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### **How to Deal with the Devil** **Luke 4:1-13**

How do you deal with the devil?

From Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus" written in the late 1500s to other variations of the Faust legend seen in books and plays and movies, and even in the Charlie Daniels Band's hit song, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia," the idea of making a deal with the devil has seemed to intrigue human beings for centuries. Of course, the deal always involves selling one's soul to the devil for something the person deeply desires. For Faust, it was secret knowledge. For Johnny in Charlie Daniels' song, it was a golden fiddle. For others, it was money or fame or something else.

Now in the twentieth century many people simply dismissed the devil and his demons altogether as some kind of mythological idea. But the problem with that is that even if you say this is all a myth, you can't deny the awful *evil* that the so-called myth represents. At the same time, in reaction to this denial of Satan's existence, some Christians overreacted with an extreme interest in and emphasis on the devil and his demons—Satan and his little devils. In the preface to his little book *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis rightly observed:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors . . . .<sup>1</sup>

The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, and Luke all portray for us a very real devil that Jesus faced in the wilderness as He prepared for the beginning of His public ministry. In that encounter, Satan tempted Jesus, trying to make a deal with Him that would sidetrack Him from the mission He came to accomplish.

#### ***The reality of temptation***

Some of you may remember the comedian Flip Wilson. He had a television variety show back in the early 1970s. One of the characters he played in some of the skits was Geraldine. And Geraldine's signature line was, "The devil made me do it!" Now while Wilson meant it to be funny, that line actually popularized and perpetrated a deadly lie that goes all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

You remember the story, don't you?

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them everything they needed. There was plenty to eat. They had the task of tending the garden to occupy them and give them joy over a job well done. God gave them each other as companions, husband and wife, partners suited to each other. And most of all, He gave them Himself, as He would come down and walk in the garden in the evening.

The only thing that He didn't give them, that He in fact forbade to them, was *one tree* in the middle of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For all the privilege and freedom God had given them, He reserved the right to determine and declare what was good and what was evil.

Then one day the serpent tempted Eve, casting doubt in her mind about what God had said, convincing her that the fruit of the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that it was to be desired in order to make one wise—indeed, to make one *like God*. She yielded to the temptation, ate of the fruit herself, and gave some to Adam. He likewise yielded and ate it.

When the LORD came to the garden that day, it became a time of reckoning. When God asked Adam if he had eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam answered, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12).<sup>2</sup> When God asked Eve about it, her reply was, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:13b). God drove them out of the garden into the wilderness, and the only thing that's ever been the same again is that we humans still try to blame our sins on somebody else!

Now despite Geraldine's declaration, the devil can't *make* anybody do anything. He tempts, he persuades, he deceives, he takes advantage of every opportunity to trip us up. But humans have the power of choice. When we give in to his temptations, *we* are responsible for *our* own sin. He's our enemy, but not our only enemy—as Pogo so poetically put it: “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

And so the devil tries to make his deals with us.

“If you take this drink, it will relax you.” But he doesn't tell you that it might lead to your becoming an alcoholic.

“You can use drugs and enjoy the high; you're strong enough that you won't get hooked on them.” But he doesn't tell you that you might become the addict who's lost his or her job and family and ends up sleeping on the street.

“You can live an immoral life and not worry about the consequences.” But he doesn't tell you about the emotional devastation of your present or future family, or the unintended child that might result, or the diseases you might contract.

“You don't have to be so honest in your business dealings. Cut this corner and you'll get ahead.” But he doesn't tell you about the people you'll harm or the consequences if you get caught.

“It doesn't really matter how you treat other people. What you need to do is look out for number one, because nobody else will!” But he doesn't show you all the people you trample on to get to the top.

You see, as Jesus put it about the devil in John 8:44, “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

### ***How Jesus dealt with the devil***

Jesus didn't make a deal with the devil; He dealt with the devil. If we're to become like Jesus, we need to look to Him to see how He dealt with Satan, and follow His model. So how did He do it? Well, look at the story.

At Jesus' baptism, while He was praying, the Holy Spirit had "descended on him in bodily form like a dove" (Luke 3:22). Now Jesus had been in the wilderness, being led by the Holy Spirit. For forty days He was being tempted by the devil, and during that time, He ate nothing. As you can imagine, when those forty days were over, Jesus was famished.

So that's where the devil started.

"If you are the Son of God," he said, "tell this stone to become bread" (4:3). The stone probably resembled a loaf of bread in its size and shape, which would make the temptation even more intense.

Imagine it—Jesus has been without food for forty days. He's starving! He has the power to do it. The stone reminds Him of a loaf of bread. It almost seems to be a matter of *survival*. And to make it even worse, the devil puts it in the form of a *challenge*: "The angel said you would be called the Son of God, and you believe you are. The Father has even said so. Alright, then. *If You are* the Son of God, use Your power to turn this stone into bread. After all, You're hungry, and you have the power to do something about it!" And what was more, the Jews believed the Messiah would be able to give bread from heaven like Moses did.

How easy would it have been to yield to that?! You have the need. You have the power. It would show the Jews you're the Messiah. Makes sense, doesn't it?

But Jesus, depending on the power of the Spirit, drew on Scripture for his reply: "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone'" (4:4).

In his commentary on Luke, Cyril of Alexandria, the early fifth century preacher and patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt, pointed out that when Satan tempted Jesus to turn the stone into bread, Jesus didn't say, "I can"; nor did He say, "I cannot." He simply responded with Scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone."<sup>3</sup>

And so it was settled. He would *not* use His power as the Messiah, the Son of God, for His own benefit, nor as a shortcut to get the Jewish people to accept Him as the Messiah.

So the devil came at Him from another angle. Knowing that it was promised and prophesied that as the Messiah, Jesus would one day rule all the kingdoms of the world, the devil took Jesus up and in an instant of time, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. Then he turned to Jesus and said, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours" (4:6-7).

Think of it—ruling the nations was Jesus' ultimate destiny, and here was a way to get to it quickly and to do so without the suffering and the cross that lay before Him.

But without hesitation, Jesus replied, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (4:8).

The appeal to use His power for personal benefit and gain had failed; now the appeal to take the shortcut to His ultimate *destiny* had failed as well. So the devil tried one more tactic.

He took Jesus to Jerusalem, and placed Him on the highest point of the temple. Then he challenged His *identity* as well as His relationship to God, and wrongly used the Scriptures (specifically Psalm 91:11-12) to do it.

"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

‘He will command his angels concerning you,  
to guard you carefully;  
they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’” (4:10-11).

Talk about throwing down the gauntlet! Not only would it prove His relationship to God the Father, but since the Jews were expecting the Messiah to appear suddenly at the temple, it would make a powerful messianic statement as He came floating down from the highest point borne by the angels!

Yet again, without hesitation, Jesus answered, “It says, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (4:12).

The way Luke tells the story suggests that these were not the only three temptations that the devil presented to Jesus; they were the culmination of all the temptations of those forty days in the wilderness. Having tried all else to derail Jesus from His purpose, Satan struck at the heart of who Jesus is, challenging Him to prove His identity by misusing His power, short-circuiting God’s purpose, and making presumptuous demands on His relationship with God rather than humbly trusting Him as His Father. But in every case, *Jesus dealt with the devil by choosing God’s way, relying on the Holy Spirit and Scripture*. And if we’re to deal with the devil rather than making a deal with him, *we must follow Jesus’ model* here.

### ***Dealing with the devil***

So how do *we* deal with the devil?

First, *we need to recognize his tactics*. He’s our enemy in a spiritual war. And one of the basics of warfare is to know how the enemy operates and what he’s capable of. Just as he attacked Jesus shortly after His experience at his baptism, the devil often attacks us *following a high and holy spiritual experience*. And just as he attacked Jesus at the point of his hunger after a forty-day fast, he often attacks us *when we’re hungry in some way*—physically, emotionally, spiritually, or financially. Satan also attacked Jesus at the point of God’s purpose for Him, trying to get Him to abuse His power and His relationship with the Father to gain the people’s acceptance. We have to be really careful here, because sometimes the devil tempts us *to do what may seem to be the right thing in the wrong way*, arguing that the end justifies the means. And just as the devil did with Jesus, *he will often distort Scripture* to try to persuade us! Understand that Satan knows the Bible well, and loves to quote it out of context! So we need to understand the importance of interpreting Scripture properly, taking it in context, in its natural sense, and through Christ-colored glasses. C. S. Lewis was right again when he said of Satan: “Like a good chess player he is always trying to manoeuvre you into a position where you can save your castle only by losing your bishop.”<sup>4</sup>

Second, *we have to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and on Scripture*. In his portrayal of Jesus, Luke shows us the vital connection between the Spirit and Scripture in the life of Jesus. It should be the same for us as well. He relied on the Spirit’s power and He resisted Satan with Scripture properly understood and accurately quoted. Can you do the same? Are you aware of the Spirit’s presence and power in your life? Do you know the Scriptures well enough to use them as “the sword of the Spirit” in your warfare against the evil one, as Paul described the word of God in Ephesians 6:17? Do you know the Scriptures well enough that you can realize when Satan is twisting them as he did with Jesus? The psalmist knew what he was talking about when

he wrote in Psalm 119:11, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” When we rely on God’s Spirit and God’s word, we win the victory over the devil!

Finally, *we must choose God’s way over all other ways*. That’s what Jesus’ temptations were really all about. Satan was trying to sidetrack Him, trying to make a deal with Him to take a shortcut to being accepted by the Jews as the Messiah. Jesus dealt with him through the Spirit and Scripture and refused to be the Messiah any way other than the way the Father had laid out. And that’s exactly what we have to do—choose God’s way over all other ways. To be Jesus’ disciples means to follow Him, to learn from Him, and to become like Him. If that’s what He chose as the Messiah, even though it meant the cross, that’s what we must choose as His disciples as we take up our own cross and follow Him.

Because you see, my friends, when it’s all said and done, that’s the *only* way you can really deal with the devil. Anything else is just making a deal with him.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root, eds., *The Quotable Lewis* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990), 157.

<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur A. Just, Jr., ed., *Luke* (ACCS NT 3; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Martindale and Root, *The Quotable Lewis*, 528.