

The Nature of Jesus' Temptations and the Bible

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“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). We are also told, “He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the seed of Abraham (believers) ... since He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Heb 2:16,18). There is something about these verses ... that always bothered me a little.

I have always understood that Jesus was “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Ro 8:3), but was *not* sinful flesh ... like me. One reason for the virgin birth was to interrupt the inheritance of a sin nature from Adam. Jesus was never *inclined* toward evil, as He was not infested with a sin nature possessing time bombs that *love* death ... like me. So how could He *really know* what kind of battles I face? How could He come to my aid and sympathize with *my* struggles ... when He did *not* have a sin nature? And wouldn't an inclination toward some sin make for a *more* ferocious battle than temptation toward that *same sin* - absent the inclination? Well, I wasn't too enthusiastic about voicing these concerns. Quite honestly, I was willing to let this sleeping dog lie. But, as I was working through the material on, “*The First Homosexual and the Bible,*” and “*Man's Nature: One's Invisible Metaphysical Imprint and the Bible,*” I stepped right on him ... the dog, that is. Avoidance was no longer optional. Two points soon emerged that then led to other insights about Jesus' challenges when He entered this age.

Point 1: He can “sympathize with our weaknesses ...”

It does not say He can sympathize with our sin nature. It's funny how I never saw that before. So, that means sin can spring from one of two sources. One is *an inherited sin nature* possessing bents toward errant behavior. Jesus did not have that. The second source involves *areas of potential moral weakness* - some vulnerability - absent any bent or character flaw toward that behavior. Jesus did deal with that. We will come back to this second source, and Jesus' entanglements with it, in a moment. Neither spring automatically accrues personal guilt before God. Only commission of errant behavior creates guilt. Careful reading, and some prayer (asking for wisdom), often leads to the untying of knots.

Point 2: I have not yet “resisted to the point of shedding blood ...”

... in my striving against sin (Heb 12:4). One reason I was tepid about voicing concern over these passages was because I knew that an insinuation that His battles against sin were *less intense* than mine (because of my sin nature bents) would border on blasphemy ... or already be seen by God as a headlong rush into it. But, this passage in Hebrews, along with recollections of the scenes in the crucifixion saga, clarified many things.

For starters, let's revisit Gethsemane. The desire to avoid the cross was so strong that, “*being in agony, He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground*” (Lk 22:44). This sweat was produced ... on a cold night (Peter was soon warming himself by a fire - Jn 18:18). It was not the result of a marathon run - but by intensity in prayer. He fell on His face, and in three appeals to the Father, asked if this cup could be *removed* from Him ... “*yet not My will, but Thine be done*” (Lk 22:42). Concerning His sweat becoming “*like drops of blood,*” some have speculated that the pressure may have been so intense that blood vessels were bursting - and may have colored, or somehow otherwise affected the sweat, so as to spawn this comparison to being *like* blood. I don't know. But, what I am confident about is that His spirit was willing to obey the Father even to death upon a cross - but His flesh was *weak* ... not flawed, but “*weak*” (Mt 26:41). The temptation was

to disobey the Father's revealed will ... and call on those twelve legions of angels for deliverance (Mt 26:53). But, I don't think He even needed them. As He exited His prayer spot, He confronted His arresting party and "said to them [not asked them], 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Jesus, the Nazarene.' He said to them, 'I am.' ... When therefore He said to them, 'I am,' they drew back and fell on the ground." Jesus then repeated the question and proceeded to dictate the terms of His arrest - and they cooperated (Jn 18:4-9). This knockdown ... changed the dynamic of the entire arrest. I am quite certain this blow was only intended to get their attention and secure the release of the disciples. He could have just as easily pinched their nostrils closed and ushered them all into eternity. "*Ego eimi*," ("I am") is the designation for God Almighty, going back to Moses and the burning bush (Ex 3:14). The temptation ... was to use His power for self-deliverance.

The whole passion was a *massive* temptation in this regard. As early as John 13:3, we find that "*the Father had given all things into His hands*" Jesus could have ended His ordeal at any time. The more I delve into this entire travesty, I don't know how Jesus was able to allow this upon His person. For some reason, He loves me, and was willing to go through this for me. I hope you can say that, too. The point? Well, there are at least two. First, obedience to God's will often brings *negative* events. The temptation is to avoid such reality. I am certain this dynamic will only exist in this age (from Adam until the Judgment). Second, these temptations to sin are as powerful as *any* sin-nature-inclination battle. Look at the energy required for Jesus to defeat them. There is no way any sin-bent temptation I ever face will be more challenging than the ones (plural) He faced. How could any fight against sin be more intense than ... the cross? He was "*obedient to the point of death, even death of a cross*" (Phil 2:8).

The truth is - Jesus was, and is, first place in every arena He chooses to enter. He was marred more than any man (Isa 52:14), He was treated more unfairly than any man (2Pet 2:22-24), and His fight against evil, and its intensity, will never be equaled (Heb 12:3). No man will ever face more powerful temptations than He did ... sin-bent or not. He is preeminent in all things.

Consider This

James tells us "*God cannot be tempted by evil*" (Ja 1:13). The Bible is also clear that "*(t)he Word was God ... and the Word was made flesh*" (Jn 1:1,14). This refers to Jesus Christ who "*did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped*" but was willing to be "*made in the likeness of men ... in the likeness of sinful flesh*" (Phil 2:6,7 and Ro 8:3). Jesus Himself was not created - "*but a body Thou hast prepared for Me*" (Heb 10:5). Jesus was/is God inside a human body. Since God cannot be tempted by evil, and Jesus is God, it appears to me that the temptations He faced during His lifetime in Judea were either *a function of His physical body ... or being in a body in this age ... or both.*

The Function of a Physical Body

It is *possible* the physical body may be capable of illegal lusts - apart from a sin nature. But, as I have always had a sin nature, I do not know what a body free of one would experience. I do know I can be walking along just fine one minute and then - wham! - a particular female presence, or fragrance - and the war is on. No thinking or decisions - just reaction ... of the flesh flushing/lusting. Recently, after such an assault, I came out the other side, chuckled a bit and looked up toward God and said, "*Boy, this stuff sure has a lot of power.*" I do realize such personal reactions may be the result of training my body into defilement over years of "*practice.*" But, this also may be the result of a sin inclination - a negative component of my personal metaphysical imprint. I will have to wait until The Judgment to know all this for sure. I do hope God will allow me to see what I was actually dealing with in my time in this "*present evil age*" (Ga 1:4) as He untwists all my contorted knots in my final

deliverance.

I do not know if Jesus struggled with such flesh assaults - in a body without a sin nature. There is no Biblical evidence that He did. All the speculation about a Mary Magdalene affair, or possible homosexual contacts, is projection from outside the Biblical record and imposed upon Him. This is an attempt to humanize Jesus in a debased manner and cast doubt upon the New Testament record of a life free of sin. His Biblically recorded struggles with "*weaknesses*" (or what I prefer to call, "*moral vulnerabilities*") all point more toward ...

Being in a Body in this Age

Just being physically present in this age ... is to be in an environment full of provocations to sin. The entire crucifixion saga, just alluded to, is probably the prime example. But, being in a body in the next age "*where righteousness dwells*" (2Pet 3:13) - while fully obeying God's revealed will - will never have such sordid challenges. For example, no one will be tempted to desert God's will, desires or agenda ... because of persecution for it. That type of malicious power will be extinct.

A Few of Jesus' Temptations (Satan's Assaults) and Some Observations

After Jesus fasted forty days, Satan attacked. The first temptation was, "*If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.*" This, as a temptation, does seem reasonable ... I mean, forty days without food? Jesus refused this as He must have determined it would be an abuse of the power He had. Satan then followed with two more attacks that appear to me as a grasp at a straw. Satan offered Jesus all the world's domain and glory if He would worship him, and he also challenged Jesus to jump off the Temple to prove He was the Son of God (He would be rescued from harm by the angels). Satan was probing for weaknesses in Jesus' character, but I think these last two temptations were total misfires. Maybe I am missing something, but I do not think Jesus was tempted to see Satan as God and I don't think Jesus was an exhibitionist - and "*tempted*" to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple, be rescued by angels, and then bask in the glory of an awed people. "*And when the devil had finished each temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time*" (Lk 4:3-13).

Was A Review In Order?

I believe Satan may have later reviewed his attack and recognized his massive miscalculations. Individuals often project *their own* insanities upon others, convinced everyone is like they are. As an egomaniac, Satan may have really thought Jesus would want to jump off the Temple - be miraculously rescued, and then be fawned over by star-struck devotees. But, not everyone is an exhibitionist lusting for center stage. (Of course, it is also possible he just hoped Jesus would splatter on the pavement, and that would be the end of the matter.) But, the offer of all the world and its power? Not everyone is enticed by a decaying material system. I suspect these last two temptations were projections of Satan's own weaknesses ... and fell absolutely flat. Satan learns, and I think he regrouped, realizing he missed a great opportunity. Future attacks were probably much more studied and potentially much more accurate. He is evil and he is insane, *but* he is not stupid. Read his initial assault on Job. Satan allowed one terrified soul to live from each attack (not because he liked them) and timed it so each one came on the heels of the other with disastrous news. Shock and awe ... with the hope Job would curse God (Job 1). Satan is the master at ambushing. Here is another one.

The Transfiguration Ambush

After speaking with Moses and Elijah about "*His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem,*" (the crucifixion) while Peter's spiritual dullness was rebuked there, more patience

stretching events were on the way. The next day, when coming down off the mount, Jesus was met by mass confusion. A father of a demon possessed boy (so, Satan was setting up an incident) fell before Jesus recounting His disciple's record of ineptness in being able to help. Exasperated, Jesus said, "*O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here!*" Is it possible this episode may have pushed Him close ... to an unrighteous outburst of anger? You see, after healing this boy, while everyone was marveling, Jesus, in an eternally unmatched intensity, bore a gaze directly into the hearts of the dullard disciples and said, "*Let these words sink into your ears: for the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.*" They were so cowed by this message and its delivery they were afraid to ask Him what He meant (Lk 9:28-45). But, the dullness, and ambushes, did not end there. They multiplied. Consider this next one.

"Let's die with Him" Test

At one point (probably sometime after this previous scene), the disciples were trying to keep Jesus away from Judea. "*Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You; and are You going there again?*" When they realized their efforts to turn Him around had failed, Thomas said to the disciples, "*Let us also go, in order that we may die with Him!*" (Jn 11:8-16). So, off they went ... *ready to die!* As the moment of truth drew ever closer, Jesus informed them they would all scatter. Peter did not like that and after sulking around for a while, he confronted Jesus and asserted, "*Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away ... Even if I must die with You, I will not deny You ... Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death ... All the disciples said the same thing too*" (Mt 26:33,35 and Lk 22:33). Jesus was on the verge of an ordeal unparalleled in human history and unrivaled in eternity. An emergency of the first order was descending, and these companions of three plus years, were pledging unflinching faithfulness. Yet, He knew that even the brazen Peter would soon wilt under the powerful gaze of an accusing ... door maiden. The other disciples didn't even get that far.

How Jesus refrained from lashing out at some point along the way I will never know. Loss of control for just a split second - just *one* errant word ... or even *one* errant heart motivation ... would have doomed us all. "*You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' ... but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother (without cause?) ... and says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire*" (Mt 5:21-22). There is no rewind, no, "*let me try this again*" - when it comes to sin. Even though He was God, He was God *in the flesh* - and being in a body in this age found Him surrounded by ignorance, overestimation of self, and stupidity of incalculable weight. I regularly fail these kinds of tests - even over inconsequential issues.

I am certain Satan's fingerprints were all over these affairs - as he did have full access to Judas. He may have stoked many such fires through him (Lk 22:3 and Jn 13:27). Satan is ... the Tempter (Mt 4:3 and 1Thes 3:5).

Winning Friends Versus Winning the Father

Obedience to the revealed will of the Father had to be a primary source of Jesus' temptation battles while in a body in this age. When in a right mind, people will not do things that lead directly to physical trauma. Many unbelievers contend that Jesus was a young zealot who foolishly ran afoul of the authorities of His day and that cost Him His life. But others (like me) believe, "*I do nothing on My own initiative ... I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself, who sent Me, has given Me commandment, what to say and what to speak*" (Jn 8:28 and 12:49). Obedience marched Him into the lethal teeth of the religious leaders and Roman authorities. And Jesus knew that with each action. He healed people on the Sabbath and was labeled a Law breaker ... empowered by Beelzebub (Mt 12:9-32). When Jesus informed the Pharisees that *Satan* was their father and they were all liars and

murderers like him - that did not win the extended hand of fellowship (Jn 8:31-47). To single-handedly take over The Temple on two occasions and humiliate the Sanhedrin in front of the entire nation were not actions that produced endearment (Jn 2:14-22 and Mt 21:12,13). To publicly pronounce woes upon the scribes and Pharisees and their hypocrisy ... to raise Lazarus from the dead and have the “*accursed crowd*” turn to Him in mass ... to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey while being heralded as the son of David - the Messiah - these actions, while in a body in this age, provoked evil men to murder. Even the disciples wanted Jesus to back off, as they could see where these confrontations were leading (Jn 11:7-16). Nicodemus knew that, too. He knew the lethality of his associates on the Sanhedrin and other religious orders of that day. That was behind his visit “*by night*” (Jn 3:1,2. Also see Jn 7:45-53).

How much temptation He suffered in completing His mission is currently unknown. I think we will have the full picture revealed when we stand before Him. I sure hope so. This will incalculably deepen my love for Him. But, I do know in order to successfully traverse this age, there were times He spent the night in prayer (Mt 14:23, Lk 6:12), or spoke with departed saints whose eternal well being depended upon His obedience (Lk 9:28-31), or had occasions where angels were dispatched to minister to Him (Mt 4:11 and Lk 22:43). Morally, Jesus always cooperated with the Father’s will - as it was natural to Him - and was always the right thing to be doing. “*I always do the things that are pleasing to Him*” (Jn 8:29). And He was probably eager to cleanse The Temple of that “*den of thieves*” (Mt 21:13). He may have even prayed for opportunities to publicly expose the hypocritical teachings and practices of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 23:1-39). He “*loved righteousness and hated lawlessness*” (He 1:9) as opposed to His lethal opponents who loved “*the approval of men rather than the approval of God*” (Jn 12:43). And to ride into Jerusalem triumphantly on that donkey - all the things the Father ever called upon Him to do were *the right things to do*. To be in the right, and be damned, is hard to take - even if you know you will rise three days later. Even small injustices are difficult to take - much less knowingly being framed for murder. The fight was to yield to where those actions led – a Roman execution. He despised the shame of it as much as the torture (Heb 12:2). For this to be the Father's will for Him, temptations (plural) to avoid such a fate while being in a body in this age is an understandable “*weakness.*”

Satan longs for these kinds of shots at us. He does have some understanding of the eternity that has been secured for us and he hates us intently - knowing we deserve damnation ... yet, will be spared. This has filled him with immeasurable rage (Rev 12:12). If given the chance, he will peel our skin off - inch by inch - and then place us on a red ant hill. And that would just be the start as he would have us linger near death as long as possible. No mercy. Friends, the flesh is weak. If obedience to God leads to some “*ant pile*” - the temptation to disobey ... is real. Jesus won His war against such temptations while in a body in this age. What an age. If you are a bit unsure how much power you may need from God in this life ... well, this I must share. “*A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher*” (Lk 6:40). I welcome all such cups ... to pass from me. Such moral weakness - vulnerability - is one He can fully sympathize with, and help with, if need be. But, at this moment, or any other moment, I will be happy to be spared this need.

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