

Temptation Part 4 Questioning

Over these recent weeks as we have studied about this greatest of the enemies of our souls, "temptation", we have come to understand that it has several elements that make up its arsenal of weapons, each of them very effective in its goal of drawing our souls into sinful behavior and corruption.

And we have seen that at the heart and core of "temptation's" power and drive are two great forces, one force coming from within our own souls, the other, coming from an outside force. That inside force coming from our own sinful nature that was born into us at birth and triggered by our natural lusts, the outside force driven almost entirely by the devil and his legion of numberless demons.

Here, in the scripture passage that I will read for us again in a moment, we are given a clear example of how the devil plies his subtle temptations in an effort to draw the Lord Jesus away from His appointed mission, that of saving the souls of hapless and corrupt mankind. But thankfully, also revealing to us that, in His righteousness, Jesus would not succumb to the wiles of the devil, but would instead use the "power of the word of God" to dismantle the devil's temptations and dispatch him with a mere "flick of the tongue", saying "get thee behind me satan".

And we want to remind ourselves that Jesus was able to do that because He did not come into this world with the same sinful nature that you and I came with. No, Jesus was born into this world pure and holy, without any of the corrupt DNA within Him that is present within you and me. Listen to those words again from Luke chapter 1, verse 35. There the angel Gabriel said to Mary

35 . . . "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. (Luke 1:35)

Folks, Jesus was born the "Son of God". His DNA came from God Himself, making Him to be absolutely Holy, without spot, stain, wrinkle or blemish. And Praise be to God for that!

But again, you and I were not born "holy" as Jesus was! We were instead born with a nature that is already inclined toward sin and easily tempted by it.

And these scriptures warn us that sin has power within it that you and I are not equipped, within ourselves, to resist. And “temptation” is its most formidable weapon. We must take warning from these scriptures that if the most innocent of all human beings, Adam and Eve, could fall victim to temptation’s ploys, then you and I are surely subject to its beguiling ways.

And we also see in these scriptures how almost immediately after Adam and Eve had given in to sin’s temptation, their son Cain, did the same. And though satan’s name is not specifically mentioned in Cain’s sin, we can clearly see his handiwork in the behavior of Cain, as Cain, in his jealousy over the way God approved of his brother Abel’s sacrifice, but rejected his own, contrived and then carried out a plan to kill his innocent brother Abel.

Consider these words in Genesis chapter 4 again, as our all-knowing God knew the thoughts and saw the murderous planning taking place within Cain’s mind. And He called Cain aside and warned him against the thing he was about to do, saying to Cain . . .

⁶ . . . “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”
(Genesis 4:6-7)

Here, we can clearly see those steps toward sin taking place that the Apostle James warns us about in James 1:14! Listen!

¹⁴ . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14)

With Cain, the temptation to sin is personified as being so powerful that it seems to have a life-force all its own. And it might have. But at the least, sin has the subtle power of the devil imbedded within it, provoking it on to do evil things and to bring about evil behavior within the hearts and minds of men.

And as we will see from these words of our scripture text today, the use of clever words is one of satan’s favorite ploys. Listen and follow along as I again read these words of our text from Luke chapter 4.

¹ Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they

had ended, He was hungry. ³And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*'" ⁵Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." ⁸And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, '*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*'" ⁹Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written: '*He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,*' ¹¹and, '*In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*'" ¹²And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, '*You shall not tempt the Lord your God.*'" ¹³Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)

Often, as we begin these messages, I will pose a question for us to answer as we study through the scripture text that we are examining for the day. And questions really can be useful tools when used in the right way.

But as we have been finding over these recent weeks, the demonic tempter, satan, has the skill to turn any God-given useful tool into a corrupt weapon to use against our souls. And that is so here in this text with the simple misuse of "questions".

Again, questioning is not in itself a bad thing. Questions are actually a very necessary part of most conversations and behaviors. And questioning is a thing that you and I must do continually in order for us to make right choices.

Simply put, "questioning", is a natural part of each of our thought processes throughout most all the moments of our lives. It has been so for me, both in my personal life and in my business practices. But unfortunately, in most circumstances, I did not realize the dangerous ground I was treading on.

In my years of working in the business world, I often used the philosophy "You can question any and every element of your business practices, without concern, because if it is valid, it will stand up to questioning". And if it is not valid, it should probably fall. And, for the most part, that kind of questioning has proven to have merit.

But I have since come to understand that “questioning” can and does also have its very difficult side. Even questioning that is done in an innocent manner, can be potentially destructive. That is so for business practices, but it is especially true when it concerns the truths and the validity of God's word.

Many modern-day theologians would argue that questioning biblical truths is still an appropriate thing to do, that God's truths are so solid, so immovable, so infallible, so unchanging and powerful, that those truths can stand up to any test.

And we who have Christ as our Savior know that what they are saying is true. But at the same time, we also know that real life is just not that simple, that although there is no possible weakness within the truths of God, our own individual naive and vulnerable souls are still part of the equation, and there is a great deal of weakness within us personally.

And that weakness and that vulnerability is common to every soul, without exception. And that has been so throughout all of time.

Adam and Eve knew about the truths of God, but unfortunately, their hearts were vulnerable to this matter of “questioning”. And somehow, satan knew that. And he used it. He simply formed the “question”, and I'll paraphrase it, “Is God's way always the right way for you? Should you not be able to make choices for yourself?”

Once the naïve and innocent mind of Eve accepted that kind of questioning, her resolve to trust the precepts of God was broken, and failure became the inevitable result.

Once any person crosses that line and believes that he or she is able to discern whether God is right or wrong in His teachings, and believes that he or she is able to discern “truth” for themselves, the battle for their soul is over, and has been lost.

And it all begins with a simple “question” within a naive heart, and a person begins to make choices they should never make.

Note also, that that word “choice” is the exact word that is used in many of today's secular debates, and especially in the abortion debate. A simple question is all that it takes, “should not a woman have the right over her own body, and should she not have the right to choose?”

Unfortunately for the babies, that simple question costs thousands of them their very lives, every day.

Another example of those kinds of "questions" is one that we dealt with every day in our teaching ministry at French Camp Academy. This one involves the studying and teaching of the science of the origins of the universe. Such matters are filled with the wrong kinds of questions, especially within the hearts of innocent children.

In our teaching, we sometimes use our Observatory facilities. There, we clearly say the words from the scriptures, "The heavens declare the glory of God." But as we go about our presentations, we find it difficult not to also bring in the standard wording of the secular world, like those words used in many of the PBS programs, such as, Nova and Nature.

And interspersed within our own presentations we find ourselves saying words like, "The light that emanates from the Crab Nebula takes millions of years to reach the earth".

On the surface, those words sound like a simple statement, but with only a moment's thought, we know that it also brings into question all that is taught in our Sunday School classes and in our study of the scriptures.

How can such reasoning fit within the plain and simple truths about creation? Phrases like "billions of years" bespeak the popular evolutionary process that the unbelieving world preaches to us.

Yes, strongly believing bible scholars can somehow work their way through most of those thoughts and considerations, and still remain faithful to the truths of God. But that might not be so with less prepared minds like yours and mine, and especially the innocent minds of children who are taught to trust their teachers. What are they to do?

All that the world, the flesh and the devil need to do is to produce a simple "question", just a simple "question", and then doubt begins to take control.

Here in today's scripture, satan sought to arouse "questioning" within the mind of Jesus using the small and seemingly innocent word "if". He said to Jesus,

"If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."
(Luke 4:3)

And He said,

“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,’ ¹¹and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” (Luke 4:9-11)

Recall that it was only a short time earlier, after Jesus was baptized by John, that God had thundered out from heaven,

“You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased”. (Luke 3:22)

But here, Jesus was weak and He was vulnerable after having fasted for so long in the desert. And satan, trying to seize on the opportunity and exploit Jesus’ weaknesses, shrewdly employs the beguiling use of “questioning”, cleverly using the word “if”.

“If” is such a small word, but it is seldom ever inconsequential in its impact. “If” carries with it all sorts of questions. Here, Jesus was being tempted to question several things, first of all, “if” He truly was the Son of God.

And yes, Jesus was then, and still is, the only begotten Son of God. But in His human condition, He, like us, was vulnerable to doubts and questions. And satan wanted to exploit that vulnerability.

Thankfully, Jesus, being also fully God Himself, and also filled with the Holy Spirit, was able to deal with satan’s question without wavering.

But satan’s question did not simply begin and end with Jesus. His question was intended to extend on to you and to me, to cause us to ask, “Do we truly believe that Jesus is the only Begotten Son of God. And also, is this very ordinary man one of the Holy Three in the Trinity of God?”

Just as with Jesus, you and I must be able to give the firm and unwavering response, that “Yes, we do believe with all of our heart that Jesus truly is the “Son of God”! And not only that, He also dwells within us every moment of every day”.

And just as Jesus did, you and I ought always to be able to quote the words of God as our proof. Listen to these words of 1 John 4.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (1 John 4:13-15)

These words tell us several things, that Jesus truly is the Son of God, that He literally dwells within us, that we dwell within Him, that He alone is our Savior and that we should confess with our mouths that Jesus truly is the Son of God.

And folks, this last point of “confessing” Jesus as the Son of God somehow seals the agreement between us and God. And at the same time, it serves as a defeat to our tempters.

And further, you and I must not do as the foolish people of this world do and demand that our faith be kept “private”. No! God actually forbids us to ever do that! We must openly and freely “confess with our mouths” that Jesus Christ is the “Son of God”! And we must declare to all who will listen that there is no other name given under heaven by which we shall be saved. Only that of Jesus Christ!

One last thought on this matter of questioning. While yes, we really should question many of the things of this life, because it is right and good to do that. But we must be ever so careful when we approach these truths of God. Questioning these truths can cause very destructive doubts to arise within us.

Some might argue, “but we are not supposed to have a “blind” faith”. And that is true! But real faith is never truly blind. Real faith keeps a clear vision and focus upon the Person of the Lord Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith.

But “blind questioning” of the truths of God will almost always be wrong, because “blind questioning” can often bring with it eternal dangers for our souls. Jesus truly is the Son of God, and God’s word is absolute truth, and God’s word is trustworthy in all that it says and does. And because of that, we can believe it!

Let me close with one last illustration. It is one that I have voiced to you on other occasions. One of the places and venues where questioning is rampant and unbridled, is within the classrooms of academia, especially on our college campuses. There, the philosophy and psychology professors, and others, openly demand that each of their students question everything. And they seem inevitably to center that questioning upon the simple truths of God.

And it is there, in the “Halls of Academia”, where so many innocent hearts are turned away from believing in Christ. And knowing that to be true, you and I have a responsibility to do all that we can to guard our children and grandchildren against those demonic temptations. We must prepare our loved ones carefully before they go into those classrooms, and we must reinforce God’s truths to them all along the way.

As we close for today, may I again remind us that, “Yes, Jesus truly is the “Son of God”? No question and no doubt! And yes, He can save us from our sins, no question and no doubt. He and He alone! And we can know that is absolutely true because of His Spirit who dwells within us. Listen again to those precious words in 1 John 4.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (1 John 4:13-15)

Let's pray!