

Provision, Power and Presumption

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“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan [where He had been baptized by John] and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness...” (Lk. 4:1) So begins an aspect of Christ’s work on behalf of mankind that is often overlooked and rarely attained to by those who claim to be His followers. Jesus’ first act, upon being filled with the Spirit is to be led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Since few have attained to this aspect of the life of Christ, at least in its entirety, we have failed to see the pattern as it is distorted and prevented in modern churchianity.

As we seek to apply this episode to our own lives, we must first recognize what the wilderness represents. Most of us have only become acquainted with the idea of the wilderness after we have left the “church,” that organized, institutionalized counterfeit of the bride and body of Christ, as suddenly we are ostracized and alone with only a vague sense of the Shepherd somewhere ahead of us, leading us into places and situations unknown and uncomfortable to us, to say the least. When we remember that Christ proclaimed the kingdom of God but it was first the ekklesia and then the “church” that came into the preeminence, we begin to see the role the “church” has played in causing us to neglect the leading of the Spirit so as to prevent us from following the Shepherd into the wilderness. The “church” is the castle of Beelzebub from where the devil and the demonic discharge fiery arrows in the hopes of killing any before they can enter the gate or progress far along the way that leads to eternal life. (*Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan, p. 21, also see Mt. 7:13-14)

Yet the wilderness is just the beginning. In the wilderness, we must face down the tempter and the temptation. It is a time of testing – testing as to just where our loyalties are. Rarely are these temptations recognized as having any place in the life of the normal or average believer – in part because we have allowed the idea of the usual “church”-ite to become our idea of the normal follower of Christ, but, even when we come to learn the fallacy of this deception, also because we succumb to one or another of these temptations and fail to press on to the fullness of the life of Christ or because we somehow believe that these kinds of temptations were reserved for the Christ alone and are not part of the life of Christ to be reproduced in each of us. We remain stranded, as it were, in the wilderness or else we return to Babylon or even Egypt rather than follow the Shepherd wherever and into whatever He leads us. The temptations, however, do conform to a recognizable pattern, though it is a pattern that is perhaps more understandable *after* or near the end of one’s time of testing is complete much more so than when one is first entering the wilderness!

Provision

Jesus “was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tested for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.” (Lk. 4:1-2) This hunger is not the hunger of having missed a meal or two – this hunger is the stomach beginning to digest itself. This is a time of literal danger, even the possibility of death, if the fasting is continued.

“And the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’ But Jesus answered him, saying, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”’” (Lk. 4:3-4) Here we see the faith that Jesus had in His Father being tested. Later, He would teach, “If a son asks for bread, will his father give him a stone?” (Mt.

7:9) Jesus so deeply learned that His Father would provide that it became a deep part of His teachings. Also being tested is Jesus' determination to do the will of God no matter what the cost. (Psa. 40:7-8) If God allowed Him to die here, so be it – it was more important to Jesus to receive His bread from His Father's hand rather than to use His power to independently produce food for His survival. After the devil's temptations are concluded, we do see that the Father is faithful and He sends angels to serve Jesus' needs. (Mt. 4:11)

It is precisely here that we may begin to see what the genuine follower of Christ is called to and how the "church" derails a follower away from Christ. When Christ taught His disciples how to pray, He instructed them "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Mt. 6:11-12) Just as Christ relied on His Father for His daily bread, indeed His very life, so too He instructs us, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [that your heavenly Father knows you need] shall be added to you." (Mt. 6:32-33) This interactive reliance on the Father is what the temptations in the wilderness is meant to test and bring forth, first in Christ and subsequently in every true believer who obediently follows the Lord wherever He leads.

The "church," in its various manifestations, presents a health and wealth and prosperity "gospel" that says a believer ought to be healthy, wealthy and prospering. If he is not, then he is presumed to be in sin, demonized (under a "spirit of poverty") or even under God's judgment. Even where this blatant error is rejected, there is often a subconscious suspicion that these things are still somewhat true. A poor person, in spite of what the New Testament says (Jas. 2:5, etc.), just couldn't possibly be living according to the will of God. In this way, the "church" demonstrates its enmity to the way of the cross of Christ.

Power and Position

"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And 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. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.' And 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."'" (Lk. 4:5-8)

Here we see Jesus' loyalty to the heavenly Father being tested. Satan was offering Jesus a shortcut to the seat of power. Jesus, as the Son of Man, was to be given the power and authority over all these kingdoms (Dan. 7:13-14) but the way of the Father entailed a cross, a shameful, painful death. If Jesus took Satan's offer, He need only bow a knee to Satan. But Jesus, for the joy set before Him endured the cross and its shame (Heb. 12:2) – even at this early stage of His work, He knew He must do only the will of God and not take any path offered to Him by the adversary Satan. The stakes were much higher than Jesus taking a seat of power – the Father was bringing forth a family *and* a kingdom which, if the demonic rulers of their age had understood the hidden wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:8) Jesus kept His will set on the Father's will, even though ultimately it cost Him His physical life, and He gained an equality with God that could not be grasped and a name that is above all names. (Phlp. 2:9) By refusing Satan and submitting to God, Jesus gained everything that Satan in his rebellion against God thought to take. (Isa. 14:12-14)

Knowing the propensity of man to seek shortcuts and to send a Moses up the mountain so as to avoid coming face to face with God (Dt. 5:5, etc.), the "church" is designed to be a way to take a seat of power (in spite of Christ's command that "it shall not be so among you!" – Mt.

20:25-26, etc.) so that some men usurp authority not meant for them to have and others submit to that usurped authority. It was not long after Christ's ascension that men became spiritually careless and brought in rules, canons, liturgies and bishops who drew followers after themselves and away from Christ to one degree or another – exactly as predicted. (Mt. 13:25, 25:5, Acts 20:30) After two thousand years, the idea of the kingdom is perverted or ignored, few if any are even able to be genuine ekklesia and the “church” is more influenced by pagan Greek practices, Babylonish trappings and demonic power than by the Bible and the Spirit of God. In short, the “church” is the great falling away from the faith that occurs before the return of Christ. (2 Ths. 2:3) By giving men a readily attainable (through personal charisma, worldly education and power-grabbing techniques, that is) seat of power (which some denominations even call “the seat of Moses”!), both the man in authority and those who seat themselves at his feet are progressively enslaved to the schemes and devices of the devil. Since the prison gates of death and darkness cannot prevail over those determined to escape into the light of Christ's kingdom (Mt. 16:18), church history is filled with instances of people (with varying degrees of appropriateness and success) “coming out” of Babylon (Rev. 18:4) or “Christian” idolatry. (2 Cor. 6:17, 1 Cor. 5:10-11)

When the Lord taught His disciples how to pray, He said to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Mt. 6:10) Nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus ever delegate authority to any of His followers to be lords over the others. The “pastor” as chief executive officer or president is simply not found in the New Testament. Rather, the whole notion, as was already pointed out, is *forbidden!* The true elder is to be an *example* of what it means to follow Christ as King (1 Pet. 5:3) and the one who serves all. (Mt. 23:11, Jn. 13:14-16) Christ's kingdom or realm is that sphere wherein He is actually the King – that is, He is actually obeyed. The “church” uses Him as a figurehead while it goes on to pursue its own understandings, agendas and, very often, one man's quest for power so that he can do something “good and beneficial” (in his own eyes, at least) for those he lords over. (see Lk. 22:25-26) As a result, the kingdoms of mere men are established (to the destruction of many) and the kingdom of God does not come into our midst because the traditions of men still have precedence over the will of God. (Mt. 15:6)

Presumption

“Then [Satan] brought [Jesus] 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. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over You, to keep You,” and “In their hands they shall bear You up, lest You dash Your foot against a stone.”’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘It has been said, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God.”’” (Lk. 4:9-12)

Here is perhaps the most sophisticated, multi-layered temptation that Satan directs at Christ and we need to examine the various levels of this subtle trap. On the surface, it is merely a challenge for Jesus to defy death and presume upon God's protection for His life. But on a more subtle level, Satan is offering Jesus a chance to die before the people in a manner more visible, more palatable and more likely to draw followers – especially if there is to be a resurrection involved. The man who could leap from a tall building, get up and walk away must be the Messiah! On an even more subtle level, Satan is tempting Jesus to presume upon His own special calling as the Messiah and reach out and grasp equality with God. (see Phlp. 2:6) On yet a fourth level, Satan quotes Scripture (twisting and distorting the meaning) in an attempt to get Jesus to rely on a Satanic interpretation and thus go on to commit an act independent of God. If

Jesus fell for any of these four deceptions, this too would be presumption – that Jesus could interpret the Scripture apart from the leading of the Spirit of truth.

On the surface level, Jesus' answer comes from the law which included a reference to a place called Massah. (Dt. 6:16) This was where Moses was instructed to strike the rock and water gushed forth. The place was then called both Massah ("Tempted") and Meribah ("Contention") "because of the contention of the children of Israel [against Moses], and because they tempted the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'" (Ex. 17:2, 6-7) Jesus' answer to Satan was simply, "It is wrong in all circumstances to test God." By refusing to fall for either of the other aspects of this temptation – to risk suicide so as to gather followers, to be the Messiah apart from God's will and way, and to misapply the Scriptures – His simple, straightforward answer rightly divided the truth of the matter on all levels and He overcome the tempter who then "departed from Him until an opportune time." (Lk. 4:13)

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Mt. 6:13) The follower of Christ who prays in this manner (not just mouthing the words but obeying the intent and meaning) can expect to have to face the temptation to presume upon God's protections – but that same one can also expect to overcome the tempter. This is as true for the follower of Christ who has never attended a "church" as it is for those who must forsake and overcome all the carnal and demonic contaminants after leaving the "church."

As the epitome of these deceptions, there is perhaps no more subtle snare set for the people of Christ than the doctrine of eternal security. This doctrine arose from the perceived need to institutionalize the teachings of the New Testament. The doctrine says, in effect, "You've been chosen by God as His elect – you will not surely die the second death. Sin as much or as little as you choose, you're eternally secure." Some have even scoured the New Testament, finding phrases like, "He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5) or "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." (Jn. 10:28), never realizing how demonically misapplied their interpretations and applications are.

The writer of Hebrews, in a series of short, closing instructions, wrote: "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Heb. 13:5-6) The instruction is first about trusting in the Lord's provision and refusing to fear what men can do to us. (also see where this quote is from: Dt. 31:6, Josh. 1:5) It has absolutely nothing to do with eternal salvation!

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." (Jn. 10:27-28) In order for a person to receive eternal life from Jesus, they must *hear His voice and follow Him!* This is what Jesus said! Many "churches" and "theologians" go so far as to ridicule the notions that a believer even *can* hear the voice of Jesus – those who believe and hear Him are just so bad for "church" business and stability. These actually dare to think for themselves and question the words of the status quo "pastors" and "theologians"! Why, those who follow Christ (note well the differences between those who arrogantly claim to follow Him as distinguished from those who bear the fruit of His Spirit as they follow Him apart from the teachings of men and demons!) think themselves to have a mandate to "*come out*" of the "church" and all of its leftover contaminants!

Instead of having the people draw real comfort and security from their intimate relationship with Christ the Shepherd, the “church” must give them a replacement – a doctrine that says they’re eternally secure whether they hear and follow Christ or not. Knowing doctrines out of the Bible is the replacement for actually hearing and knowing His voice.

In essence, Satan has taken the people of Christ to the pinnacle of the temple of Christ’s body and bid them leap off – and many have foolishly done so.

A Persistent Problem

Presumption has always plagued man’s attempts to know God. Every act of God to reveal Himself is answered by man’s presumptions about the things of God. The New Testament records Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3), Simon Magus (Acts 8:20) and the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13) as but three instances of men presuming upon the things of God. The Israelites presumed upon God’s protection and support, daring to go up and fight the Amorites after God in judgment had said that generation would die in the wilderness. (Dt. 1:42-44)

Perhaps the most prevalent expression of presumption is pride or, more precisely, arrogance. This was the constant theme of Satan’s temptations of the Christ – “If You are the Son of God...” In effect, Satan is saying, “You’re something special, Jesus. Treat yourself right according to what You are.” Paul, who as Saul in his presumption that he knew the way to please God had murdered followers of Jesus (Acts 9:1, etc.), would later write, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Rom. 12:3) Because “no lie is of the truth” (1 Jn. 2:21), the way to overcome the deceptive temptations, especially presumption, is to remain soberly honest about what we are – in both the flesh and the spirit. Paul also wrote, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24), recognizing the devastated condition of man apart from Christ, but he also wrote, “But by the grace [power] of God I am what I am... I labored more abundantly than they [the other apostles]...” (1 Cor. 15:10), recognizing what the power and call of God in Christ Jesus had transformed him into.

The “church,” because it does not allow the Spirit of truth to shape and define its role and purpose, must presume to know the things of God. Thus the “church” is filled with arrogant “theologians” and teachers who presumptuously speak the things of God as if they understood His meaning, intent and purpose – exactly as prophesied. (2 Pet. 2:10) This is perhaps the most extreme fulfillment of those “having a form of godliness but denying its power.” (2 Tim. 3:5) These are like the Jews who opposed Paul and Barnabas by contradicting the truth and reviling against God’s true messengers and actually opposing God’s truth and purpose. (Acts 13:45) These have no love of the truth (2 Ths. 2:10) but insist that their own understandings and doctrines are the absolute truth and no arrogant or worldly argumentative tactic will be left unused to show how stupid their opponents are for not believing the lies they believe. Any “theologian” who does not speak in love and humility is not a true servant of the Lord. (2 Tim. 2:24-25)

The Power of the Spirit

Jesus refused to use His power independently of the Father. He refused to take any shortcut to the throne His Father had promised Him. He refused to rely on any understanding or application of Scripture other than that given to Him by the Spirit of truth. As a result, the tempter left Him and “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee” (Lk. 4:15) and He “began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.’” (Mt. 4:17) The

miraculous flow of power to overcome sickness and disease (Mt. 4:23, etc.) and even the elements (Mk. 4:41) were the evidences that He truly was the King.

The power of the Spirit is absent from the vast majority, perhaps all, of “churches” because Christ is not truly the King and Ruler of all that is said and done – even though virtually everything is done as if it did have His personal approval. The power of the Spirit is not present in many “ministries” for the same reason – those “ministries” that fail to conform to Christ’s likeness, kingdom and agenda but still exhibit supernatural power are suspect, more likely to be fueled by Satan’s power than Christ’s. (2 Ths. 2:9) This is why when Christ, by the power of the Spirit proclaimed the kingdom (and His role as King), the synagogue (very similar to the “churches” of today) rose up in anger and tried to kill Christ whose very existence challenged all their religious presumptions. (Lk. 4:28-29)

But for the disciple still in the wilderness, the public display of power is a thing of the future. The power of the Spirit is available now to enable the believer to overcome the temptations the “church” systematically places before us. Let the believer who has succumbed to or who is yet to face these challenges in the light of truth not despair. Continue to pray as the Lord instructed, continue to listen to His voice and follow Him wherever He leads. Allow the Spirit of truth (and Him alone!) to reshape your understanding of spiritual truths and matters. Resist the devil (in the power of the Spirit and not with the arm of the flesh!) and he will leave you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you who have been sinning and purify your hearts you who have been both carnally and spiritually minded. (see Jas. 4:7-8)

This is the way to the power of the Spirit and few indeed there are who have found it.

Let he who has ears hear.

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