

How May A Christian Stand Firm In Temptations?

Text: Matt 4:1-11

Suggested Hymns:

195, 368, 341, 68, 181

- 1) In Temptations To Use Unlawful Means For Sustenance, Overcome By An Implicit Trust In God
- 2) In Temptations To Believe False Doctrines, Overcome By Strict Adherence To The Divine Word
- 3) In Temptations To Seek The World's Sinful Pleasures, Overcome By A Stern Refusal

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 4:1–11, ¹ *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* ² *And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.*

³ *Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”* ⁴ *But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”*

⁵ *Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,* ⁶ *and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.”* ⁷ *Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”*

⁸ *Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.* ⁹ *And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”* ¹⁰ *Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”*

¹¹ *Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

This is a remarkable story — Christ is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. At first sight we are at a loss what to make of it, and we fail

to see why Christ would be tempted by the devil. But there is a cause and a reason for everything that Christ did. And the reason why Jesus underwent this temptation in the wilderness was, because He needed to make amends for, and set right, the failure of our first parents, of Adam and Eve, in Paradise.

Are we not told that *“for this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil”*?¹

And what was the devil’s first work? It was this. In the form of a serpent he approached man in Paradise and tempted him to transgress God’s commandment, to perform an act of disobedience against the divine Maker. And behold, the devil was successful.

Even though our first parents possessed the power to resist Satan and to retain their original integrity, yet they did not stand firm in the hour of temptation, but hearkened to the seducing voice of the tempter. Thus sin was brought into the world with all its evil consequences, misery, death, and eternal damnation.

And it was not merely the individual that fell, it was the race that fell in Adam and Eve. For their children were flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood, polluted and corrupted with the same sin with which they were infected.

The fountain having been contaminated, the entire stream issuing from it, is stocked with the germs of disease and death. This was the devil’s work. But our divine Lord came to destroy the works of the devil.

Scarcely had Jesus been baptised by John the Baptist and entered upon His public ministry, when He encountered the “old serpent” in the wilderness and subjected Himself to the deceiver’s temptations.

And lo! Jesus came out victorious. He conquered Satan for us, as our Substitute, and thereby won back the battle which had been lost in Paradise.

Jesus, however, does not only figure as our Substitute in those temptations in the wilderness. He is our Guide at the same time. By His example we may learn how to stand firm in all the temptations with which we are being beset.

With the help of God’s Holy Spirit let us consider the question, *How May A Christian Stand Firm In Temptations?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. In Temptations To Use Unlawful Means For Sustenance, Overcome Them By An Implicit Trust In God.

Our text begins, ¹ *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* ² *And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.* ³ *Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”*

We shall not enter upon the question here, in what disguise or form the devil approached Jesus and tempted Him. The Scriptures say nothing about this, and all we know is, that it was the evil spirit, who had assumed the form of an intellectual, rational, visible being, so that he could converse with Jesus.

Neither shall we enter into discussion with those who claim that the things recorded in our Gospel were not an actual occurrence, but merely took place in the mind of Jesus and were a sort of a vision which came to His weakened mind in consequence of a forty days' fast. There is not the least trace of an indication pointing to such an explanation.

Our text is a plain, simple narrative describing what actually took place; and every unprejudiced reader will and must accept it as such.

The question with us is, What did the first temptation imply, when the devil approached Jesus and said, *“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”* The answer is, it implied that Jesus should use unlawful means to provide for His own sustenance.

Jesus was hungry, having fasted forty days and forty nights. He was starved and longed for something to eat. Now the devil's object was that Jesus should not trust in His heavenly Father, and expect Him to provide for His bodily wants, but that He should exert His own power, if He really was the Son of God, and turn stones into bread, against the will of the Father, who had sent Him upon this earth to suffer and to subject His will to the will of His Father in heaven, to be obedient to Him unto death, even the death on the cross.

The devil tempts Christians in the same manner to this day. When you are in want and an opportunity presents itself to obtain money or goods in an unlawful way, by practising upon your neighbour a clever fraud, or by lottery, or gambling, or in some other crooked way, does not the devil whisper into your ear and say, *Here is your chance! Why should you be such a fool as to let it slip? Go, do it! Others do it, the most respectable people do it. There is no wrong in it, especially since you are in such straits and difficulties.*

When you are ill at ease about things that are concealed before your eyes and that you would like to know, are you not tempted at times to consult clairvoyants, mediums, fortune-tellers, and to find out with their help what God does not want you to know?

When a disease has fastened upon you which baffles medical skill and no relief may be expected from the physicians, are you not tempted at times to use witchcraft, or to join the cults who deny the very existence of sin and its evil consequences, and tell you to simply believe that you are well and then your sickness must depart?

So, how may a Christian stand firm in these temptations to use unlawful means for his sustenance or deliverance? Christ shows us plainly. He answered the devil and said, ***“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”***

The Lord quotes this passage from the book of Deuteronomy, where the reason is stated why God fed the Israelites with manna, namely, because He wanted to teach them that man shall not live by bread alone.² Here Jesus shows His trust in the heavenly Father, that the Father is able and willing to provide for Him; and that He can do so without bread, just as He did in the wilderness when He fed Israel for forty years with manna.

Learn from Christ, then, my dear Christians, how to stand firm in the temptation to use unlawful means for your sustenance and deliverance. Trust in God that He will provide for you in some way. Trust in Him so implicitly so as not to doubt that the affliction in which you must remain, is for your own good, and that He will deliver you when the right time has come.

Trust in Him, that without His good and gracious will not a hair shall drop from your head, and that with Him you are always in safe keeping. And if thus you trust in the Almighty God you will stand firm in the hour of temptation and not think of doing anything which is incompatible with conscience and His divine Word.

2. In Temptations To Believe False Doctrines, Overcome Them By A Strict Adherence To The Divine Word.

The second temptation is described in the following words, ***“⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said***

to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, "In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

Now what did this second temptation imply? It implied false doctrine. The false doctrine produced by the devil is, that God will protect those who trust in Him and let no harm come to them, even if they carelessly expose themselves to danger and risk their lives by some foolhardy act.

Jesus had declared His trust in the heavenly Father in point of nourishment; and now He shows His trust in point of safety. The devil suggested that Jesus could leap from the high roof of the temple, and believe that He would land safely on the ground below, because God's holy angels would bear Him upon their hands.

In support of this false doctrine the devil quotes Scripture. But how does he quote Scripture? He omits the very point at issue. The passage quoted is Psalm 91:11-12, but he omits the words *"To keep you in all your ways."* What does that mean, *"In all your ways?"*

It means that if you go out of your way, out of the way of your duty and calling, you forfeit the promise and have no claim to God's protection. Now these few little words overthrow the whole doctrine of God's protection in foolhardiness, which the devil meant to elicit from the Word of God; and therefore he cunningly omitted them. It was false doctrine with which he tempted Christ.

The devil often tempts Christians in the same way today. Is he not constantly breeding mischief by false doctrine? Are there not false prophets almost every where, perverting and distorting the holy Word of God by either omitting or adding to it?

Is there not a bewildering number of sects, each of them deviating from God's plain Word in some point and claiming to possess the truth? Is there a divine truth which Satan had not assailed and to which he had not given some false interpretation? Does he not continually bring forth something new, some new doctrine, or some new method to rob people of their faith in Jesus, the Saviour from sin, aside from whom there is no salvation, and no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved?³

How may Christians stand firm in these temptations of false doctrine? Christ shows us plainly. He simply said to the devil, ***“It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”*** What was the weapon, then, which Jesus wielded against the tempter, and by which He wiped out his fiery darts? It was the written Word of God.

The devil had quoted the Word of God to support a false doctrine of his own fabrication, and had mutilated the Word to gain the point. Jesus quoted the Word of God in full bearing in plain language upon the point in question. He stood firm in the temptation and overcame Satan by a strict adherence to the divine Word.

Learn from Christ, then, my dear Christians, how to stand firm when you are being tempted by false doctrine. It is a vain excuse for a Christian to say, *‘There are so many churches, every one of them claiming to be right, and saying the others are wrong, I do not know whom or what to believe.’*

You have the written Word of God, the Bible. Every question of doctrine is settled in that Book. There is nothing to be settled by churches, or synods, or ecclesiastical bodies. God Himself has settled everything once for all in the Bible. Let neither the traditions of men, nor the dictates of human reason, nor the deceptions of your own sinful heart beguile you.

Search the Scriptures. Abide by the letter and spirit of the written Word of God; and if you do this, you will not be deceived by false doctrine, even though men endeavour to support it by Scripture, falsely quoted, and by wonders and signs.

Jesus distinctly says in Matthew 24:24, ²⁴ ***For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders.*** But if you strictly adhere to the divine Word, you will not be deceived by them.

3. In Temptations To Seek The World’s Sinful Pleasures, Overcome By A Stern Refusal.

The third temptation is described in this way, ⁸ ***Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”***

Now what does this third temptation imply? It was calculated to kindle in Jesus a desire for the pleasures of this world. From an exceedingly high mountain the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of this world and their glory.

This was done, as Luke informs us, ***“in a moment of time.”***⁴ It was done in a twinkling of the eye. There was a scene presented to the eyes of Jesus which came and went as a flash of lightning. It was, doubtless, *“a fascinating delusion of Satan setting forth the wealth, pleasure and fun of life, as indulged in by the children of the world; the crowns, and robes, and palaces, and pleasure gardens, and all the earthly power and splendour of kings and princes.”*

The devil was sure that this dazzling picture must create a profound impression and produce in Jesus a desire to enjoy those pleasures. Unhesitatingly he, therefore, makes the proposal, ***“All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”***

Does not the devil tempt Christians in the same manner to this day? Is not the temptation to seek the world’s sinful pleasures the most frequent and the most dangerous delusion of the ruler of this world?

From the days of the holy apostles, when Demas⁵ forsook Paul, having loved this present world, to this day, have not thousands upon thousands lost the faith and swelled the number of the damned, because they did not withstand the temptation of the lusts of the flesh, and of the eye, and of the pride of life?

Is not the world and its evil lusts, the desire for nothing but amusements, enjoyments, and pleasures the great temptation of the day? This temptation tends to ruin Christian congregations, and to kill in them the spiritual life, and leads Christians to worship God with their mouths, but worship the devil in their hearts and with their works.

O my dear Christian hearers, let us stand firm in this last and severest temptation. Christ has shown us how. He met the devil with a stern refusal and said, ***“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”***

Learn from Christ, then, what to do when you are tempted to seek the world’s sinful pleasures. When the godless children of this world invite you to go with them to such places as should be shunned by Christians, or to do such things as are forbidden in the Lord’s commandments, the only way to overcome such

temptations is, sternly and most emphatically to refuse, because God demands your whole heart and not only a part of it, if you want to be His child.

Say with Joseph, ***“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”***⁶

Remember the apostle’s entreaty written in 1 John 2:15–17, ¹⁵ ***Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*** Know that you are actually worshipping the devil, if you give your heart to the world.

But blessed are those who stand firm in the hour of temptation! At the end of our Gospel we read of Christ, ***Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.*** Likewise the angels of God shall also minister to those who stand firm in temptations, and guard and keep them until they arrive where ***all the ransomed church of God Be saved to sin no more.***⁷ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 John 3:8

² Deut 8:3

³ Acts 4:12

⁴ Luke 4:5

⁵ 2 Tim 4:10

⁶ Genesis 39:9

⁷ Hymn 68