

Contemporary Mystic Christianity

Bible Self-Study Supplement

The Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, I command that these stones be made bread.

But he answered and said, it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down;

for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

And saith unto him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaveth him, 'and, behold', angels came and ministered unto him.

For the esoteric Christian the devil has two meanings, an inner and an outer. From the external standpoint, the devil is Lucifer who, because of ambition, fell, and was exiled, together with other fallen angels, upon the planet Mars. The devil within man is his lower nature so long as this is influenced and controlled by the Luciferian vibrations. For this reason the plan of salvation as taught by the Church is designed to overcome and gain control of the desire body, for only in this way can the power of the devil be overcome. The Church works primarily with the desire body of man; esoteric Christianity focuses its effects on the vital body. Through the great orderly plan of evolution, which is God's handwriting upon the wall of time, the majority of people are brought into contact with the teachings of the Church before they come into occult work, which always presupposes that the desire body has been purified to a certain degree before definite training and specific development of the vital body is attempted.

Temptation is one of the most potent factors in soul growth. Everyone meets temptation daily; it comes in matters both great and small, obvious and subtle. It is not the temptation, but the way in which one reacts to it that reveals the degree of spiritual attainment. Christ Jesus came as the great Way-Shower for all humanity; consequently it was necessary that temptations beset Him also so that He might become that divine example and inspiration, the Perfect One "who was tempted and yet remained without sin."

Temptations are threefold in nature. There are temptations of body, of mind, and of soul. The Master was confronted with all three; so, too, is the neophyte. When taking the step called the Baptism, the aspirant, through an ecstasy of feeling, touches the realization of the oneness of all life, and with this realization there is born within him a new and conscious power which it is permissible for one serving the Holy Grail to use for the good of others, but never for the benefit of self, no matter how great the extremity or need. If, however, through personal ambition — the temptation which caused the fall of Lucifer, and which is the most subtle of all temptations for mortal man—he succumbs and uses this new-born power for self-aggrandizement, he becomes a powerful tool for evil in the hands of the Black Brotherhood, both on this plane and in the inner realms. It is particularly this unfamiliar phase of

temptation that the Master taught and illustrated in His own Temptation.

In the series of temptations to which the Master was subjected, the first occurred in the physical body and had reference to it, whereas the last two were experienced in situations transcending physical limitations.

1. Temptation of the Body

Mark tells us that Christ was tempted with wild beasts, meaning thereby the desires. But they did not harm Him. Christ, the Sun Spirit, had transmuted the power of desire within Himself long aeons before, and the body of Jesus which Christ was using was the purest that could be produced upon the earth. Since ordinary humanity has not yet attained to such purity and perfection, the Christ does not expect the average individual, who is still subject to the frailties of the flesh, to overcome temptation as completely as He did. His victory is the ultimate conquest to which we aspire, however often we may fail in the attempt. Persistence will win in the end. The only failure is in ceasing to try.

The mineral kingdom, like all other planes of life has a basic keynote; when certain forces are set in operation by one who knows the higher law, it is possible to alter substance and transform even the stones into bread. Such

transcendent powers come only when self is set aside, and it is retained only so long as the higher law is not violated by calling the higher forces into action to satisfy the lower self. It may be used for others' welfare only. Christ Jesus, moreover, did not need to rely on physical substance. He knew the source of the living bread; hence his reply to the tempter: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." He placed God and His glory first. He bared His sacred heart for all the darts of hatred, malice, and revenge; uncovered His glorious head that it might bear the Crown of Thorns; stretched out His loving hands that had entreated, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest," that they might be nailed to the Cross. He renounced Himself completely, utterly, and entirely for the sake of the earth and its humanity.

2. Temptation of the Mind

"The devil taketh Him into the holy city," that is, into the inner planes or the heaven worlds. Bible commentators observe that the devil "carries Him off," the phrase apparently indicating that He was literally transported through the air. This is actually what happened. He was taken out of the body, for the physical vehicle can never enter the holy etheric city (Jerusalem). In that high place the Master was subjected to the fiercest of all temptations, vanity. All the thought waves of ambition and pride that have ever dominated the world beat against Him. With the

unparalleled resources which He possessed and could command, He knew that He could focus the attention, admiration, and homage of the entire world upon Himself by giving a demonstration of His ability to use supernatural power. Again the Master triumphed, and rebuked the devil, saying: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

3. Temptation of the Soul

The "exceeding high mountain" to which He was taken is to be understood as referring to a still higher spiritual realm than that in which the previous temptation occurred, namely, the Second Heaven, or the Mental World. Here He looked upon all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. He perceived the heavenly archetypes of all things manifest in heaven and on earth and saw how the forces on the life side externalized themselves in forms; He read in the Memory of Nature the records of the past, present, and future. The devil said, "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Christ Jesus beheld on the one hand the position of supremacy that was within His reach, did He but choose to accept it; and on the other hand he viewed the path of sorrow, ignominy, and final death upon the Cross if he continued on His previously appointed way. As He looked, even His great heart quailed before the awfulness of the picture; but at the same time there came to Him the vision of sorrowing and suffering humanity which, apart from His intercession, was without

the aid necessary for its redemption from sin and death. Then it was that the Compassionate One, stretching out His arms, a halo of glory encircling Him, became for all time a "Man of Sorrows" and acquainted with grief, to the end that the world might find the Way of Peace that passeth all understanding. In triumphant tones he commanded: "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'" Then the devil left Him and Angels came and ministered unto Him. Even so do they come to bless and to strengthen each and every one whenever the higher nature is victorious over the lower self.

Prayer and a spiritualized will constitute the only impenetrable armor against the temptations which so constantly beset us. Paul's admonition is to pray without ceasing. Each forward step along the Path brings its own attendant temptations. The most subtle ones always come along the line of our ambitions and fundamental desires. The devil, within and without, knows well how to twist and color these temptations according to individual temperaments so as to make them snares so enticing that none but the spiritually discerning and the inwardly fortified can successfully withstand them. Christ Jesus met every phase of His temptations by an utter renunciation of self and a complete surrender of His will to the service of others. Only in this way can we follow in His steps.

Temptations come to us life after life, until the treasure laid up in heaven has been tested and tried by the sorrows of earth. When the spirit of Christ descended into the physical body of Jesus, it was taken into the Wilderness to prove its strength or weakness, And similarly, after each heavenly experience (both between incarnations and in our exalted states of consciousness while in the body), we must expect to be brought back to earth in order to learn whether or not we can withstand the fiery furnace of affliction.

The Temptation, which marks the most important stage in the early life of the aspirant, was an experience common to all the world teachers. A very old manual reads: "All magical operations consist in freeing oneself from the ancient serpent, then placing a foot on its head to lead it according to the will of the operator."

Said the tempter: "I will give thee all the kingdoms of the earth if thou wilt fall down and worship me." To this promise the Initiate has but one reply: "I will not fall down, but thou shalt crouch at my feet; thou wilt give me nothing, but I shall take from thee whatever I wish, for I am thy lord and master."

Temptation is the most effective means, at this stage of our evolution, for furthering us on the Path. Therefore, in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the first formula of

attainment given to man details an account of the temptation in the life of Christ Jesus. Mark makes only a slight reference to it, and John, who deals with man's highest method of attainment, does not mention it at all.

The man who is gaining experiences through contacts in the outer world comes to a testing time immediately he has come into wealth, power, or fame. A similar testing comes to the neophyte on another plane after each exaltation of consciousness; and it comes again in yet subtler guise to the victorious aspirant after each Initiation or spiritual illumination. The purpose of these testings is identical in every instance. The aim is to determine how the additional faculties or powers will be used. Will they be used for personal glorification, or in a larger, selfless service for the benefit of one's fellow man? It is the self-seeking of the masses of people that accounts for the chaos of the world, the wars and rumors of wars that beset the nations.

The victory of the Temptation remains like a great white star above the horizon of the world: "He alone was tempted, yet remained without sin." In the solitude of the forty days in the Wilderness, The Christ conquered completely the remaining frailty of the flesh body, which will always remain subject to weakness, even though it be so high and holy a body as that of Jesus. A part of the forty days' task was to make over entirely the red corpuscles of

the blood, as an Ego can know complete individuality only in a body wherein the blood is manufactured by its own effort. Blood is formed of food and may be alchemically transformed by thought. The blood manufactured by the Christ was so charged with power that it almost shattered the body of Jesus.

Only after passing the Temptation could Christ Jesus begin His great work. According to Matthew, it was immediately after this event that He chose His twelve disciples, and delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Mark relates the performance of many healings following this same event, and Luke records the miracle of the great draught of fishes. In each instance we have a complete detail of the process following the conquest of temptation in accordance with the outlined path of development.

As we advance in spiritual understanding the subtlety of the temptations increase. After the Baptism came the Temptation; following the Transfiguration the subtler test of suffering in Gethsemane; and before the Resurrection, the bitter experience of Calvary.

Temptation is not a barrier but an accelerator to soul growth. Met aright, every temptation becomes a stepping stone to higher and greater accomplishments, as was proved in the life of the Master.

The Divine Lady was brought through the Rite of Baptism into such atonement with Christ that ever afterwards she was able mystically to follow His work regardless of separation in place and distance. In spirit she was with Him in every experience of the Temptation. Shut away in her own little sanctuary for these forty days and nights of fasting and prayer, she worked in co-operation with her Lord in cleansing, purifying and lifting the vibrations of the planet and in demonstrating the perfect type-pattern for the emulation of the race — that of being tempted and yet remaining without sin.

Matthew 11:11-15

Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

— **Corinne Heline**