn't need to do anything – there's been enough evil in me, to cause me to sin – the old man fighting against the Spirit.

Now having said that, sometimes the Devil **is** the one who's responsible for temptations. Ephesians 6, tells us, we are not in a battle of flesh and blood. It's against the principalities and the powers of darkness – the spiritual forces of evil...

And in my experience, the Devil's most concerted attacks, often take place either just before, or after an amazing move of the Spirit of God. So much so, that when I'm preparing a person for Baptism, I warn them, "To be ready, because it is really common, that after a person gets baptised, the Devil will come at them in all sorts of ways, to try and destroy their new faith in God."

But even so, there's nothing for us to be scared about, because these are times of testing, and in the strength of our Almighty God, we have **victory** in times of testing.

I suspect, the two greatest tricks the devil has been able to pull-off, are opposites to each other.

1. The first trick, is to get people to believe that he doesn't exist. Many today might believe in a concept of evil, but not in a personal spiritual being of evil. But the Scriptures are very clear, and when it talks about:

- The Evil One;
- Devil;
- Satan;
- Diabolos;
- Beelzebul
- whatever you want to call him

The Scriptures are very clear, that there **is** a personal being of evil. The Devil is just as real as God is.

2. And his second trick, is to get people fixated on him. And for some they're not content in Christ – it seems they get their jollies out of doing some kind of glorified battle with the devil...

Be aware, and **beware**, the Devil is real, but The **Lord** is the one who does the battle and the victory is already His..

Righto: Luke 4.

Jesus has just been baptised. And the Holy Spirit came in bodily form upon Him. And, full of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness. (being told over and over

again “the Spirit is at play here”). And there He fasted for 40 days, **and** was tempted by the Devil.

Remember what I said about when we’ve had a significant experience of God, that’s often when the Devil will attack... Some people are of the opinion that it’s only when one is distant from God – that’s when they’re vulnerable to attack. Don’t you believe that for a minute.

- Jesus had just been baptised;
- He’s been filled with the Holy Spirit;
- It’s just been announced to Him that He’s the Son of God; and
- He is **following** the Holy Spirit;
- He’s been fasting (a spiritual discipline),,,
- **and** He’s being tempted by the Devil.

Now, the first thing we need to know about “temptation”, is “the things that I’m tempted by, may not be the things that you’re tempted by”.

And obviously, the things that tempt the Son of God, are probably not the things that are going to tempt Michael Brumpton. I don’t know about you, but I’ve never been tempted to turn stones into bread, or to jump off of a tall building to see if an angel might catch me before I hit the footpath...

And so the temptations for Jesus, were specific temptations for Him...

But I want us to note: in what form, did the temptations come? **Words** (don't know if they were audible or if they were sensed):

- Jesus was hungry (hadn't eaten for 40 days), and the Devil **said**,
"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.";
- And he somehow took Jesus up high to see the kingdoms of the world, and the Devil **said**,
"To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."
- And he took him to the top of the temple, and the Devil **said** (and he even quoted Scripture),
"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written,
" 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' ¹¹ and
" 'On their hands they will bear you up, Lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

Jesus is being led by the Holy Spirit, but He's also hearing the words of the devil. Let's not assume, that "If I'm being led by the Spirit, everything I hear has come from God." We cannot assume that. It wasn't true for Jesus, and it won't be true for us.

So, how did he tell the two apart?

Well, there's 2 things that are obvious to me:

1. The words of the devil, were appealing to the flesh:

- The 1st temptation – Look after yourself – have a feed – you're hungry;
- The 2nd temptation – avoiding the pain and suffering of the cross. Jesus was destined to be king and ruler of this world. The Devil was offering Him an easier way to get there.
- The 3rd temptation – assurance – If you are the Son of God, you'll know it, because the angels will catch you.

Alright, so the words of the devil, were appealing to the flesh...

2. The **second** way to test if a word is from God: is when the Devil speaks, it may (on the surface) agree with some of the Scripture, but not **all** of it.

Are you with me? We tend to think of "sin" as "doing stuff that hurts other people". And yet the temptations that were thrown at Jesus, on the outside, some of them appeared good, but every one of them, was disobedience to God.

And that is a lesson for us, when we are trying to discern God's plan (God's will for our lives), often we begin asking that question because we have a discontentment with where God currently has us... And we assume, God's going to give

me a way out of this – God’s going to give me a way forwards. And at times like that, watch out. The Devil might offer me just what I want; he might even come up with a bible verse to help sell it to me... **Beware:** Is it the voice of God? Or is it my own desire? Or is it the voice of the Devil?

And so I’ve learned a long time ago, If I have a feeling of direction and it really appeals to me (yeah, I’d love to do that), I’ve learned to be extra careful – Is it God; or is it just what I want to do?; or is it the Devil???

And if the Devil was speaking to Jesus, we need to be aware that sometimes he tries to mislead us...

The safer way, is to empty ourselves of our own plans and our own ambitions, and ask God, “What’s Your will? How will you have me serve?” And God’s Word, (primarily the Scripture), will lead us deeper and deeper into God’s will. As we let God’s word challenge all of our pre-conceived ideas and we’re drawn into His greater service.

Righto, back to the reading:

Every single time the Devil tempted Jesus, Jesus replied by quoting the Word of God from Scripture. And pretty much every time I’ve heard the temptations of Jesus preached on, that’s been the message. And with good reason.

When the Devil tempts (audible voice; inner feeling), the way to repel his attack, is to first of all, recognise that it isn’t from

God... And so we test the voice with the Gold Standard word of God (The Scriptures)....

And at this point, the examples we preachers usually give are very obvious. E.g.:

- if a person feels led to leave their wife and shack up with another woman, it's obvious isn't it – that's not God leading someone to do that – that's the Devil. What does the Scripture say? Do not commit adultery... It's a no-brainer... Or;
- if no one's watching, is it alright for me to take an item out of a shop without paying for it? Of course not. If you are tempted to steal, feel free to quote God's word, "Thou shalt not steal". It's a no-brainer...

Alright, that's the typical lesson – You've got that haven't you? If you're being tempted, recognise it is a temptation from the Devil, by confirming with God's word. And be obedient to God...

Simple; Job's done.

But I want to take us deeper today – deeper than no-brainer-level examples.

Every one of the Scripture references that Jesus quoted, come from Chapters 6 & 8 of Deuteronomy. For Jesus, He was in a time of testing. And the Scriptures He quotes, are all about Israel, in **their** time of testing.

Israel are just about to enter the promised land. The promises of God, are on the cusp of being fulfilled. And Moses gives them a jolly good talking to. Moses isn't going to make it into the promised land, and so he needs to tell them this before they cross the river. And this section of Deuteronomy is a reminder of the commandments of God, and it's a reflection/remembering of things that they had done (including their unfaithfulness) as they were being tested in the desert.

Alright, so Israel were tested on their way to their promise (the promised land). And they made a real hash of it (numerous times).

Jesus is being tested as He brings into being, the **new** promise.

The Kingdom, promised to Israel, was just across the Jordan River, but as they journeyed through the desert, they were tested. (40 years in the desert)

Now, the Kingdom of God is breaking into the world. Jesus has crossed the Jordan River, and He's now in the desert being tested (40 days)... But unlike Israel, He passes every test with flying colours.

And as we look at the quotes Jesus gives from Deuteronomy 6 & 8, we can see what the test is really about.

So, the first temptation was to turn stones into bread. And Jesus' replies, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.' "

But what's that talking about? Let's turn to Deut 8:1-7 and see what it is about.

Deuteronomy 8:1-7 (ESV)

8 "The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do (not just a bit of it. All of it), that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. ² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶ So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of

water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills,...

What's really going on here? It's a time of testing. But what is being tested?

The test, is what is really in the heart. Is it a heart of obedience to God? Or is it a heart that follows self?

You see, when we go through times of testing (times in the wilderness; times of need; times of despair), know this: The Lord disciplines His children. In Hebrews 12, we're told "The Lord disciplines those He loves". That's what a time of testing is.

*When raising a child, we can either molly-coddle them, and they never learn to cope with adversity, **Or**, we can allow them to be tested, and discipline them through those times of testing, and they grow and strengthen into maturity... And that's what God does with us:*

Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)

³ we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

You see, when Jesus was baptised, the voice of God spoke and said, “**This is my Son...**” And now the Devil is questioning that, “**If you are the Son of God...**”

The Spirit of God had led Jesus to the desert and to fast... And the temptation was to use His power to satisfy the weakness of His flesh, rather than the humility that comes through testing...

Would Jesus yield to the flesh? Or would He submit Himself to the Father and submit Himself to be humbled for His service? Well, our Lord chose the Word of God over bread.

The 2nd test:

The Devil took Jesus up to show Him all the Kingdoms of the world. And he told a half-truth. He said, “It’s been given to me, and I can give it to whoever I want.” All you have to do, is worship me and it’s yours.

Now the thing is, that’s a half-truth. For the **moment**, this world is the Devil’s domain. But the Lord is supreme. Satan’s days are limited, and he’s going to be thrown into the pit of hell. He won’t have rule and reign over the world then...

Jesus' response:

“It is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’ ”

Let's look at Deuteronomy 6. Basically V1-11 are saying, "When you come into the promised land, don't turn your back on God. Remember how he brought you out of Egypt". And from V12

Deuteronomy 6:12-18 (ESV)

¹² then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³ It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. ¹⁴ You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— ¹⁵ for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God — lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

¹⁶ "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. ¹⁷ You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. ¹⁸ And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers

What happened at Massah? Israel tested God at Massah – what happened there?

The People of Israel questioned God's faithfulness. They didn't trust that God would fulfill His promise to them. And they wanted to take things into their own hands and do things another way.

They were thirsty and they grumbled. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"ⁱ

How did they test God? They were saying, "Is THE LORD among us or not?"

And the test of Jesus, is would **He** take the easy way out? Did Jesus trust that His Father was with Him, and had everything in control and that God's will would be done? Yes He did.

And when things get tough for you and I, what do **we** do? Do we doubt? "Is THE LORD among us or not?" That's testing God.

Jesus showed us the path of trust in our Heavenly Father.

The 3rd test:

If you are the Son of God, jump off this tall building and the angels will catch you.

¹² And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

It comes from the same passage in Deuteronomy 6. It's about trying to take things into our own hands and not trusting that God is in control and God's got this. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test – that's about the same water incident at Masala, and doubting "Is THE LORD among us or not?"

So the test for Jesus, is like the test of the people of Israel. In the time of testing, the people of Israel doubted that God was even there. But Jesus firmly held to God's word, and even though He was in a tough place of testing in the wilderness, He knew His Heavenly Father was with Him, and His way was the only way for God's will to be done.

And V13 says: ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

It sounds a bit ominous doesn't it... *The Devil's a bit like Nut Grass. You just think you've gotten rid of it, and you have a couple of wet days and there it is again... I haven't seen any Nut Grass at my place for years. This week, I found a patch of it that big...*

And so the Devil departed until an opportune time...

What could that "opportune time" be?

We've been talking about "a time of testing" in the wilderness – in the tough times...

And we're usually quite aware that we're vulnerable in the tough times...

But in the context of Deuteronomy 6 & 8, Israel are about to enter a period of blessing. They're about to cross over into the promised land, and the warning for them, is, "**When things are going good**, don't forget about God". When you've got:

- nice houses;
- good crops;
- a full pantry;
- when you are blessed,

don't forget about God. Trust Him; obey Him; keep His commandments....

For us, Jesus has fulfilled the blessing – we've received the promise. We are forgiven and reconciled through the blood of Jesus... We've received the promise; We are blessed...

And so, when things are going good, don't let all the blessings divert us from God and His righteousness...

That's a curse of living in a prosperous land – many don't depend on God any more – they don't need to... And maybe for us, that's the opportune time for the Devil – You don't need God. You've got too much of a fun time to have – things to do; places to go...

And we forget about God.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

We thank You that Jesus was faithful,
and humbled Himself to follow Your path to the cross.
He never doubted. Indeed, You were with Him.

And we thank You that You are with us.

As we go through the desert – the wilderness – the time
of testing,
Help us to fix our eyes on You,
and to trust You, always.

Lord,

in the times when we hear words –
words of direction –
words of guidance,
give us a discerning heart, and help us to test those
words,
never having such a spiritual pride,
that we would assume that if I'm hearing a voice,
then it has to be God.

Give us the wisdom and discernment to test everything
according to Your word.

And help us to go deeper,
not just discerning the 'no-brainers',
but help us to know You

and know Your word so well,
that we would never be misled.

And Lord we pray,
that when we enter a period of blessing,
that our faith and dependence on You,
would not grow cold.

May You remain our King;
and our Lord;
in all things;
at all times;

Amen.

ⁱ Exodus 17:3