

ESF Lord's day service message
3/26/2017

Overcoming the Temptation of Testing God

Matthew 4:5-7

⁵ *Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:*

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

⁷ *Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

This text shows us the temptation of testing God. The tempter, the devil took Jesus to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple and said: *"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:*

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

If we hear just what the devil told Jesus to do, it is not easy for us to find anything wrong with it. In fact, it sounds very convincing for Jesus to throw himself down from the top of the temple because the word gives the promise of God's protection.

But Jesus answered the devil, *"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* With this answer, Jesus exposed the deceptive intention of the devil. The devil's intention was not to promote faith in God's promise. The devil's intention was to provoke Jesus to put God to the test. If Jesus had thrown Himself down from the top of the temple as the devil told Him to do, God would not have protected Him and He would have been crushed to death on the ground. Because it is not an act of faith, but an act of testing God.

If we are believers, and if we know some of the word of God, the devil will surely tempt us as he tempted Jesus. The devil will tempt us to apply some of God's word not to build up our faith, but to destroy our faith. The devil will use the word of God to provoke us to do something against God's will. The devil will use the word of God to convince us to do something foolish or even deadly.

How can we overcome such a deadly temptation of the devil?

Jesus teaches us how. Jesus teaches that the key to overcoming the temptation of testing God is to understand and use the word of God in the right context.

In this specific temptation, the word which the devil quoted was from the book of Psalm 91:11-12. When the devil tempted Jesus to apply the word of God not for benefit, but for destruction, Jesus resisted the devil with the word in Deuteronomy 6:16: *It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."*

When we see the preceding verses of Psalm 91:11-12, we realize that the devil was using the word out of context. The preceding verses, Psalm 91:9-10, say: *If you make the Most High your dwelling-even the Lord, who is my refuge- then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.* So, God's promise of protection in verses 11-12 is given to us with the condition that we make the Lord our dwelling place. Also it means that God will protect us not from intentional harming, but from harm which we do not expect or have control.

Therefore, if we put ourselves in a harm's way intentionally, it is not faith. It is putting God to the test.

Within this context, God never gives the word of protection to encourage anyone to intentionally throw himself or herself from a high place to the ground. This does not prove his or her faith, or prove God's protection in his or her life. If anybody does that, he or she is testing

God. God will absolutely not protect such a person from self-destruction caused by such a senseless behavior.

What the devil did to tempt Jesus was to take the word of God out of context and misapply it. The devil took the word of promise out of context, and provoked Jesus to apply the word in the wrong way, in a way that put God to the test.

Therefore, what Jesus did to overcome the devil's temptation was to understand the word of God in the right context. To defeat the temptation, Jesus brought the meaning of the word in the right context of the whole bible and applied it according to God's will.

Not every word we hear as God's word is truly God's word. The devil can also use God's word in a very convincing way. When the devil tempts us, he may use a written word of God. But he always uses the word out of context, in a distorted way, to mislead us from following God's holy will into follow the devil's deceptive will. He tempts us to live with a false confidence of God's promise through misinterpreting God's word and applying it to our lives in a destructive way.

So, to overcome the devil's temptation, we must understand the word of God in the right context and apply every word in the right context. We must compare one word to another word in the Bible. If it is a word which is truly coming from God, it should not contradict another word in the Bible.

Let us see some typical examples of how the devil misuses the written word to mislead us into put God to the test and let us see how we can overcome the devil.

There is a word of God's promise regarding health and healing:

“I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians for I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). The devil may use the word to mislead us. The devil may use the word to provoke us to mistreat our bodies or even use our body to sin: *“If you are a believer and a child of God, God will never let you get sick. God will always protect you from all diseases and you will always be healthy. So you don’t need to worry about your physical health. You don’t need to take care of your body as the unbelievers do.”* Also the devil may use the word to deceive us into believe that all physical handicaps or sicknesses are evidence of lack of faith or God’s punishment for our sins. If we believe the devil’s interpretation of this word, we may neglect taking care of our health as we can and must. Also, we may get discouraged if we have a handicap or we are sick. This is not building up our faith in God, but tempting us to put God to the test.

To overcome such temptations of the devil, we have to understand the word in the right context. God’s promise of health does not mean that it is OK for a person to neglect taking care of his or her own body. Such a behavior is putting God to the test. Actually, God gives his promise of health and healing with a condition: *“If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees.”* God’s blessing of our physical health and healing is the result of our obedience to God’s word. God’s will for us is that we must take care of our bodies responsibly. It is written that man’s body is the temple of God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We must take care of our bodies as the proper place to which the Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell in.

Also God’s promise of health and healing does not mean that every sickness or handicap is evidence of God’s judgment for our sins. Of course, there may be some sicknesses caused by our sins and God’s judgment on us. But there are many handicaps or sicknesses which have nothing to do with God’s judgment for our sins. When the disciples saw

a man blind from birth, they asked Jesus, “*who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” But, Jesus answered, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life*” (John 9:1-3). With this answer, Jesus clarified that not all handicaps and sicknesses are the results of sins.

There is a word of promise regarding God’s answer to believers’ prayers:

“*call to me, I will answer you and tell you great things you do not know*” (Jeremiah 33:3). The devil may use this word to tempt us into believing that all our prayers will be answered no matter what the prayers are. With this word, the devil provokes us to pray hard without knowing the meaning of the promise in the proper context. The devil’s intention is to mislead us to pray the wrong prayer with the wrong conviction. The devil’s intention is to tempt us to misapply the word so that when our prayers are not answered after we pray a lot, we get confused and discouraged.

But the promise of prayer must be understood with another word regarding God’s answer to our prayers. God answers our prayers when we pray according to His will. 1 John 5:14 says: “*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, He hears us.*” If we pray without seeking God’s will, He will not answer to our prayers even if we cry out all day long, every day for many years. If you pray with confidence of the word of God which promises that God will answer your prayer, but you do not seek His kingdom and righteousness first, your confidence is a false confidence. God will not accept your prayer based on your false confidence.

There is the word of promise regarding prosperity:

Deuteronomy 28:11 says, “*The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity*”

The devil also tempts us to misunderstand and misapply this word. The devil misleads us to believe that if we are believers we must be materially prosperous always. Of course, if God blesses us, we may be prosperous. But material prosperity is not absolute evidence of God's blessing. Jesus clearly teaches that the abundance of possession does not guarantee happiness in life. In Luke 12:15, Jesus says, "*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*"

The material abundance and prosperity is not a sure sign of God's blessing. If we understand prosperity as God's true blessing in the right context, it is the prosperity of our souls. It is a state of contentment with faith in God's provision. It is a generous and giving heart to the poor and the needy.

There is a word of promise regarding gifts, visions and dreams of the Holy Spirit:

Joel 2:28 "*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.*" According to this word, when believers are anointed by the Holy Spirit, they may prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions.

Again, the devil may use this word to have us apply the word out of context so that we get confused and fall into the deadly lies of the devil. The devil tells us to take some visions or dreams as God's special revelation on certain things. The devil provokes us to seek and exercise certain spiritual gift more than other gifts. But we must know that according to the whole context of the Bible, not all visions and dreams are from God. To be sure that a vision or dream is from God, we must interpret the vision and dream with the whole context of the Scripture and should determine whether the dream or vision contradicts the Scripture or not.

Paul clearly warns us to guard against the devil's interpretation of the word in regard to gifts of the Holy Spirit and encourages us to seek them and use them in the proper context (1 Corinthians ch.12). According to Paul, all spiritual gifts are equally important and precious as essential parts in the body of Christ. There is no spiritual gift which is superior to other gifts. All believers should respect the gifts of each other and use their gifts to build up the body of Christ together. If there is a gift which all believers should pursue more than any other, it is the gift of love.