

Tempted in All Point Like as We Are

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*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have **one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are** - yet was without sin (Heb 4:15).*

A common belief to many Christians is that because Jesus was divine he could not have been truly tempted because, as James 1:13 says, God cannot be tempted and Jesus was "God with us." This was the belief of first century Gnostic sects. But Matt 4:1 says he was tempted, as does the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. In fact, the Hebrews writer says that he was tempted the same way we are. The Greek word used here in this text literally says he was tempted "in the same manner" (*kathos*) as we are. Here is where the doctrine of the incarnation ceases to be a piece of mysterious theological curiosity and becomes one of the most meaningful and valuable teachings of the Christian religion.

According to the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth was truly "God with us," but he was also truly "one of us." So much so that he was able to experience the power of sin at work in this world the same as any other son of Adam; but Jesus never yielded to the forces of evil at work in this world. It is important that we see that it is *the power of sin* we are concerned with here, which is a much broader concept than thinking of sin as a transgression of the law. One practices sin in his life because sin has become an enslaving power in his life; specific transgressions are the manifestations of the presence of the power of sin at work in our lives. The Apostle John speaks of these manifestations of the power of sin as: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes

and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

In Matt 4:1-11, we see Jesus tempted in all of these areas and in each temptation, unlike the original Adam (Gen 3:1-7), he did not yield to the temptation of sin. He was tempted in all points, like as we are, yet he did not sin. Why? The power of sin had no control over him. There were forces present in his life that were more powerful than the forces of evil. It isn't that Jesus was not susceptible to lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride of life; the point is that these had no place in his life because the power of sin had no place in his life, and these are all manifestations of that power.

Here is why is it so important for us to see Jesus as one tempted just as we are - tempted as "one of us." The importance lies in the fact that we can learn something from seeing him this way. He was clearly someone who stood apart from the other sons of Adam of his time. What was it about this son of man that made him so different from all other sons of men? Without question, that which marked him as unique was his godliness; not his godliness as a God, but his godliness as a man - a being created in the image of God. Here is the source of his inner strength, his moral character, his moral courage, his knowledge of God that never failed him, and his relationship with the Father that gave meaning, purpose, and interpretation to his whole existence.

The most immediate question for us here is, "Whence cometh this godliness?" This is a point of no little significance. There were, in the life of Jesus, certain practices which, when carefully examined, readily explain the depth of godliness within him; practices through which he was constantly brought into communion with God and God in communion with him.

From the New Testament Gospels two practices emerge through which Jesus found constant communion with God. First, he found God in those old Hebrew scrolls the Jews believed to be inspired Scriptures. God's presence and power were in the words of these ancient writings and Jesus knew that. Secondly, he found

communion with God - and God's presence and power - in the age-old practice of prayer. No doubt, from the earliest years of his life, Jesus heard the voice of God (God's communication) in the old Hebrew Scriptures, and responded to God's voice in his own communication with God, his prayers.

Not only did he find an avenue to God through these practices, he filled himself with God through them. Here were the resources of his strength when confronted with the power of sin or the temptations associated with such manifestations of sin as lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride. His resource of strength was not the indwelling of deity within him, but his faith which was rooted in revelation from God as contained in Scripture, and his communication with God which centered in his life of prayer, both actions which made God's presence a reality in his life.

The Role of The Scriptures in the Life of Jesus

It is evident from the Gospels that Jesus spent many hours in the presence of the Father setting before those old Hebrew scrolls of the law, the prophets, and the writings. He not only learned to read these writings, he obviously immersed himself in them. He so filled himself with a knowledge of these writings that they were in his thoughts constantly. His life was a very fulfillment of the first Psalm,

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalms 1:1-3)

From Early Childhood He Knew the Scriptures

The typical Jewish boy learned of his religion, first of all, from his mother. The stories (*haggadah*) of the Old Testament Scriptures were told to the children first by their mothers. At the age of six, the education of a Jewish boy was taken over by his father, who

continued his religious teaching as well as teaching him a trade. Some Jewish males were given further instruction by a Jewish tutor called a *chazzan*, a "servant" of the synagogue (similar to the early church's deacon), who taught Jewish boys how to read the Hebrew Scriptures. This instruction was done in the *beth sepher* (house of scrolls), which was a room attached to the synagogue where the chest of the scrolls (a portable chest housing the synagogue's collection of Scripture) was kept. Here a school was conducted for young Jewish males. The amount of learning provided for the student depended upon his desire. Here, no doubt, Jesus spent many of his boyhood hours; perhaps, as much as time outside his carpenter training would allow.

This would account for the astonishment his knowledge of Scripture created on the part of the Rabbis in the temple in Jerusalem when he was only twelve.

*And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? **Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?**" And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:42-52).*

His Working Knowledge of the Scriptures

From the Gospels it appears that Jesus had so filled himself with knowledge of the Scriptures that they were at ever ready command to inform his thinking in all situations of life. This is evident in the temptation account of Matt 4:1-11. Three times Satan tempted Jesus. In each temptation Jesus' knowledge of the will of God, as informed by the Scriptures, was called into service in overcoming the temptation. Three times he is tempted, in each case he responds with "it is written," first quoting Deut 8:3, then Deut 6:16, and finally Deut 6:13. In each instance Satan attempts to convince Jesus that it would be in his best interest to do his will, and in each instance Jesus' knowledge of Scripture leads him to the conclusion that do as Satan suggests would lead to a violation of God's will. His moral character (i.e., godliness) was deeply rooted in his knowledge of God and this proved the difference in every temptation that confronted him.

Not only was his moral character a direct result of his knowledge of God, his knowledge of the Scriptures had served him well in the development of his doctrinal or theological beliefs. In the Sabbath controversy of Matt 12:1-8, Jesus' knowledge of 1 Sam 21 provided him with the insights he needed to respond to the erroneous teachings of the Pharisees. So also with the debates of Matt 22; in each instance Jesus' theological beliefs appear to have been better informed than the beliefs of the Jewish hierarchy. The difference was that the sources informing his thinking were the Old Testament Scriptures rather than the sectarian traditions of Judaism.

His knowledge of the Scriptures was superior to that of the whole of the Jewish scholarship of his day. The response of the Jewish hierarchy in John 7 is very revealing with reference to the reputation Jesus had gained as one in possession of a great knowledge of Scripture.

About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marveled at it, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" (John 7:15)

The Greek text literally reads, "the Jews were filled with wonder." The cause of their wonder was his vast knowledge of the word of God and his insights as to its proper interpretation. Why was this so astounding? He had "learning" (i.e., *grammata*), without having been schooled by the scholars (i.e., receiving theological training). The Greek says, "*me memathekos*" which means, "not having been schooled." Yet, his learning reflected insights not common to the scholastic community (i.e., the scribes/rabbis). This was the reaction of the people at the conclusion of his sermon on the mount:

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority [the scribes taught by the authority of the established tradition], and not as their scribes [the scribes taught the traditional interpretations of the great scribes or rabbis of the past], (Matt 7:28-29).

In Matt 22 Jesus is challenged in debate by the Jerusalem hierarchy on three different occasions: first, by the Pharisees and Herodians (Matt 22:15-22); secondly, by the Sadducees (Matt 22:23-33); then, finally, by a lawyer or *Torah* scholar, (Matt 22:34-40). In each instance Jesus' knowledge of the Scriptures proved too much for these representatives of the scholastic community of established Judaism. How was he capable of refuting the best minds of Judaism with his knowledge of Scripture? Was it because of his insight were of divine origin?

This doesn't seem to be the case in view of Jesus' own reaction to his opponents and their inadequate understandings. To the Sadducees (the priestly sect) he says in response to their faulty reasoning: "You err, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." (Matt 22:29) How is Jesus' rebuke of these scholars justified if the reason they didn't know the Scriptures as did he was due to his supernatural insights. It appears that he expected them to know what they were talking about. They were the leaders of Israel; they should have known God's will for the people. This appears to have been his attitude toward all those whom he confronted on that day, whether scribe, priest, or lawyer. They should have known what

he knew, and they would have, if the source of their knowledge had been God's word and not their traditions. Jesus had addressed this same issue, and, perhaps, the same people, in Mark 7,

And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!" (Mark 7:6-9)

Jesus' beliefs and teachings were from God, as informed by the word of God. Jesus' Teaching is filled with such expressions as: "it is written," "have you not read?" "do not the Scriptures say?" These and similar expression are found in over forty occurrences in the teachings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. The Old Testament Scriptures are quoted or alluded to by Jesus in over 100 occurrences in the New Testament. Jesus obviously spent many hours in those Scriptures, and it showed in his masterful knowledge of God's word and in the level of godly character manifest in his life.

The Role of Prayer in the Life of Jesus

The prayer life of Jesus of Nazareth was extraordinary, to say the least. When he came before the people to tell them of the Father, it was apparent that he knew the one of whom he spoke, and knew him well. When he spoke to them of the will of God, he spoke as one who truly knew what the will of God was, as only one who had spent much time in the presence of God could speak. In fact, his whole demeanor was that of one who had just come from the presence of God to speak to the people on behalf of God. That he spent a great amount of time with the Father is evident from what we see of his life of prayer.

Throughout the Gospels, the role of prayer in the life of Jesus is given exceptional prominence. In Mark 1:35 we see that from the very outset of his Messianic ministry this was a practice that was an ever-

present part of his whole course of life.

And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed (Mark 1:43-35).

Following the miracle of the multiplication of food in Mark 6, we are told:

And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray (Mark 6:44-46).

He is constantly portrayed as withdrawing to remote areas in order that he could be alone to pray:

But so much the more the report went abroad concerning him; and great multitudes gathered to hear and to be healed of their infirmities. But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:15-16).

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray (Luke 9:28).

He often prayed through the whole night. In Luke 6:12 we read, "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray; and **all night he continued in prayer to God.**"

He prayed publicly as well as privately (Matt 11:25ff; Luke 10:21ff; and John 17). His constant practice of prayer led his disciples to desire to learn to pray as he prayed (Luke 11:1-4; Matt 6:6ff). His prayers were personal and intimate (Mark 14:32-41), and he believed that there was great power in prayer (Mark 9:29; Matt 26:53). His

communication with God in prayer never ceased; even while dying (Luke 23:34); in fact, his last breath was breathed in prayer (Luke 23:46).

Just as Jesus met the Father in the pages of those old Hebrew scrolls of Scripture, he found the Father here also, in this ancient practice called prayer. Perhaps here in these practices of Jesus we find the sources of his godliness, and in his godliness the source of his inner strength, his moral character and moral courage. Here is how he could be tempted in all points *just as we are*, and not sin. The power of sin had no place in his life because his life was too filled with the power of godliness - and the power of godliness is surely greater than the power of sin.

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Questions For Discussion

1. To what extent do you think Jesus was tempted in all points just as we are (Heb 4:15)?
2. If Jesus was "God with us," how could he have been tempted with sin in view of the fact that James 1:13 says that God cannot be tempted?
3. Why do you think the temptation account of Jesus in Matt 4:1-11 consists of three different temptations? See 1 John 2:15-17.
4. Why is it important to see Jesus tempted in every way, "just like we are," yet without sin?
5. What did Jesus' deity have to do with his ability to overcome the power of sin? If he availed himself of the powers of his deity, then was he truly tempted "just like we are"?
6. To what extent could the power of godliness enabling one to overcome the power of sin? Discuss your understanding of the concept of godliness.

7. What role do you think the Old Testament Scriptures played in the development of the godly character of Jesus of Nazareth?

8. What role do you think prayer plays in the development of godliness in a person's life?

9. Do you think that Jesus knowledge of God as developed from the Old Testament Scriptures and his extraordinary life of prayer could have been the sources of the level of godliness he possessed?

10. Do you think it is possible for one to develop such a level of godliness through the example of Jesus that he would be capable of withstanding the power of sin? If so, what lesson is there here for us?