

The Temptation - Part 1

by W.F. Anderson

The sermon explores the temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ, examining the nature of temptation, the purpose of Satan, and the humanity and divinity of our Lord.

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-6, Mark 1:13, Galatians 6:1-2, Philippians 2:5-8

Topics: "Temptation Of Jesus", "Satanic Opposition"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the circumstances surrounding Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. He highlights the fact that Jesus was alone in the wilderness with no distractions, which intensified the force of Satan's temptation. The speaker also mentions that Satan's purpose is to drive a wedge between humans and God by getting them to doubt Him. Additionally, the speaker mentions that Jesus faced the temptation alone without any disciples or friends to support him. The sermon references Mark's account of the temptation and also mentions the hunger Jesus experienced after fasting for forty days.

Transcript

Mr. Wilson this morning was talking about some of the trends in the thinking of our Western world. There's a book, by the way, that traces the origin and the development of that kind of thinking. It does an excellent job of it, and I'm referring to Francis Schaeffer's book, *Escape from Reason*.

There's one copy back there. I've got it in my hand, *Escape from Reason*. Francis Schaeffer is one of the leading Christian spokesmen among non-Christian intellectuals today.

A very, very gracious as well as a brilliant individual. And this book is a condensed tracing of the development of Western thought, beginning with Thomas Aquinas, who made a very logical but fatal distinction that has gradually expanded through the centuries and brought us to where we are today. And as he said, one of the reasons for understanding this is if you want to understand why our young people think differently from the way we think, it's because of the development of this line of thought.

The way they are trained in school, the way they think, the basic assumptions that are made are quite different from the ones that were made when we went to school. But anyhow, this is a very helpful book. There's several other books by Francis Schaeffer back there.

I hope you're going to get *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*. As you read first about the form of the church, you would think you were sitting in an assembly listening to T.E. Wilson talk about the

local church. But then he talks not only about the form of that local church, but the freedom of the Spirit of God in that form.

And he has some very, very pointed things to say. And I hope you'll pick up, I think there's one copy of that back there. There's a little booklet of his, *The March of the Christians*, which is his discussion of our Lord's words, *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another*.

What Schaeffer calls the ultimate apologetic for Christianity. So those books are back there. I'm just suggesting this little one, *Escape from Reason*, that might get your thinking, your wheels turning in your mind.

Get your mind moving to understand what's going on in our Western culture. And some of the problems with which we Christians are faced as we try to interact with a culture that thinks this way, when we are thinking in a totally different track. And to try to bring Christianity into a people who are thinking, whose thinking has been formed by this development.

I suggest you get it. I found it a very, very helpful book. I find all of Francis Schaeffer's writings, and he's a delight to listen to, by the way.

I've had the privilege of listening to him. He's a delight, well I don't want to go on talking about that, but to me he is the epitome of a Christian gentleman. I will go on to say this.

If I remember correctly from several years ago, Bishop Pike debated two men in Chicago. One man, a brilliant individual, Evangelical Christian, cutting the ribbon. When this Evangelical was through, there wasn't a shred of Bishop Pike left, as far as the man or his position.

Some later time, Bishop Pike debated Francis Schaeffer. In Chicago. The difference was very, very marked.

Francis Schaeffer left no doubt about the validity of historical Christianity. But he never cut Bishop Pike to shreds. And they left arm in arm, with Bishop Pike inviting Francis Schaeffer any time he was in California to drop by and visit him.

Which, by the way, in a later book, maybe it's that book, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Francis Schaeffer did. And was able to sit down and talk with Bishop Pike about what he had left. And about his supposed contact with his dead son.

Try to help him to face truth. This is a man, by the way, who has given us the terminology of absolutes. Moral absolutes.

Here it is. Here it is. So I suggest you pick up some of Francis Schaeffer's books.

Now, for those of you who are with us for the first time tonight, what I've been trying to do, a little ambitiously, of course, is look at the genuine humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We began in *Philippians* chapter 2, where we see the union between the divine and the human natures in our Lord. The thinking and decision that our Lord made to come to earth to be a genuinely human individual.

In the second study, we looked at the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. And tonight I would like to begin, I'm sure we are not going to be able to finish, but I would like to begin the consideration of temptation. We've already read that very brief passage in *Mark* chapter 1 about the temptation of our Lord.

Now, tonight I would like to turn to Matthew's gospel, chapter 4. For the regulars who are here, that's the first book in the New Testament. Matthew's gospel, chapter 4. We'll begin reading at verse 1. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights.

And afterwards, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But he answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and 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 will give his angels charge of you. And on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against the stone.

Jesus said to him, Again it is written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God. Again the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. And he said to him, All these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me.

Then Jesus said to him, Be gone, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve. Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him. Temptation is a universally human experience through us as Christians, through us repeatedly, daily, and it's true that every one of us here falls.

We yield to temptation. I don't suppose any of us here tonight would deny it. We never mention it publicly, of course.

We pretend that it doesn't happen, but it does. And our Lord shared that experience, the experience of being tempted, but without sin, without falling. But He knows what sore temptations are, for He endures the same.

Now, before looking at the three specific temptations listed here, I would like to do a little preliminary work. One, I think we ought to define what we're talking about. There are many good men who feel that we err in using the word temptation, of what happened to our Lord Jesus Christ.

They prefer the word testing. My understanding of those who hold this position, who write about it, or who talk about it, is that it is an attempt to preserve the idea of the sinlessness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only that He did not sin, but that He could not sin, and therefore they would stay away from the word temptation, and prefer the word testing.

I appreciate the desire, with which I heartily agree, but I think the change in wording is not in itself helpful. The same word in the New Testament is translated both test and tempt. Whether a particular event is designed as a test to strengthen and hopefully bring out the best in an individual, or whether it is a temptation designed to drag a person down into disobedience and independence of God, depends upon the source and the purpose.

The same event can be used by God as a test, and by Satan as a temptation. For example, Paul's thorn in the flesh, and by the way, I remember reading a number of years ago, in one of Sir Robert Anderson's books, his objection to the translation thorn, even taking into consideration those large Near Eastern thorns. The word can mean thorn, does mean that.

It can also mean stake. And his feeling was the Apostle Paul was not the kind of man to talk about a thorn. But what he felt was that Paul was referring to an old Assyrian method of execution, in which a sharpened stake was sunk in the ground with, of course, the sharpened end up.

And then the individual to be executed was taken and lifted up and impaled on that stake. And he felt this is what Paul had reference to. Whatever it was, it was so severe that Paul talked about it as being impaled on a stake.

But he said that was given to him by God to present pride because of the abundance of the revelation. But he said it was a messenger of Satan. That is, Satan had something to say to Paul in those severe circumstances.

God had something to say to Paul. God said to Paul, my grace is sufficient for thee. Satan had something to say to Paul.

A messenger is an individual or a thing that carries a message. And Satan was trying to get something across to Paul, which would be the idea, if God permits this to happen, he's not worth serving, why don't you give up? And the same event designed by God for Paul's good can be used by Satan to tempt Paul to discouragement and despair and to abandon his Christian faith. So it depends on who is the source and what is the purpose of whether or not it is a test or a temptation.

Because so much of our temptation is self-originated, and we're aware of this, there is no external stimulation. There is no external incitement. Nobody is inviting us to do something wrong.

It's spontaneous within. The desire to rise within us. Because that's true of us.

It's difficult for us then to come to that word temptation and see to our Lord Jesus Christ. But I think it is temptation. He was tempted.

Satan's purpose was to cause him to deviate from the will of God, to act independently of God. I'd like to take that up. That really is the thrust of all temptations.

The purpose of Satan is to get us to be the God of gods, to use Helmuth Telekis' phrase, to get us to be independent of God, to be our own gods over God, which is what happened in the Garden of Eden, by the way. And this was Satan's purpose. And he was trying to get the Lord Jesus Christ to act independently of his Father.

It was a temptation in that sense. If you understand my use of the term, that it does not imply an answer by any evil desire in the Lord Jesus himself, and does not imply that he could have sinned, then let me use the word temptation. The second thing I want to mention briefly is a preliminary is the possibility of temptation for the Son of God.

We are clearly told by James that God is not tempted by evil, nor does he tempt any man to evil. And James is telling us that in order that we might be clear that any temptation we have comes from our own lusts. And he says we are drawn away after our own lusts and incites.

That's when temptation comes in. God is incapable of being tempted, and God, being the kind of God he is, could not tempt a human being to sin. God does not do that.

And James is reminding us again that every good thing comes from God, not evil, not temptation to sin. That does not have its source in God, because every good kind of gift and giving comes from God. But I take it two things are necessary for temptation to be possible.

One is a source from which the temptation comes. And here in the wilderness, the source was another personal being outside our Lord Jesus Christ, Satan. The second thing necessary for temptation is an avenue through which the temptation can reach the person.

And this was provided by our Lord's human nature. Now mind you, again, it's his sinless human nature. There were no evil propensities in the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

His human nature was sinless. Our temptations are so often self-originated. His was not, but his human nature provided the avenue through which the temptation could reach the person.

I take it in general, there are two things that we must have in order to be tempted. We either have a need or we have an ambition. God cannot be tempted, of course, because he has no need.

He is self-sufficient. The only self-sufficient being in the universe because he is uncreated. He has no need.

And of course he has no ambition. That is, how could he be higher than God, which was Satan's fault? Now our Lord Jesus Christ in flesh had human needs. And it was through those human needs that Satan worked.

And we'll look at some of those needs as we talk about the three specific temptations with which Satan faced our Lord Jesus Christ. So because he was genuinely human, with genuine human, guiltless needs, there's nothing guilty about being hungry. He had guiltless human needs.

Satan had an avenue through which to reach the person, to approach the person. How are you going to approach God, to tempt him to sin, when he has no need, no avenue through which you can get to him, to talk to him in this direction at all? But our Lord Jesus Christ did, being genuinely human. Finally, before we, again, this really should come at the end, but I'm going to throw it in now, because I don't want to leave it until our discussion tomorrow.

There is the whole problem in this temptation of whether or not Jesus Christ could have sinned. I raise the problem because a lot of good people ask the question. And there are students equally devoted to our Lord Jesus Christ who have a difference of opinion.

All are agreed that he did not sin. And the question is, could he have sinned? Some of my students, sometimes when we talk about this, want to make a syllogism. God cannot sin.

Jesus Christ was God. Therefore, Jesus Christ could not have sinned. And that's good.

And I say, well, now let me throw a syllogism at you. Human beings can sin. Jesus Christ was genuinely human.

Therefore, Jesus Christ can sin. Now, what do we do? The fact is, of course, neither one standing by itself is the whole truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's our difficulty.

We have to forget the syllogism. To me, we must remember this. The human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ never existed independently of the person who took it.

In other words, apart from the Incarnation, there would never have been this human person, Jesus. This human nature that he had, that he took in the Incarnation, could have had no independent existence. The second thing I think we have to remember is that it is not a nature that sins.

It is a person that sins. And the person that we are talking about is the second person of the Trinity. That person took a human nature.

It is not a divine person coming to live in a human person. That's what we have, the Spirit of God living within us. No, that is not what happened.

It's a divine person, the second person of the Trinity, taking a human nature. And so, for me, when I look at the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, I cannot look at it abstracted from the divine person who took it. My conclusion is, the Son of God could not have sinned.

Now, that leaves me with a problem. And the question is this. How, then, could the temptation have been genuine? How could he have been genuinely tempted if he could not have sinned? And for that, I really have no answer.

But I admit, I would rather wrestle with that difficulty than wrestle with the difficulty my friends are faced with who say, yes, he could have sinned, but did not sin. Personally, I would rather wrestle with my problem than with theirs. Though I cannot doubt their devotion to the Lord Jesus, nor to the Word of God.

Let me throw out this further statement, however. When I talk about the impossibility of our Lord Jesus Christ's sin, I am not talking about a mechanical impossibility. I am talking about a moral impossibility.

I am talking about our Lord Jesus being the kind of person he is. He simply could not do that. Here is a good man, Christian, whose character has been formed by experience, by the Word of God, by the work of the Spirit of God in him over the years.

He is much stronger than his wife, physically. And he is physically capable of knocking her head off. But being the kind of person he is, he simply could not do that.

And this is what I mean by moral impossibility. And our Lord Jesus Christ being the Son of God, being the kind of person he is, in my judgment, simply could not have done it. Now that's my judgment, you understand.

It's a conclusion we draw. There isn't any scripture that definitely states that. But I think I have to say it, because of what scripture does say about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And again, I'm going to pull something from what I want to talk about tomorrow morning, because I don't want to leave this either. Why was he tempted? Why was the Lord Jesus Christ tempted? Well again, he has shared our humanity and our human experience. And the writer of Hebrews has two passages, really more than that, but two passages I'm thinking of at the moment, in which he talks about that.

And he talks about our Lord Jesus Christ as a merciful and faithful high priest. One who has suffered being tempted. And really, if I get nothing else across to some of you tonight, I want to get this across.

None of us as a human being really has any right to say to a fellow Christian who has yielded to temptation, how could you do that? We have no right to say that. We cannot say that. Writing to the Galatians, Paul talks to the spiritual about a man who has fallen.

He has been overtaken in a transgression. And Paul says, You that are spiritual, restore such in one, in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. And really, when I try to work with someone who has fallen, I do not ask, I dare not ask, how could you? The question I have to ask is, how did I not? That's the question.

And what Paul is telling the Galatians is that except for a set of circumstances, there is no difference between the spiritual who goes to restore and the fallen who is to be restored. God knows, put me in those circumstances from which I have been mercifully spared, put me in those circumstances and the spiritual might be coming to restore me. Sometimes we preachers give the impression that we are above all this.

And I felt this in talking about our Lord and the implications of his decisions in Philippians 2. And none of you should think that I or anyone else who ministers the word of God is trying to teach you what he himself has fully experienced. We haven't. We're struggling with it the same as you.

There's always a danger for those of us who preach. We preach an authoritative word. There's always a danger of taking that authority to ourselves.

And we can't. And there's always a danger of preaching as though we had arrived. And so when we talk about temptation, we face it, the same as you.

And we fall, the same as you. Now what is our Lord's attitude when we are tempted and when we fall? He is first a merciful high priest. He knows what sore temptations are.

In fact, he knows them far better than we do. We who capitulate early in the temptation have never felt the full force of that temptation we gave in to early. It's the man who wrestles against it who feels its full force.

And our Lord is one who did not give in to it. He felt its full force. He knows what sore temptations are.

For he endured the same. The second thing, let me say, his whole concern is how to get you back. Now he's not ignoring the sin.

But his concern is how to get you back. That's all he's thinking about. You remember that with Peter? Right from the announcement that the Lord made in Gethsemane to Peter, Satan has desired to have all of you that he may sift you as wheat.

But I have prayed for you, Peter, singularly, that your faith, singularly, you, your Peter, I'm talking about yours, your faith may not fail. Now our Lord knew Peter was going to fall. Before Peter fell, what was our Lord's attitude? I've prayed for you.

After Peter fell, what was our Lord's attitude? Why do you think that angel said on resurrection morning, go tell his disciples and Peter? Are you to think by resurrection morning, Peter counted himself a disciple of Jesus Christ? No. The worst thing about it was probably the other disciples didn't either. That's the way we act toward each other anyhow.

When a brother falls, you know, we don't count him a disciple anymore. Now I'm not talking about the need for discipline. The whole purpose of discipline, by the way, is not to clear our skirts in our

self-righteousness, but to get that man back.

To get him to repent. To get him to see the enormity of what he has done. That's the first step to bring him back.

The purpose is to bring him back. Go tell my disciples, his disciples, and Peter. Why do you think our Lord made a special resurrection appearance to Peter? And then you think of the care in John chapter 20, by the Sea of Galilee, when he brought Peter back to his service.

His whole purpose was to get Peter back. As far as the record is concerned, never once did our Lord mention how deeply he had been hurt by Peter's defection. He wasn't thinking of himself.

He was thinking of Peter. This is our Lord's attitude. He wants you back.

Got that? He's a merciful high priest. So we have this sympathetic, I like Philip's translation of a passage in Hebrew, He said, we do not have a superhuman high priest. One who is above our experiences.

No, that's not the kind of high priest we have. He has, he is genuinely human. He has lived where we live.

He has felt what we feel. He knows what we're going through. And his desire is to help us.

He is touched with the feelings of our infirmity. You get that? You parents know something about that. You know how you suffer with your children.

Don't you? In their difficulties, you know how you suffer. That's the Lord Jesus Christ. He is touched with the feelings of our infirmity.

By something that is the purpose of his temptation. I'm almost persuaded to go ahead the rest of the time and talk about our temptations rather than his. But let's look at his.

Maybe all we're going to be able to do is first, in his temptation, some of the circumstances that heighten the force of his temptation. There are three of them that I'm thinking of. One we read from Mark's gospel the other morning.

Mark chapter 1. Where Jesus was led out into the wilderness and was with the wild beast. Mark is the only one who records that, by the way. He was with the wild beast.

In my thinking, there are two things that that tells me. One, there were no distractions. He was out in the wilderness alone.

There were no distractions to ease the force of the temptation. God knows in how thankful we are. How often in our experience, right at the point of temptation where we felt we were going to go under some distraction totally uncontrolled by us had come in and to us at the moment accidentally thwarted the whole thing.

And looking back on it after it's over, we thank God for this. He was out in the wilderness where there were no distractions to blunt the force of Satan's temptation. It tells me a second thing.

He was alone. Without human companionship. I think all of us have known this too.

Even if we're in a crowd, it's in that sense of loneliness that we are exposed. Sin not only drives us into loneliness, it very often finds its occasion to tempt us in loneliness. Now, I don't know what I can say to those of you who are older.

You are not past temptation either. But I have found here is one of the values of an intimate, genuine Christian fellowship. There are men and women with whom I have that kind of relationship.

And when I am in difficulty, it's the kind of thing I can share with them and sharing it with them, knowing that they know, and we can pray together, takes the sting and the force out of a lot of the temptation that I experience. That I am not alone on the human level now. Because when I'm in the temptation, friends, I am not about to talk to the Lord.

That's part of the temptation, by the way. But having that human friend who can help me get to the Lord. Now, our Lord doesn't have that.

I hope before we're through this week, I can talk about the Lord in Gethsemane. When he reached out for three men, Peter, James, and John, in his hour of need, here in the wilderness, there were no disciples, no friends, who could strengthen him. And he faced that temptation alone.

That's the first of the circumstances that heightens the temptation in my judgment. The second is the matter of suffering. He was hungry.

He had been 40 days without eating, and he was hungry. Physical suffering. Now, there are circumstances in which physical suffering can be an educational experience for the Christian.

But we are very, very unwise, in my judgment, and very unrealistic if we say that all suffering is educated for the Christian. It's a totally different experience. But I have hung over the rail of a pitching submarine chaser in World War II, and cursed every German submarine under the water and every American ship on top of it.

I was so sick. And if you had come to me and wanted to discuss Daniel's 70 weeks, I would have thrown you overboard. You think I was learning any lessons when I was so ill, so violently ill? First of all, afraid I was going to die, and then afraid I wasn't.

No, no. And a point is reached, that is no illustration of it, but I'm saying there's a point reached in physical suffering when it's very senselessness makes us question God. That's the point of temptation.

It's senselessness. When physical pain becomes so great, there is no possibility of rational thinking to learn the lesson. I saw it as a boy.

I owe a great deal to the godly example of my father. His interest in the word of God, his prayers. When I was about in the 8th or 9th grade, my father got rheumatoid arthritis, for which they still have no cure, of course.

And it went from his hands and knees and feet up to the base of his neck. And I remember nights being wakened by it. And when I went into his room, he was standing about three feet from the wall, just throwing himself against the wall, battering his head against the wall, trying to get rid of the pain.

One night I grabbed him as he stood in the second-story window ready to jump. Educated? No, no, not at all. Not at all.

He was past rational thinking. His very senselessness was the point of temptation to question God. Our Lord suffered physically the intense pain of forty days without food.

That heightened the temptation. The third element that in my thinking intensified the temptation was the matter of time. Forty days, which is a period of testing in Scripture.

There's a second element in our temptation, our suffering, is, all right, we've learned some lessons, now we can quit. It's time for the suffering, the temptation to stop. And it doesn't.

It doesn't. In time, as this suffering, this temptation, continues and continues and continues without relief, that becomes a factor in temptation. And it may be after a short period of suffering, we have learned something of the grace of God.

But it keeps on, and it keeps on, and it keeps on. You want to say, Lord, I learned, I learned something of your grace. What now? And that thing stretches out and stretches out and stretches.

And these are factors in the circumstances of our Lord's temptation. Let me say this final word. We'll try to expand on it tomorrow morning.

If I understand Satan's purpose throughout Scripture, you can see it in his work with Adam and Eve, or with Eve, and then through Eve reaching Adam. You can see it with Job. You can see it with our Lord.

You can see it with Paul. Satan, Satan's purpose is to drive a wedge between us and God. To get us to doubt God.

To question. If God is good, well, he can't be good to allow this. To rebel against God.

To give up on him. To quit. What do you do when you're faced with that? As C.S. Lewis says, you go back to the foundation.

You go back to why you believed in the first place. Did you believe because God said he would give you an easy life? Did you believe because God said he would give you a life free of pain, suffering, temptation, illness, difficulty, trial? Is that why you believed? No, no. Then if that is not the reason why you believed, it's not a reason for stopping believing.

And you go back to why did I believe? Why did I first put my confidence in God, in Jesus Christ? Because in love he gave his son for my sins. Has that changed? I can still hold on to that confidence. Second, regardless of how it seems in your temptation, there is an understanding high priest who, one, provides a way of escape.

You are never in a temptation where you are boxed in without a way out. Never. There is always, in every temptation, some way out.

But I'm really concerned about those of you who may be here tonight overloaded with guilt because you fell and you haven't found anybody you can talk to about it. Because when we get up to pray at the Lord's Supper or in prayer meetings, you would never know that since the day we trusted Christ, we have ever needed his forgiveness. But we do.

And what I'm trying to get across to you is he knows what you are going through. And his whole concern

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