Recognizing Satan’s Schemes Part II

**Matthew 4:3-11**

*Pastor Paul Anthes*

**Introduction:** Immediately before His temptation, Jesus, the sinless son of the Living God came to be baptized by John who was preaching a baptism for the repentance of sin. John was astounded by His coming, and perhaps you are as well. But John’s ministry and preaching had other entirely Scriptural reasons as well. Here are just a few:

* **One:** Jesus was about to begin His earthly messianic ministry. John was the herald of Messiah so John was able declare publicly that Jesus was the one he was and had been announcing.
* **Two:** John was a Levitical priest. Christ’s appearance signaled the end of temple sacrifices for sin because Jesus is “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”
* **Three:** Jesus came to identify with sinners. So much so that, He became sin for us. He willingly experienced what everyday men and women experience.
* **Four:** As an added bonus The Triune God is perfectly displayed at this moment for all generations to behold. Heaven was suddenly opened wide and God The Spirit descended on God the Son as God the Father thundered from Heaven.

Christ’s love for you knows no bounds. He eternally altered His nature to become a human man. He also willingly exposed Himself to the very things that torment us and He deliberately experienced the same trials and temptations we do. God created men in His own image. God the Creator did become one of His own image bearers. He did this not just to take away our sins but to transform us into His blessed image.

**Col. 1:21-22** And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--

Three powerful enemies are seeking to prevent our transformation.

**The World System [“The World”]:** This is “the world order,” which is the “way of life” of men who hate God. Lie if it helps you. Cheat and steal if you can get away with it. Go along to get along! God is not a factor in how you live. Eat bugs, give up your personal property and money. Abort your children and above all else… save your mother, who is the earth, for she is your God and your only hope. You absolutely cannot love two opposing Gods. What “god, the world” teaches, believes and loves is the polar opposite of what God, the creator, teaches, believes and loves. Therefore God pleads with us ….

**1 John 2:15-16**  15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

**Fallen Humanity [“The flesh”]:** This is the person we wake up with every morning and see in the mirror. You and God are the only ones who truly know you and you…not so much. When men say, “We are our own worst enemy” they are describing the Flesh! “The Flesh” is bent on living independently of God. It can be tamed by the Spirit of God but will not be destroyed in this life. Victory requires constant submission to God and His Word because,

**Prov. 16:25** There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

**Romans 8:5-9**  5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

**Satan Himself [“The Devil”]:** Of the three enemies of your soul, Satan is the most dangerous. He is smart and more powerful than us but not more powerful than God. God can and will protect you from his schemes, thoughts and tricks when we trust Him and ask Him to. Don’t be spiritually asleep! “Be vigilant!”

**1 Peter 5:8**  8 Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

* “The World” appeals to our sinful human nature. [lust of the eyes, lust of flesh, the pride of life].
* Satan works tirelessly to persuade us that this world can satisfy our wants, our hearts and our minds!” It cannot!
* Our fallen human nature (the Flesh) always loves what it believe will satisfy it.

The lie of Satan worked for Eve in the garden and it still works today. It all comes down to whether or not we believe this lie.

These enemies work tirelessly to seduce us to sin. Satan knows that to lie, to cheat, to steal, to hate, to lust, to take revenge all come to mind when we think of sin. Satan uses “the world” he controls and “the flesh” he has corrupted to keep us from loving Christ and trusting Him to care for our lives. His approach is to love and trust in ourselves and our world rather than God. He tempts us with things we would normally not consider sin. Knowing this The Spirit led Jesus out to be enticed by Satan to ….

* Provide for His own needs.
* Obligate God to provide for His needs.
* Take immediately what God promises to give later.

**You do not need God to provide when you can do it yourself.**

And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" **[3-4]:** Many think that Satan only accuses us before God? But in truth, he constantly accuses us directly. He reminds us of our sin, shortcomings and weaknesses. Satan tempts us to sin and then accuses us for being tempted. “If you were really a child of God you would not have….” Satan wants us to believe that we are condemned by God because we are still broken sinners. That we are not loved because we are not good enough. The tactic goes like this:

* Satan tempts us in one of the areas of our weakness. It does not matter to him if you succumb or not. He prefers that you do, but if you do not he still has a plan.
* Satan then accuses you for being tempted. He says, “If you were a strong Christian you would not have been tempted to sin.” I know many Christians who regularly resist temptation, yet feel constantly defeated by the incessant accusations of the “Accuser”. “If you really are a child of God, then how come you are not above temptation?

In the wilderness Satan challenged Christ’s standing as “The Son of God” and he challenges yours as “a child of God.” There is a hidden agenda behind this challenge. Jesus saw right through it and so can you. It is the temptation to live independently of God. To believe that we can provide what we need from our own resources. Why pray when we can just work harder? Prayers before meals are perfunctory. We don’t really need to thank God for the food because we have a job and a refrigerator full of stuff.

Satan’s actual temptation is to pride and independence. (To Jesus) “Prove that you are The Son by not waiting for The Father to feed you.” (To us) “Prove your greatness by providing for yourself independently of God. Independence is the eternal enemy of faith. Faith equals trust and trust implies dependence. God will take care of me…I do not need to worry, connive, scheme, lie or manipulate. I will wait for God to meet my needs. Ways to overcome this common temptation:

* If you are able to provide for yourself then consciously acknowledge that God has provided for you to do that.

**1 Corinthians 4:7**  What do you **have** that you did **not** receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had **not received** it?

* If you cannot provide for yourself then purpose to pray and trust God to provide it for you?

**Matt. 6:11** 'Give us this day our daily bread.

Jesus taught us to daily acknowledge our total dependence on God for all things. When you pray over your next dinner acknowledge that this food was given to us by God.

**Satan is thinking now… “If Jesus cannot be lured into self-sufficiency than perhaps He will agree to obligate God to do something for Him?**

**Obligate God to honor your faith and take care of you**

**Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" [5-7]:** There are few things more irritating than listening to a godless politician misquote Scripture. Such men and women know some Scripture, but do not submit to it. This is the very essence of unbelief which is distrust of God. It is twisting another person’s words to mean something they never said because they do not trust what that person actually said.

What a masterful idea. Getting our mind off God by quoting Scripture. Millions in our day are “Bible worshipers” rather than a “God worshipper.” Satan wants your mind off of The Father and the Son. Religion can do that better than many things and it has the added bonus (to Satan) of making fools out of us. Let me put this plainly. Satan said to Jesus, “You say you trust God and what comes out of His mouth…then prove it by going against the laws of nature God created!” You can obligate God to do what you want.

Jesus was supposed to respond to this challenge with a demonstration of His awesome standing with God. So, I ask you, what could possibly be wrong with trusting God to provide for our safety? Because Satan, as always, has a hidden agenda. He is twisting the meaning of Scripture to produce a false conclusion. God cannot be obligated by us. He is not a genie in a bottle!

God is not obligated to make us rich because we give to Joel Osteen. He is not obligated to heal us because we buy holy water or a magic prayer cloth from Peter Popoff. He is not obligated to keep us from trials and failures in this life. He does provide money to care for us and he does help us recover from sickness, BUT He does these things because He loves us and is gracious and compassionate. Obligating God is PUTTING GOD TO THE TEST!

When Jesus said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test,’ He was not referring to what Satan was doing to Him but what Satan was trying to provoke Jesus to do to God.

**Jesus teaches us to Trust God while Satan taunts us to Test God**

What exactly is Satan’s pitch to believers today? Here it is: If you say that you have a relationship with God then surely you will have power with God to get Him to do your bidding. This is the trap of countless tele-evangelists and believers caught up in the prosperity gospel. Men caught in this Satanic trap act and speak as if… “God is our servant and must give us whatever we ask.” “Having demonstrable power with God is proof we are God’s children.” Jesus Himself would not fall for this…neither should you.

What does the Bible say about “testing God?” Men “put God to the test” whenever they try to obligate Him to do something they want Him to do. God is very responsive to the prayers of His children, but becomes angry when we try to manipulate Him into doing what we want. Jesus responds to Satan by quoting from:

**Deuteronomy 6:16**  16 "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah. …

So….what exactly did the Israelites do at Massah that was so bad? Didn’t they just want a little water to drink? It is not the water. It was their lack of trust in God. They questioned the goodness of God. This is pandemic in our world. “If God is good then why does He allow child abuse, birth defects and war? Where was God when 911 happened … of the earthquake in Turkey?”

“If God were really good He would give us the world we demand and then just get lost so we can enjoy it.” Israel actually accused God of bringing them into the desert to kill them. Now…let this sink in! The God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt just did it because He wanted to kill them all?

**Exodus 17:3**  3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

We test God when we try to force Him to give us what we want. But that is not all. We test God when we accuse Him of being evil and acting wickedly toward us. Trusting God causes us to pray and wait because we know God is good and His timing is perfect. They did the same thing with the Manna.

**Psalm 78:18**  18 And in their heart they put God to the test By asking food according to their desire.

**NOTE:** We may put God to the test, but only if we are specifically invited by Him to do so.

**Malachi 3:10**  10 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.

Jesus declines Satan’s offer to force God to prove Himself. When a man tries to pressure God into meeting some expectation of his, however good it might seem to him, he is putting God to the test in the most perverse way. Although God will sometimes respond to us when we behave this way, He is under no obligation to do so. Furthermore and more importantly, we have failed the test of trust (or faith). When we insist that God respond to our wishes we have ceased to trust and begun to test.

The main way to overcome this is with knowledge of God and constant worship. Do not let a day go by without telling God how good He is. Let no joy or pleasure pass without acknowledging God’s goodness to yourself, to others and to God Himself. Tell your children that God is good. Think about God’s goodness. Say it out loud!

**Psalm 145:2-10**  2 Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. 3 Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable. 4 One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts. 5 On the glorious splendor of Your majesty And on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. 6 Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And I will tell of Your greatness. 7 They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant **goodness** And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. 8 The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. 9 The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works. 10 All Your works shall give thanks to You, O LORD, And Your godly ones shall bless You.

**At this point, Jesus left Satan with no recourse except a straight out appeal to treason against the Most High God. Ultimately, Satan offers the rule of the world in exchange for a repudiation of God the Father.**

**Avoid the Hardship that comes with trusting God.**

**Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" [8-10]:**

It is obvious at this point that Jesus is on to what Satan is doing. If Satan can get Jesus to declare His independence from God then his work is done. That is exactly how he got Eve and then Adam. Once that is done then Jesus will be a sinner like us and His death on the cross will be meaningless, because one sinner cannot die for someone else’s sins. He must die for his own sins. So… the devil seeks to offer Jesus a path around the cross with this temptation, “Why not take your future glory now? Why does faith and trust in God have to be hard? Is God just intent on doing everything the hard way in our lives?”

The experiences and trials of Christ’s life had meaning! God, in His wisdom has used the distress and trials of this broken world to reveal His grace, mercy and love for us.

The circumstances and events of your life have meaning as well. God did not put them there to keep you from obtaining something wonderful. They are not obstacles to be simply pushed aside or gone around. They are the life shaping forms that will mold you into the Christlike person that God has destined you to be. They constitute the crucible of life in which the formula for true joy and fulfillment is mixed.

Satan offers a similar plum to you today. He calls you, “to ‘seize the day!’ Get what you want, when and how you want. Why should we have to consider others to be more important? Why should we have to defer to our husband or wife? Realize your full potential! Advance to the pinnacle of your vocation! Experience your sensual ambitions! Obtain the possessions you so desire! Bask in your own achievements! Enjoy what you so richly deserve! And do not …I repeat…. DO NOT under any circumstances simply trust God for what He will give you. That makes you a loser. A man does not get what he wants by putting God first and waiting for Him to provide.”

What Jesus teaches us here is fundamental to your life. God is worthy to be trusted by you.

**Romans 8:32**  32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him **freely** give us all things?

Notice how the very thing Christ refused from the Devil, God Himself quickly grants to His beloved Son. The Father sent angels to feed and care for Jesus.

**Matthew 4:11**  11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and *began* to minister to Him.

**CONCLUSION**: God also cares about your circumstances and cares about your needs. God desires that we live in dependence on Him. He designs our circumstances to convince us of that. My life, so far, has been one demonstration after another of this truth. Perhaps you too have experienced God’s care in this way. As soon as we give up trying to force God to our way of thinking and trust His providential care, He responds with more than we ever hoped or thought. These temptations have made Christ a compassionate High Priest who represents you before the Father in Heaven. He has experienced your trials as well as human frailty, hunger, and weakness.

**Hebrews 4:15-16**  15 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**. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

“Look around,” God says. Look at creation and see how God cares for it. Is it any wonder that our godless culture is obsessed with the destruction of nature. It is bigger than they are. They cannot control it and yet they act and talk as if they can. They are faithless and therefore hopeless.

“Look in your closet. Are there clothes there? Look in your pantry. Is there food there? Count your years! How many of them has God sustained you through so far? Stop listening to Satan and listen to God instead… Listen to His Son Jesus who said….

**Matthew 6:27-33**  27 "…. who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? 28 "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! 31 "**Do not worry** then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.