

The Temptation - Part 2

by W.F. Anderson

W.F. Anderson's sermon explores the three spiritual enemies Christians face--flesh, world, and Satan--and offers insights on how to combat these temptations through faith and action.

Topics: "Temptation Of Christ", "Faithfulness To God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the temptations faced by Jesus in the wilderness and how he handled them. The speaker emphasizes that Jesus was tempted in three areas: physical needs, the approval of others, and the accomplishment of a worthwhile task. Jesus countered each temptation by quoting scripture, showing the importance of relying on the word of God. The speaker also highlights the need for believers to have loyalty to Jesus even when he does not provide immediate physical or spectacular deliverance.

Transcript

This passage last night will not re-read it this morning, but refer to it as we go along. We read Matthew chapter 4, verses 1-11. And we began last night a discussion of the temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the wilderness at the beginning of His public ministry.

All of us are aware that we as Christians face three spiritual enemies. Not that all our enemies are in themselves spiritual, but they tempt us and affect us ultimately in the spiritual realm. There is the world, the flesh, and the devil.

All of us are aware of that terminology. I'm not sure we are always aware just of the significance of those three terms and just how those three things are our enemies. Before we look again at the details of our Lord's temptation, for the help particularly of those who are younger, I want to talk about those three enemies of our own spiritual experience.

The flesh we probably have a little more time to talk about as we come to the first temptation that our Lord was faced with in the wilderness. But I found a definition in J. Stafford Wright's book, *Man in the Process of Time*, a number of years ago, that helped me understand what the Bible means by the word flesh when it is being used in a moral sense. The word flesh is used in several different ways in the New Testament.

It is sometimes used simply as the stuff, the physical stuff that hangs onto our bones, more or less loosely, the flesh. It is sometimes used as the whole of human nature. Our Lord became flesh.

What do we mean by that? He took a complete, genuine human nature. And sometimes it is used in this moral sense of the enemy that we face within, called the flesh. The flesh, as J. Stafford Wright defines it in this moral sense, is life organized on the basis of gratifying physical appetite.

That he says is the flesh. Life organized on the basis of gratifying physical appetite. That's the flesh.

And all of us face that enemy. Just in case I forget it because I don't always think clearly. The weapon against the flesh is to run.

Mark claims that there are many ways of dealing with temptation, the best of which is cowardice. And for this kind of temptation it is. When we were living in South Carolina, we worked with alcoholics quite a bit.

We did not live in the largest town in South Carolina, but it did have the reputation of having the largest chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous in the whole state. That, by the way, is not why we moved there. But we did work with alcoholics quite a bit.

And I remember one individual that, coming to know the Lord, was greatly changed. His whole family was changed. He finally secured a job and was working away happily.

And then one day I got a call from his wife that he was off on a binge. And so when I went to find him, we finally got him sobered up a few days later, and we sat down and talked about what had happened. It was something like this.

It was a salesman. He had to travel to a number of towns around the town in which we were living to make his call. And going into this town one day, it happened to be a town where you had angle parking like you've got over here in Painesville.

And he went up and down the main street because he had to call in a couple of businesses on that main street and he couldn't find a parking place. And finally he found one that was open. And he pulled in, turned off the ignition, looked through the windshield, and he stopped right in front of a liquor store.

And he told me later, he said, I sat there and fought with myself for 20 minutes. And then I got out and went into the liquor. Now, as we talked about it, he knew what he should have done.

He should have turned that engine back on, thrown that car in reverse, and got out of there. That's the only way to deal with it. But when you sit there and fight it, you're going down.

That's all. Get out of there. The weapon against the flesh, for us, is flight.

Get away. Now, the flesh is more than... We talk about the sins of the flesh and we think about drunkenness and sex and that kind of thing. But there's more than that to the sins of the flesh.

It's unfortunate that we reserve the word flesh, usually, for sexual sins. It's a much wider thing than that. And there's more involved in it than the simple, physical appetite.

I think all of us are aware of this. I think it's in his book, Mere Christianity, that C.S. Lewis does such a beautiful job of talking about the perversion of our sexual appetite. And anyone with any common sense who had his head screwed on straight and could think clearly would see our sexual appetites have been perverted, have been overstimulated.

And there's more than the physical appetite. The soul is involved here. The individual is involved here.

It's far more than the natural gratification of physical desire. There is, in our society, the deliberate attempt to keep that appetite constantly stimulated. I think all of us, to use C.S. Lewis' comparison, would be aware that if we thought about food, 90% of the time we are awake, we're aware that, like gluttony, we would be eating more than our bodies really called for.

And there is the mental, the emotional side to this physical appetite. And this is what our society is doing, keeping us thinking about sex 90% of the time. You're faced with it everywhere you go.

So that our appetites are unnaturally stimulated. And the whole philosophy here, the Playboy idea, is, in spite of what they say, is not satisfying natural appetite. It's gratifying an artificially stimulated appetite.

And there's more than simply the physical appetite involved in the temptations that we face in the area of flesh. A second enemy that we face, all of us are aware of this, is the world. And here, I think, is the most difficult one of all to identify very clearly.

One of the reasons for that is it is so hard for us to know what the world really is. We think in terms that are not quite biblical, when the Bible talks about the world. We talk about worlds, and we've joked about these three themes, one of them being the world, and we have all the worldly people on that theme.

No, I won't think about that. But we think, when we talk about a Christian being worldly, of a Christian who does certain things that we label as worldly. And I'm not advocating that we do things that Christians have fundamentally called worldly, but what I am saying is there's a terrible danger of thinking that's worldly, and not seeing what the temptation of the world really is.

And the world in the Bible is a way of life, and I'm using James Stafford Wright's definition again. It's a way of life whose assumption is that everything of value is bounded by the horizons of birth and death. That's the world.

It's a way of life that sees only this life, and lives for what is temporal. That's the world. You have it in my judgment epitomized in that beer commercial.

You only go around once in life, get all the gusto you can. That is the world. Not the beast.

If you had gone to Holland or Germany, you would not call beer worldly. As Christians, it's amazing how cultures differ, you know, and what to us is horrifying is to them perfectly normal. And what to us is perfectly normal is to them horrifying.

If you went out in certain countries in Europe and played a game of volleyball on the Lord's Day, you're a terrible, terrible sinner, but you could sit down to your meal and drink beer. So anyhow, what I'm saying is not that the beer, but the idea of the commercial. That you only go around once in life, grab all the gusto you can.

That is worldliness. That you're only going to be here once, and that's true. The conclusion is the worldly part of it.

Get everything you can of what is temporal. That is the essence of worldliness. And I can be thoroughly worldly while I stay away from such things as moving, card playing, dancing, whatever you, smoking, drinking.

I can stay away from all those things and be thoroughly worldly. I can have my goals temporal and material. Now what you say your goals are may not really be your goals.

Every one of us, I think, here as a Christian would say our goals are spiritual. We want to know more of the Word of God. We sung day after day, hear more about Jesus, what I know.

But what our goals really are is determined by what we give our time and effort and energy to. What determines our decisions. And I can talk all I want to, for instance, about one of the goals high on my list of priorities is to bring up my family in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

To be the kind of father I ought to be according to the Word of God. But if I am not deliberately spending the time, and this may mean I have to change jobs, forget the time. And if I refuse to do that, all my talk about putting my family high on the list of priorities is hypocrisy.

I have deceived myself by my own talk. And going in for what is temporal. Having the kind of goals that our society has.

Our non-Christian society that knows nothing about another world still to come. To which all of us are going, Christian or non-Christian, we're all going to that world. To live now for this world.

As though that world did not exist. That's worldliness. And it comes to all of us.

It comes into our churches. We adopt the thinking of our non-Christian society. And even in our churches we can be thoroughly worldly.

For instance, things that keep coming to me as I think about worldliness in our local churches. I don't know about you folks in Minnesota and Iowa, so I'm not talking about you. Maybe I am without knowing it, but I'm not.

I think of many of the local churches of which I am familiar. And most of us Christians look up to as leaders in the church. Men who are leaders in industry, business, or in the community.

For most of the churches I am familiar with, if they are in that kind of a society, like say Chicago, industrial, commercial, the leaders in the local churches are successful businessmen. Why? Because we're worldly in our thinking. Our non-Christian society looks to these men as leaders because they are financially successful.

Now I'm not saying a financially successful man cannot be a leader in a local church, but I'm saying the transfer cannot be one-to-one. It must be other qualities that give him a position of leadership in the local church. But we don't think that way.

Because unfortunately when we look at the church, our local churches, we see them in terms of the organizations of our non-Christian society. And since businesses are run by an executive board, then too often elders are like an executive board in a corporation rather than like shepherds taking care of a flock. Where did we get that idea? If you were to go to a society that knew nothing about industrialization, you wouldn't have that pattern.

We pick it up from our non-Christian society. We are in danger of picking up another idea from our non-Christian society in our local churches, and that is the bigger the more successful. Size and numbers indicate success in our non-Christian society.

The bigger a corporation, the more successful it is. And we are in danger of bringing that idea over into our local churches. The bigger the local church, the more members, the more people we get in, the more people we're reaching, the more successful it is.

That may be true, but it's not necessarily true. Size, and I'm not advocating tiny little churches. I've said before, some of those small churches are simply dead.

That's why they're small, and they haven't got enough sense to be buried. But size is not the evaluating thing. Because it's small, it is not spiritual, necessarily.

Because it is large, it is not unspiritual, necessarily. What I'm saying is size is not a factor here. When you come to the Word of God, the thing God is looking for is what is going on in the lives of the people who are there.

What's happening in the individual experience of the people of God? Are they growing in the things of God? Are they maturing? Are they showing that spiritual life that God talks about in the Scripture? That is the kind of thing God uses. How are they treating each other as Christians? Fighting? Jealousy? Rivalry? This is the kind of thing God talks about. We talk about size.

I do this. As soon as I meet somebody from an assembly where I've never been, you know one of the first questions I ask, how many are in fellowship? What difference does that make? What difference does it make? What's going on in the lives of God's people? And if we think only in terms of size, we may be in danger of worldliness. We can do this with our family.

We can think of our children in terms of their position in society. And that's a terrible thing. Terrible thing.

I saw it in my own family. I've shared this with some of you before. The day my son, in his second year in college, came into my office in fear and tremble, he wanted to talk to me.

And it took him at least five minutes sitting there beside my desk before he could tell me what he wanted to tell me. And he made all sorts of preliminaries before he could get it out. And I'm sitting there scared silly about what he's done.

I said, I didn't know. And finally it came out. He's going to drop out of college.

At first you can't imagine the relief that that's all it was. But as we worked our way through in that conversation, the reason he found it so difficult is that his impression of me was the most important thing to me was that he get a college education, make some mark. And it took us a couple of hours to work through.

I had to work through it to get through to him. To me, the most important thing in all of life is whether or not he is God's man in this world. And I think I finally came to it myself and got through to him.

Dave, I don't care whether you're a ditch digger or an executive in society. Neither count anything to me. What I am concerned about is the kind of Christian you are, whatever your position.

And I shall not be afraid to lift up my head and tell anybody else my son digs ditches for a living. I wouldn't care. But you see, I had adopted a thoroughly worldly idea.

And he had gotten that. But the most important thing to me about him was the position he had in society. Now, of course, I'm not interested in his being lazy or irresponsible.

But the chief thing is the kind of person he is. But where do we lose that? We lose it in the pressures of our world. That's worldly.

We adopt the standards, the goals of our non-Christian society who knows nothing about that other world to which we're all going. Worldliness. That, to me, is probably the most subtle of the three enemies that we face.

We absorb it. We're exposed to it from birth. And we absorb without being aware of it.

We absorb its standards and its ideas. And it's something you have. And John tells us the way out of that is faith.

Now, faith is not something that you have in itself. Faith is a confidence in an objective revelation. It's really taking God's Word seriously.

And if I take God's Word seriously, I am convinced that there is another world. I'm convinced that all his promises about the future are true. And I'm convinced that when he says this world is passing away in all its lusts, that everything here is temporal, everything that seems so permanent and so lasting, that one day there won't be any United States of America.

That all this is temporal. I take that seriously. And when he tells me that what I do now, today, is going to have significance forever, I take that seriously.

And I act on that. By the way, you believe, really believe, in the biblical sense, and here I'm using Dorothy Sayers again, you believe, in the biblical sense, only what you take for granted and act on. Do you get that? What you take for granted and act on.

And we Christians take that other world for granted. It's there. It's real.

Have you seen it? No. How do you know it's there? You've got his Word. And you take it for granted and you act on it.

It's the only way out. But you have to do some hard thinking about your own goals, and your own ambitions, and your own decisions, the basis on which they're formed, whether it is on the basis of what's important to our non-Christian society, or whether they are true, biblical, eternal considerations. So the world is one of our enemies.

The third enemy is Satan. And without talking about his origin or his work, let me tell you as far as I understand his desire, it's, as I mentioned last night, to drive a wedge between us and God. To make us give up on God.

To lose our confidence in God. To become practicing atheists, is his ambition. For example, with Job.

Satan's thrust was to get Job to curse God. And this is what he said. The only reason Job has any confidence in you and serves you is because of the physical protection and blessings you give him.

Take all that away and he'll curse you to your face. And this is what Satan wanted. To destroy Job's confidence in God.

I take it the same thing with Paul. If we were talking about his stake or, as our Bibles usually have it, his thorn in the flesh. Destroy Paul's confidence in God.

To make him give up. That was his work with Peter, by the way. That's why our Lord said, I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.

What do you think would naturally run through Peter's mind and determine his action after he had denied the Lord three times? It's all over. It's all over. You'll have nothing more to do with me.

I'm finished. Now, what our Lord prayed was, Peter, that your faith may not fail. You may not give up your confidence in me.

I am not the kind of person who kicks you out because you fail. I don't want you to lose your confidence in me. I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.

What Satan was after was to cut the ground out from under Peter's confidence in our Lord Jesus. That's the very thing about which the Lord had prayed. That your faith fail not.

So I think the work of Satan, in our experience, is not primarily concerned with our physical appetite. As far as I know, with the exception of 1 Corinthians chapter 7, he is never directly connected with the lusts of the flesh. He will use those.

But he knows quite well that we'll do a good job without his help in the area of the lusts of the flesh. But he works primarily in the spiritual realm of our confidence in the living God. So our Lord is faced with this tempter, Satan, here, in three temptations.

And by the way, these were not the first nor the last. The very structure of Mark's language in chapter 1 indicates that this temptation has gone on for all 40 days. And then we read in the Gospels that Satan left him for a season, which means that he returned.

And this was neither the first nor the last time. I mean, what we have written here in Mark, in Matthew chapter 4, some form had been going on during those 40 days. And this is certainly not the last time that Satan would face our Lord Jesus.

Let me say this, by the way. And I keep wanting to talk about us in temptation. I didn't start out to talk about the Lord in temptation.

But I keep getting sidetracked, which my students know is one of my great weaknesses and one of their favorite tactics when they are not prepared for class. They come in and raise an issue I'm interested in. We get sidetracked, and I never find out that they weren't prepared.

Some of us as Christians are surprised, one, that we are tempted. And we shouldn't be. If our Lord was tempted, we shouldn't be surprised that we are.

Of course we are tempted. And we are surprised when we are tempted by the same thing repeatedly. We shouldn't be.

Our Lord was. He was faced again and again with some of the kinds of temptations that Satan faced Him with here. And because you have successfully come through one attack in a given area, does not mean you're not going to face that same thing again.

No. You will find, as you have found in your experience, the same temptation coming to you over and over and over again. And you never win what some people call complete victory.

You never do. You face that battleground many times. Many times.

And it shouldn't surprise you if you do. Our Lord did. There was a way out for Him, and we want to look at that too.

Yes, you do, don't you? Three times Satan faced the Lord with a temptation. The first here is to tempt Him to turn stones into bread. If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

And here, as all of you know, many have seen in these three temptations, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, which is John's summation of all that is in the world. It's been compared many times with the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. And, of course, the differences in response are noted between how Eve handled it and how our Lord Jesus Christ handled it in Matthew.

Here He is dealing with physical appetite, physical need. And as I was suggesting last night, temptation is possible to us because we do have need. Legitimate need.

But it's need separated from the will of God. We make certain basic assumptions about God. And this is what Satan is doing all the way through here, by the way.

Maybe pinpointed more clearly in the second temptation, where Satan reasons, using the word of God, that he has promised that his angels shall take charge of you. You will not dash your foot against the stone. Therefore, throw yourself off the temple and God will take care of you.

He reasons as to what God must do based on what God has said. And we are in danger very often of handling Scripture the way Satan handled it. Of handling it without personal submission to the God who said it.

Of standing almost as an equal with God and telling God, this is what you've got to do. And we make certain assumptions because we isolate certain passages of Scripture from what God has said about that subject as a whole. We may take the exceptional thing that God has done according to His own self-revelation and insist that because God did that in exceptional situations, He'd do that normally.

And there are some of us who would make the miraculous the normal and would no longer be the miraculous. And we almost tell God what He's got to do. There's a terrible, terrible danger in that.

As far as providing for us is concerned, as I understand it, particularly from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, in this area of physical need, where our Lord taught His disciples to pray, Give us this day our daily bread. Where He told them, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. We forget that expression, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Let me sum it up this way. In Scripture, our God is seen as our Lord. Which in the Old Testament, Adam and Eve, has the secular idea of a slave owner.

A slave is responsible to do the will of his master. The owner of the slave is responsible to provide everything the slave needs to do his master's will. Now to that, God has committed Himself.

He will give us everything we need to do His will. Anything else He throws in is extra. Our difficulty is that we really do not have as our chief goal to accomplish His will.

And so we feel we need a lot of things we really don't need to do His will. Now He may give us those as extra. But so often we are like Solomon.

When he became king and God said, Okay, ask me anything you want. Solomon, realizing the enormity of the responsibility given to him, said, I need wisdom. I need wisdom.

And God was so delighted. He said, All right, I'll throw in wealth, prosperity, long life, and your enemies as well. You haven't asked for any of those.

You've asked for what you really need. Because to do God's will was to serve as king over the people of Israel and lead them in God's ways. And for that He needed wisdom.

And He asked for what He needed to accomplish the will of God. He didn't need wealth. And He didn't need long life.

And He didn't necessarily need His enemies. That period of prosperity and peace to accomplish God's will. What He needed was wisdom.

And that's what He asked for. And God threw everything else in as extra. But as Solomon's life developed, the extras became his gods.

And he became a man captured by wealth. And what God threw in as extra became the main thing in Solomon's life. No, let's come back to the basics.

You and I are here in this world temporarily. We're on our way to another world. And we are here to do the will of God.

Everything you need to accomplish God's will, He has pledged Himself to give you. Now sometimes we get our eyes on those extras and we say, you've got to do it. No.

No, He doesn't have to. He may. But He'll give us what we need.

Now I remember reading in Harry Ironside's biography years ago that his stepfather once wrote him, Someday God may see that I need a starving. Everything I need. But now Satan's coming at our Lord with a genuine physical need.

But he divorces it from the will of God. You see, our Lord had the power to turn stones into bread. And He had the need for physical food.

But Satan wanted Him to act independently of God. Isn't even the second temptation, just sketch through it, in being alone here in the wilderness and coming as the Messiah of Israel, was to bring God's people under His leadership. How better to do that than with this spectacular leap from what was probably the southwest corner of the temple, jump down into that courtyard, crowded with people, possibly at the hour of prayer, and in that spectacular deliverance, win the loyalty of the crowd.

Isn't this what you need? Isn't this what you need, to have these people follow you? Yes, it is. It is. But it would be on the wrong basis.

It would be like the crowd that followed Him because He fed them. You remember after the feeding of the 5,000. It would not be on the basis of their need before God as sinners.

It would not be on the basis of salvation. It would be on the basis of the spectacular. And with that kind of a following, you find people who one day are shouting, the next day are shouting crucify, when He no longer produces the spectacular.

Now, the Lord endures all this for one reason at least. He is saying to His followers, I want my people loyal to Me, even if I do not give them bread. I want my people loyal to Me, even if I do not produce the spectacular for their deliverance.

I want people who are loyal to Me to death. And not one of them can say that I haven't experienced what they are going through. The third temptation is all the kingdoms of the world.

And after all, this is why He had come to bring this rebellious planet into the orbit of His control and will, as He will one day. But here it was, all offer to Him, to accomplish His mission. And there are three needs that we have, our physical needs, the approval of others, and the accomplishment of a worthwhile task.

Every human being has those three basic needs. And it was on the basis of those needs that Satan approached our Lord Jesus. There are many things you can see as you look at these temptations, but what I really wanted to come to is how our Lord handled them.

Three times our Lord used the Word of God. It is written, man shall not live by bread alone. It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

And again, telling Satan to be gone, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. I used to think years ago that the secret was memorizing and quoting Scripture. And that this is how our Lord defeated Satan, by quoting Scripture.

But as I look at that temptation, that is only part of it. I think many of us have discovered at times we have quoted Scripture and it hasn't worked. Because there isn't anything magical in the Bible.

I'm grateful, for instance, for soldiers who in World War II, and you heard story after story, had in their shirt pockets a New Testament with that metal plate on it. And some bullet hit it and stopped at that plate and they were delivered. Well, they weren't delivered by the Word of God, in the sense that the Word of God talks about being delivered.

And the feeling arose that you have some sort of a magical thing here that in itself brought deliverance. We were getting to the point where we were treating the New Testament like Israel treated the Ark when they carried it into battle against the Philistines. That it shall deliver us.

No, there's nothing magical in this book. Magic is the idea of manipulation. And you cannot manipulate God and events by a book.

You don't manipulate God by anything. This is the sober communication of God's truth to man. It's something I need to know and understand and be subject to.

And there isn't anything magical in the words of Scripture. It is the vehicle by which God, these words, communicate what He thinks and feels and wants and wills and has planned. And it's not just by memorizing the Scripture and quoting it that our Lord met Satan.

Because Satan quoted Scripture, but he did it as a mechanical thing without subjection to the God of Scripture. And I think so often in our discussions, particularly where we disagree, theological debates, we hurl proof texts at other people and we are guilty of using the Word of God the way Satan used it. We are using it as a weapon to club someone else into submission.

How did our Lord use it? Why was He quoting these particular verses? My understanding is that this Scripture had power in the temptation because our Lord Himself was personally subject to what that Scripture said. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. That is the basis on which our Lord Jesus lived.

He was personally subject to the Word of God. And really, in the final analysis, it does me no good, or does the Word of God no good, for me to depend logically, exegetically from Scripture, the inerrancy of the Word of God, if I myself am not subject to His authority. And our Lord Jesus, the Eternal Son of God who became man, subjected Himself to obey the written Word of God.

Satan came to Him to say one thing. The Word of God came to Him and said another. And what our Lord was telling Satan was, I am already committed to what God has said.

So with each of these responses that he made, it is no reverence for the Word of God to do what Satan did with it in the second temptation. Throw yourself down. God has got to keep His promises.

That's called tempting the Lord God, as Israel tempted Him in the wilderness, demanding that God prove that He is faithful to His Word. No, our Lord had too great a reverence for God and for His Word to use the Word of God that way. In His reverence, His submission comes through.

In His own personal subjection, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And in that final one, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. And He's saying that whatever we worship is what we serve.

And to kneel before Satan would be to serve Him. And Satan would be the real God of this world. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.

Which means that all of life, and there is for the Christian no division between secular and sacred, all of life is brought under subjection so that one worships and serves the Lord God in His machine shop Monday through Friday, as He does at the Lord's table on Sunday. He is serving the Lord Christ, as Paul tells the slaves in Ephesians. And all of life is brought in subjection to the living God.

That's the way the Lord Jesus lived. And you find this all through His life. Subjection to what God has said.

Now, there's a danger in our being selective in what we subject ourselves to.

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