

Sandpoint church of Christ

June 26, 2016
vol. 126

1331 Cedar Street
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The Test

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The course has been extremely difficult with many unexpected twists and turns. The lack of background in the field has left many participants wishing they had taken an introductory course instead of the full immersion course. Many are anxious about their chances of even passing, let alone getting an excellent grade. The final exam is notoriously brutal and the instructor is viewed by some as merciless. Some are tempted to cheat.

Would you think the instructor guilty of tempting them to cheat by making the course so difficult? Or does that temptation come from within as a sign of an emerging or developing character flaw? And, by the way, is temptation sin or is giving in to temptation sin?

The Lord Jesus was tempted in Mt. 4 by the devil but I do believe GOD allowed His temptation as a final exam before He could begin His ministry. There is almost always a final exam to prove to us and everyone else that we are competent. Many think that this single event was His temptation, period, because Mathew just reads "the devil left Him". The gospel of Luke though paints perhaps a different picture. In Luke 4:13 we read he "left Him until a more opportune time."

Temptation is, as far as I can determine, always brought to bear through something we desire. When that desire becomes so strong we are willing to commit sin, it becomes lust. With the Lord Jesus there could be no doubt He desired bread. There also can be no sin in desiring to eat when one is hungry. The question becomes, do we have the strength of character and have we practiced doing the right thing in spite of strong desires or even pressing needs. I do believe forty days without food goes way beyond desire and well into pressing need. Still, His strength of character and desire to do the right thing overrode His desperate need (lust) for food. In our English language we have two words for what we are describing. One was mostly good, desire, and one almost always bad, lust, whereas the Greeks had only one and the context determined whether it was good or evil.

Let's take a look at the case of Job. GOD is holding Job up as the gold standard of humanity. The LORD had been aware of this man and his character development for a long, long time. From Job's own statements later in the book we know how he responds to most every set of circumstances; what kind of soul he has. The LORD refers to him as blameless and upright in every way. There are a lot of passing grades on a lot of tests in this man's history. Priors are not necessarily a bad thing. His proven character is why the LORD chooses him as the poster boy of the righteous, and test subject to put the devil in his place. The LORD knows from his record that He can count on him. Notice how the devil is only allowed to go just so far. If the LORD keeps track of every hair on our heads and that of every sparrow, HE certainly knows how much we can bear. In 1 Cor. 10:13 the apostle Paul tells us that GOD is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear. Not what we are willing; that is the test. The LORD would only allow the pressure to be increased when Job's character was proven. The LORD has been using Job as an example for the righteous ever since. What and honor.

Abraham is also an excellent example of someone being tested, not tempted by GOD. The writer of Hebrews informs us of Abraham's ordeal in chapter eleven and verse seventeen, when Abraham was tested, he offered up Isaac his only son. Tested, not tempted. If there was a temptation to disobey, it is not recorded, but I cannot imagine Abraham not searching for alternative solutions, or excuses that would relieve him of such a horrible task. Those thoughts or temptations would have originated within his own mind or from someone wanting him to disobey, such as Satan (the tempter).

So how do we use this in our own course in life? How will it help us to pass the final exam?

I am confident we, as human beings, are often oblivious to the tests we face on a daily basis. Every day we are tested. Let us consider a real life situation: You are paying for your groceries and the cashier misses something in the bottom of the cart. You wonder about it but you say nothing and go on to your car. Once in the car, you check your receipt and discover you did not pay for it. You haven't done anything wrong yet but you have certainly made it easier to do the wrong thing and another step away from being or doing right. It is a test. The first step in the wrong direction is not immediately asking the cashier about the item. You know what is right but the conversation in your head begins. The story some native Americans tell fits very well here. An old man tells a young boy that two wolves live inside of men and they are fighting. One is good and honorable, the other is cowardly and dishonest. The old

man stops his story and the boy wants to know which one wins. The old man responds, the strongest one. Which one is strongest, the boy asks. The old man pauses for a moment, looking intently at the boy and then says, the one you feed the most.

So often we view the struggle in epic terms; would you be tempted to steal a million dollars if you knew you could get away with it? Those epic terms are not where our focus should be. When we leave an office after signing some papers and realize we kept their expensive pen, do we feel the need to return it? It is a test. One of many that we will be faced with each day. Driving in our car, we know the speed limit but we are late. Another test. They just keep coming. Am I the only one experiencing these internal discussions verging on arguments or do we all have them?

We are indeed influenced by two spirits. One, the spirit from GOD, leads us toward success, love, joy, peace, etc. The other, the spirit that is working in the sons of disobedience, is steering us toward ruin and destruction. I suppose the old Indian parable is right; which one do we feed the most?

It seems quite evident to me there is a world of difference between the test, which should disclose proven character as well as our competence, and the temptations and distractions which are brought about by the schemes of the devil. The test is to encourage us as well as define our shortcomings or weaknesses. Temptation on the other hand takes place when we are unprepared for the rigors of the test.