

Right after Jesus was baptized, he was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Our baptism into Christ therefore prepares us to face the devil's temptations. Christ prepares us for temptation in two ways. First, it is by his own merit. Second, it is by his example. Let's consider each of these.

First, Jesus prepares us for temptation by his own merit. His merit is everything he earned for us. It's everything he does in our place and on our behalf. Jesus faced the devil, not for his own sake but for ours. In obedience to God, Jesus used God's Word as his only weapon against the devil. He reconciled us to the Father, securing for us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. In this way, he strips the devil of all his power.

Christ's merit prepares us for temptation by giving us the victory right from the start. This means that even before you face the devil's temptations, you have already won the battle through faith in Christ. Having been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, you are already dead to sin and alive to God.

Second, Christ prepares us for temptation by his example. If our Lord has suffered for us, then it follows that he also leaves us an example for us to follow in his steps. By his example, he shows us how the devil is defeated. And in showing us how the devil is defeated, he also shows how the devil works. He exposes the devil's tactics for what they are. This is so that we would not take these temptations lightly but draw strength from our Lord's Word in the heat of the battle.

The devil uses three basic tools. He uses the flesh. He uses God's Word. And he uses the world. He appeals to the appetite and desires of our bodies, because he knows that we are flesh and blood. He knows that we need food. We need nourishment and bodily comforts. He therefore uses these things to tempt us.

The devil appeals to God's Word, because he knows that we need spiritual guidance and nourishment. But he takes it out of context, adds to it, and mixes it with half-truths and outright lies.

The devil appeals to the praise and honor of this world, because he knows that God has created us to have relationships. God has made us social creatures. He places us in various stations with various duties and levels of responsibility and authority. We need the support of our families, the encouragement of our friends, and the security that comes from living in an orderly community. The devil therefore exploits this to lead us into sin.

But what is the temptation? What's the devil's goal? Jesus exposes this too. The devil's goal is to drive you to despair of God's mercy. God gives you your daily bread. God's Word gives you salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, comfort, peace, guidance, correction, and hope. God calls you to your various duties, and he has created you for the good works he himself has prepared for you to walk in. God promises to work all things out for your good. But the devil wants you to think that God is holding back his mercy. This has always been the devil's message. He told our first parents that they would be like God if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This, the devil claimed, was why God told them not to eat it. God had given Adam and Eve everything they needed, but the devil used the one boundary to argue that God was holding out on them.

So this is the temptation. It is to despair of God's mercy. Give up on the thought that God is actually going to follow through with his promise. Instead, look out for yourself first. If God really cares, then he needs to prove it. In the meantime, you make sure you get what's yours.

Consider Satan's tactics against Jesus. Jesus had every right to eat bread. But the goal of the temptation wasn't merely to get Jesus to eat. It was to get Jesus to give up on his Father's promise to provide. Jesus did not come to take what was his. He came to work while it was day, to honor his Father, and to reconcile helpless sinners back to the living God. He deprived himself of food, not because there was something wrong with the food, but to reveal the true food and nourishment God provides. As he said to his disciples, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (John 4:34). Jesus' food and nourishment is to obey his Father and to give his life up for us all.

This is therefore what our Lord teaches us about food and all earthly goods. No food should be considered unclean if it is received in thanksgiving. But the devil makes it all about the food and the earthly comforts so that we forget about the true nourishment of God's Word. It could be as simple as forgetting to pray before you eat, thinking about lunch when you should be listening to the sermon, skipping church to tend to something that could be done before or after the service, or neglecting to read God's Word with your family while you are relaxing or winding down.

Is it wrong to eat? Is it wrong to go out for lunch? Is it wrong to build a house, pay a bill, fix something that's broken, go hunting, relax and wind down? Of course not! These are all blessings from God who knows that you need food, shelter, and rest. But we don't need to act as if these things will go away if we don't make sure that we get them. Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. The devil acts like he cares more about your daily nourishment and comfort than God does. But he's a liar. So don't listen to him. Pick up God's Word and read, even if only a chapter at a time. When his Word remains your daily nourishment, then this will guard you from becoming a slave to your earthly wants and desires.

Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. The devil knows this. But the thing about God's Word is that it works in God's time. To God, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand year like one day. God's Word gives comfort and guidance, but it doesn't come all at once. God teaches you to wait and think about what you have read or heard from Scripture, to pray about it, talk about it, and grow in your understanding through patience and humility. This takes a lifetime as God patiently nurtures your faith and strengthens your assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ.

But the devil knows how easy it is for our restless hearts to lose patience with God's Word. When you read the Bible and seek to apply it to your life, it can seem at first like it doesn't apply. Maybe you're reading the various accounts from thousands of years ago, and they seem so distant from your life today. Or you chafe with discomfort at certain things God says about bearing your cross, submission, obedience, humility, and rejoicing in your suffering. You picked up your Bible and read for a while, but you find yourself confused about some things or feeling guilty about other things. This is when the devil's temptation creeps in. He tries to force the Bible to say what it doesn't say. Take passages out of context and explain away clear passages by adding a context that isn't clearly set forth by Scripture.

This temptation treats God's Word as a tool for immediate satisfaction. By treating God's Word this way, the devil leads us to put God to the test. If God's Word is true, then it should align with my lived experience. It shouldn't offend me or challenge me or say that I'm wrong. If God's Word is true, then he won't make me suffer or fail in anything. After all, doesn't his Word say that he will send his angels to keep me from stubbing my toe? But the devil is misusing God's Word. He tries to get Jesus to jump

off the highest part of the temple as a way to prove that God’s Word is true. But Jesus responds, “It is written, ‘You shall not test the Lord your God.’”

We don’t put God to the test. He tests us. He proves our faith. Yes, he says that his angels will guard us in all our ways. This means that they will protect us in the stations to which God has called us and in which God has placed us. So whether God has called you to carry out a task that gets a lot of attention or serve in a way that many don’t notice very much, whether he calls you to rejoice with those who rejoice or suffer and mourn some kind of loss – in whatever road God has placed you, happy or sad, he promises to comfort you and protect you by his holy angels. In the meantime, if you have to grapple to understand and apply God’s Word, then good. Jacob wrestled with God all night, and God blessed him. Those who hold onto God’s Word, even when they struggle to understand and apply it, are never put to shame.

As we walk in these stations to which God has called us, the devil takes the opportunity. He knows that we were created to live in this world, work with others, and have companions. He therefore promises us respect and honor from the world if we only forget that we are serving God and not men. You can have close friends, praise and honor from respectable people, a high status career, and prestigious credentials. Or maybe all you want is for everyone in your family and your friend group to get along. None of these things is bad, and God knows better than you how much you need faithful family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances in this life. In fact, God teaches us to honor all people and to live in peace with everyone as much as possible.

But the devil deceives us into thinking that we can go after these things without first seeking counsel from God’s Word. This is why people decide on where they want to go to school or work a job without seeing if there is a faithful church for them to attend in that area. Because they care more about these worldly blessings than they do about being nurtured by the truth of the gospel. It’s why couples move in together before marriage. Because they care more about their companionship than they do about what God’s Word says of living a chaste life that honors the marriage bed. It’s why people plan tournaments on Sunday mornings. Because they care more about the kids learning discipline and sportsmanship than they do about them hearing their Shepherd’s voice in the congregation of the saints.

Of course, a good education or career, trusted companions, discipline, sportsmanship, and even fun – these are all blessings from God, which should not be despised. But the devil wants you to think that you need to go out and grab these things for yourself, as if God is holding out on you. As if God won’t give you a better education, more fulfilling work, a godly spouse, friends, and family, discipline and joy. God gives all of these things a hundred times over. He gives us more blessings than we can count or even handle. But he also gives us sorrows and persecutions and trials and sadness. The devil promises an easy life without these tests. But God prepares you for every test. He especially prepares you to face the devil’s temptations.

Your baptism into Christ has prepared you to face the devil’s attacks. He has left you an example for how to fight them off. Turn to the Word of God. Confess what is written in the Scriptures. Learning to resist temptation is not something any of us has mastered. As you follow Christ’s example, you will continue to learn God’s Word and how to apply it to your life. This will continue to humble you as you learn from God to repent of your sins and turn in faith to Christ your Savior. The battle also gets very frustrating. But remember that Christ doesn’t just leave you his example to figure out on your own how to apply it. He is with you all the way with his good gifts and Spirit.

So as you follow your Savior's example, remember that he did this all for you. He did it in your place. He has already given you the victory. He has given you peace with God and the forgiveness of sins. His righteousness covers up your guilt and silences the devil's attacks. This remains the sure ground of your faith, however weak your spirit gets in the battle. It is Christ's pledge to you in your baptism and the token of God's peace in his body and blood. He who called you is faithful, and he continues to fight for you. Amen.